

Letters to the Editor

The Valley Springs News, June 17, 2015

Deserve to hear facts on hot plant

Editor:

Recently, Al Segalla, President of the Calaveras County Taxpayers Association, praised Ford Construction's plans to build an asphalt plant in Valley Springs, and he denigrated local residents for challenging a planning staff decision, raising questions, and pointing out potential risks. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) protects the public's right to comment on possible dangers to health, safety, the natural environment, and the peaceful enjoyment of property and property values.

We wish Mr. Segalla had done more research before claiming to have discovered "the facts" and agreeing with Planning's determination that concrete includes asphalt. The plain language of county zoning code lists only "concrete mixing and batch plant, ready mix" as a permitted use in the quarry's M2 industrial zone. "Asphalt plant" was removed from the list of permitted uses in 1978.

Mr. Segalla ignores the fact that the hazardous material "liquid asphalt" would be used to make asphalt paving. Liquid asphalt bitumen is the petroleum-based tar-like binder needed to mix with aggregates to produce hot-mix asphalt. Heated bitumen produces fumes. Asphalt plants emit particulate matter and a variety of gaseous and hazardous air pollutants, according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency documents.

Mr. Segalla later claimed the company pulled the plug on the asphalt plant to move it elsewhere. Evidence shows Ford Construction plans to fight the County's recent decision to review the asphalt plant as a project under CEQA, and asphalt plant equipment continues to be brought onto quarry property (documented by photos).

Mr. Segalla and the Taxpayers Association may be willing to risk the health and safety of Valley Springs area residents and their environment for an estimated 10 jobs, but those who live here are not. Jobs should not automatically trump possible loss in residential property values, increased unrestricted heavy truck traffic in residential neighborhoods, and risks to the health and safety of residents and the rural environment. Both Stockton East and Calaveras County Water Districts appealed the determination, based on concerns about contamination of Calaveras River drinking water. Without public notice and transparency, we don't know if adequate protections will be in place.

We welcome full disclosure of the facts at the public appeals hearing June 25. We want to see businesses grow and thrive, but not in ways that harm local residents.

Colleen Platt, Secretary
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