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TEMECULA: Report slams city's annexation plan

Request called "atypical"

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TEMECULA ---- The city's bid to annex 5,000 acres on its southwestern border was dealt a blow Thursday when a report was released that recommends denial of the request.

The report, which calls the city's request "atypical," was written by George Spilotis, executive officer of the Local Agency Formation Commission, and two of the commission's local government analysts.

The commission's board is made up of elected officials from various cities and the county, plus a member of the public. The board is scheduled to rule on the annexation application during a public hearing in Riverside on Thursday morning.

While a negative report isn't a death knell for the city's bid, many public agency boards are wary of overruling their staff's recommendations.

Karie Reuther, director of community relations for Granite Construction, said the company, which is looking to site a quarry on a wedge of the land the city wants to annex, was cheered by the contents of the report.

"It reads really, really nicely," she said. "We agree with staff's recommendation."

Much of the land the city wants to add consists of open space and rolling hills in the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve. But there is also a 400-acre section near Interstate 15 that is targeted by Granite for a project called the Liberty Quarry.

Granite officials have called the city's attempt to annex the land a blatant attempt to stop the quarry project, which is working its way through the Riverside County Planning Department.

City officials have said preserving the land as open space has long been one of the city's goals, and annexation is the way to do that.

Reuther said Thursday night that the report was right in calling the location of the quarry a regional issue that should be determined by the county Board of Supervisors.

Also, she contends the "atypical" nature of the request noted by commission staff was spot on.

"You grow your city for development, not to stop development," she said.

Temecula Mayor Maryann Edwards said the report gives the city a clear road map on how to focus its 15-minute presentation during the hearing, which also will feature presentations from Granite officials, annexation supporters and annexation opponents.

"It gives us an indication of things that we might want to add into our presentation," she said.

Those additions and modifications will be discussed, Edwards said, during a senior staff meeting

Friday.

The commission report states there is no compelling reason to remove the land from the county's jurisdiction. The report also notes that quarries, like prisons or landfills, need to exist somewhere and there has been a trend toward more regional decision-making on their whereabouts.

The mention of "regional decision-making" stands in contrast to the repeated calls for "local control" made by Temecula city officials and supporters of annexation, a group that includes residents of De Luz and Rainbow.

Addressing the report's reference to regional decision-making, Edwards said, "The government that governs best is the government closest to the people."

The report states that a typical annexation request involves the commission looking at proposed land uses or development plans submitted by the public agency requesting the boundary changes.

In this case, the only body planning any sort of development in the proposed annexation territory is Granite, which has been working with the county on its proposal.

If there were a ruling in favor of the city's request, the land would be rezoned to prohibit mining and the rest of the land would remain zoned for hillside residential uses ---- homes on lots of at least 10 acres. If the request were rejected, the decision on whether or not to approve the quarry would be made by the county.

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