

Report: Temecula's land grab plan hits snag over quarry

By JEFF HORSEMAN

The Press-Enterprise

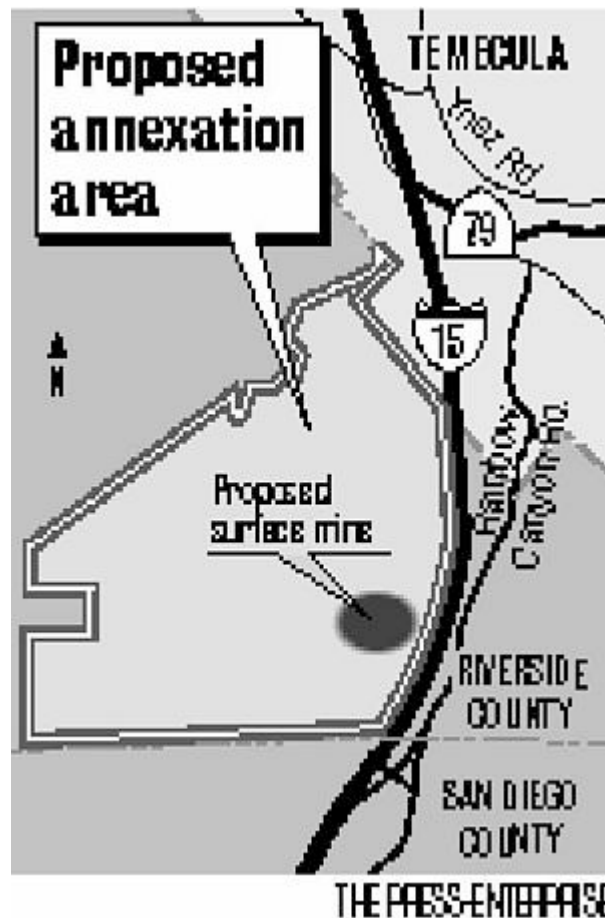
11:14 PM PDT on Thursday, May 28, 2009

Temecula's intentions to ban open-pit mining could stymie its effort to annex nearly 5,000 acres that includes the proposed site of a granite quarry.

In an 18-page report released Thursday, the staff of a boundary-setting agency recommended against the annexation of the hilly, rock-strewn land that includes the 414-acre site of the proposed Liberty Quarry.

The report said any decision about the quarry should be made by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, which currently has jurisdiction over the land, because the operation would affect people and commerce beyond Temecula's borders.

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If the annexation is approved, the city would have authority over the land. Proposed city zoning would prohibit open-pit mining there, and the door would be shut to debate over the issues raised by the quarry proposal, according to the report.

The annexation will be decided by the Riverside Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO. An independent agency made up of supervisors, local officials and a private citizen, it has the power to approve or deny annexations in the county.

Thursday's report from the commission's staff did not judge the merits of the quarry itself, which has been a divisive issue for more than four years.

Many Temecula-area residents and civic leaders oppose the quarry, citing the dust and noise it would create in a region known for wineries and tourism.

The quarry's developer, Granite Construction, said critics' concerns are baseless. Supporters said the quarry will generate millions in tax revenue and create nearly 100 jobs while providing a desperately needed source of aggregate, a building material.

LAFCO will review the annexation during a public hearing at 9 a.m. June 4 in the County Administrative Center in Riverside.

The staff's findings are not binding on the commission.

In making a case for annexation, city officials have avoided addressing Liberty Quarry, saying the annexation is meant to preserve open space. But city staff reports to the City Council cast a negative light on mining operations in the area.

The quarry plans are being examined by county planners, and the release of a draft environmental study is pending.

The LAFCO staff report finds that the questions raised by the quarry would never be answered if the city is allowed to annex the land.

"The only reasons to approve the annexation are if the commission believes surface mining in any form is not an appropriate use for the area and that such a decision is appropriately a local decision," the report reads.

The report concludes that the Board of Supervisors "does have a regional interest and perspective that is called for in this circumstance."

Quarry foes will still have the opportunity to express their views before the board, the report found.

Temecula Mayor Maryann Edwards said despite the report, the city will press ahead with the annexation.

"We still think that local control is the best thing when it comes to residents deciding what is best for the future of this city," she said.

Granite Construction representatives were pleased with the report. "We think it's the right decision," said Gary Johnson, the company's aggregate resource development manager.

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[welrdelr](#) 8 minutes ago wrote:



With unemployment in the double figures it is hard to imagine any elected official not supporting the creation of 100 new jobs. Often times environmental groups don't seem to support the best interest of the voters.

welrdelr@verizon.net



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[The WildomarWatcher](#) 1 hour ago wrote:



You can bet that Granite has been “working” with the County in oh so many ways!

The County’s Planning department, the Planning commission, LAFCO and the Board of Supervisors all have dollar signs dancing in their heads. They are thinking about the millions of dollars in fees and revenues that will flow into the County’s coffers from this project and others like it.

Their recommendations and predictable decisions are being made based on how much money they would glean from Liberty Quarry, not on what is good for the environment or desired by the people who live here in the Temecula Valley. Do they care about air quality deterioration, traffic congestion and other detrimental environmental impacts? No!

They are also preparing to approve a new General Plan Amendment, which will allow them to put these types of development projects practically anywhere throughout the county, while skirting CEQA guidelines and EPA standards with so-called fast track approvals.

This has happened repeatedly, and it is time to vote these Supervisors and their appointed cronies out of office. We need to elect new officials who will respect the environment and the will of the people. These existing officials have long forgotten that they were elected to serve the public, not abuse us.

Elections are coming up. In 2010 and 2012 we will have the opportunity rid our communities and our county of officials intoxicated on their own power. They have been in office far too long and are doing far too much damage. We need new people who will deliver on the promises of positive change. We need new Supervisors and strict term limits.

If you are concerned about what is happening, just remember you have the power to change things with your vote.