

Public relations specialist enters hot plant battle

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ Wednesday, July 29, 2015

The battle for the hearts and minds of residents near the site of a proposed asphalt hot plant off Hogan Dam Road heated up the past few days with public meetings hosted by proponents and opponents of the controversial proposal.

Opponents of the Ford Construction Inc. request to operate the hot plant at the Hogan Quarry near Valley Springs had a community meeting Saturday in the La Contenta Events Center. The well-publicized gathering attracted 66 people, according to Janice Bassett, who lives within a half-mile of the quarry and helped organize the meeting.

Those in attendance were highly motivated in opposition to the request, outlining a list of how the hot plant will adversely impact their lives and property, she said. There was also discussion of forming a community action group to closely follow the project as it works its way through the governmental review process and starting fundraising activities to hire an attorney to represent the residents' interests.

Word also surfaced at Saturday's meeting project proponents planning their own meeting for Tuesday evening at La Contenta. Notice appeared on Facebook.

Brian Holloway, president of Holloway Land Company out of Sacramento, was facilitating Tuesday's meeting, which occurred after The Valley Springs News' press time.

The company's website describes the firm as "Land Development Consulting specializing in procurement of entitlements, permit processing, project land use management, and neighborhood outreach."

Testimonials posted on the website say:

"We could not have received our project approval without Holloway Land Company. They converted concerned neighbors to supporters, and worked to get the project approved, with livable conditions of approval." Mark Wiese, president. McKinley West Developers.

[for more testimonials, visit <http://www.hlandco.org/>]

Joyce Techel, MyValleySprings.com president, doubted any out-of-town public relations effort on the part of hot plant proponents would have much sway on locals.

“After going to Saturday’s meeting and seeing how bright these people are, I don’t think they’re bulnerable to people doing a PR job on them.” Techel said. “I think folds in Rancho can handle this.”

Bassett was also skeptical about the public relations move by hot plant proponents.

“I just don’t see that happening (convincing the public the plant is a good idea),” Bassett said. “We’re the ones who are going to get the pollution and all the unpleasant aspects from it and we won’t get any of the benefits.”

She said some of those who were at Saturday’s opponents’ meeting were planning to attend the proponents’ gathering.

Holloway said he was hired by Ford’s attorney, but planned to be objective at Tuesday’s meeting.

Techel confirmed MyValleySprings.com has filed an appeal to one of the County Planning Commission’s decisions concerning the hot plant.

The planning panel on July 9 formally voted on a resolution backing county Planning Director Peter Maurer’s April 30 decision the asphalt plant is a permitted use at the quarry, which is located at 3650 Hogan Dam Road.

She anticipates the appeal could reach the Board of Supervisors on Aug. 11.

Ford Construction has also filed appeals to planning panel decisions concerning additional reviews prior to the project moving forward.