

November 19, 2019

San Diego County Board of Supervisors, District 2, Supervisor Dianne Jacob
Valle de Oro Community Planning Group, Wendy Tinsley Becker, Chairperson
County of San Diego, Planning & Development Services, Environmental Coordinator
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Reference: Record ID. SDC PDS RCVD 11-19-18; MUP18-023; RP18-001

Regarding the **Proposed Cottonwood Sand Mining Project**:

We have lived in our home on one acre just south of the Cottonwood Golf Course for over thirty years. We have enjoyed seeing rabbits, possums, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, turtles, egrets, herons, mallard ducks with their ducklings, and even gophers and coyotes wander through our yard. We have been blessed with a quiet, tranquil, peaceful place to enjoy our retirement.

The subdivision in which we live contains over fifty homes on plots of one acre or more. Some of these residences are valued at over one million dollars. Nearby we have seen the construction of a thriving community shopping center and the growth of a respectable community college. We have a comfortable, pleasant **residential** community.

We were actively involved in community planning and preparation of the Santee Community Plan from 1968 until Santee's incorporation as a city in 1980. During that period we learned the principles of good urban planning and applied those principles to recommendations to San Diego County Planning staff. We heard numerous development and land use proposals. Some of these proposals benefited the community by providing jobs, facilities, and convenience. Some proposals were atrocious, being completely incompatible with the existing or planned character of the community. We strongly support community input into zoning and land use decisions. We are pleased with the established and approved Valle de Oro Community Plan, adopted in 1977 and incorporated into the San Diego County General Plan in 2011.

The proposed sand mine **does not comply with the existing adopted community or county general plan**. It is **not consistent with good planning principles**; i.e., it places heavy industrial land use in the midst of existing low density residential development with no "buffer" of high density residential or commercial use. It would be a lack of common sense to replace recreational open space with heavy industrial use. The proposed project would have a significant and lasting impact on the quality of life of residents adjacent to the proposed activity and provides **no benefit** whatsoever to the community. How can consideration of **heavy industrial** zoning replace **recreational open space** zoning in the middle of low density, single family, semi-rural housing? This is not urban planning. It is urban idiocy and disaster!

Reasons to deny this application are well known and obvious: decrease in property values, increase in traffic (heavy equipment vehicles and trucks), increase in noise, serious degradation of air quality (health issues), danger to schoolchildren having to walk on the single bridge (Steele Canyon Road) between their homes and school. The developer will provide many silver-tongued mitigation measures for these factors, but none will be sufficient to consider his application any further.

It is not just a matter of offering “mitigating measures” that may meet minimum state and local environmental standards and requirements, but one of good common sense and fairness to those of us that have invested in our property with the expectation of tranquility and a pleasant, safe environment in which to live.

Access to and from the property in question is limited to two semi-rural roads: four-lane Willow Glen Drive and two-lane Steele Canyon Road. The most logical egress from the property in question and described in the latest proposal is a turn onto Willow Glen Drive. With restricted visibility due to curves in the road, a turn onto it is dangerous and invites accidents.

The developer plans to conduct trucking operations from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday with excavation and processing from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The trucking operation will produce 176 trips per day over a 6-1/2 hour period (390 minutes). A simple calculation shows that this results in a truck zooming in or out **every 2.2 minutes!**

Won't it be pleasant to wake up to the grinding, whirring, banging, and beep-beep-beep of heavy industrial equipment! Our home in Santee was some three miles from the sand mining operation there. When atmospheric conditions were right (not infrequently) we could clearly hear the noise of the sand mining operation. If this proposed operation were to be approved, we would not be three miles, but within 300 feet of it!

There seems to be no recognition that the proposed property is, in fact, the Sweetwater River bed. Although we are presently in a drought period, it is not that many years ago that the river bed was flooded from bank to bank and threatened to undermine the newly erected Steele Canyon bridge. More recently, in fact on a regular basis, water is transferred from the Loveland Reservoir to the Sweetwater Reservoir. This transfer creates a flow of water through the river bed approximately 100 to 200 feet wide and three or four feet deep. This flow lasts for several days, occasionally weeks. Even storm runoff from major rainfall can create a significant flowing river. What happens both upstream and downstream if such a flood occurs again, water is transferred, or a major storm occurs with a sand pit and heavy industrial equipment in the middle? Will the river be dammed up and cause flooding upstream? What pollutants will be washed downstream? What effect will these pollutants have on the wildlife and flora in the downstream **San Diego National Wildlife Refuge and on the Sweetwater Reservoir?**

Part of the application process is the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). This report should describe the total impact area, not just to the project boundaries. Noise, dust, and particulate pollutants travel well beyond the project boundaries. This extended boundary should be identified. Similarly, the roads on which the projects trucks would travel are not limited to the project area. What provision is made for repair of roads throughout the county?

The basis for any consideration of the proposed sand mining operation should be the approved and adopted **Valle de Oro Community Plan**. The approved plan should be as enforceable as any law. **What good is a plan if you do not enforce compliance with that plan?**

Read the Valle de Oro Community Plan carefully. It does not envision any heavy industrial use such as that proposed. Excerpts from that Plan and observations regarding those excerpts follow.

The Vision Statement from the Valle de Oro Community Plan states:

“The unique balance of urban, semi-rural, agricultural, and open space land uses shall be retained. The green-belt separation from adjacent cities and planning areas shall be preserved. New development will conserve natural resources and topography and will provide a pleasant, safe environment for present and future residents of Valle de Oro.”

This Vision Statement calls for a balance of urban, semi-rural, agricultural, and open space uses. It does not include heavy industrial use, and its last sentence clearly opposes industrial activities such as sand mining which would have a negative impact on conservation of natural resources, topography, and safety.

The Goal of the Valle de Oro Community Plan includes the statement: *“Development of the remaining undeveloped land must be closely scrutinized to ensure compatibility with the existing Rancho San Diego community and the area's wildlife resources.”* The proposed sand mining operation is clearly not compatible with either the existing semi-rural residential Rancho San Diego community or the area’s wildlife resources.

The Industrial Goal in the Valle de Oro Community Plan is: *“Provide for the kind of industrial development that does not detract from the existing character of the community.”* The Policies for industrial land use include the following statements:

“1. New industrial areas shall be compatible with limited impact industrial activities.

2. Industrial areas as identified on the Land Use Map or Specific Plan shall be (1) of sufficient size to allow adequate internal circulation, (2) located in areas which are served by an adequate transportation system, and (3) adequately buffered from surrounding uses.

The proposed sand mining operation is clearly not a “limited impact industrial activity”. It is a high impact activity. The area in which it is proposed is not “served by an adequate transportation system” for heavy equipment vehicles and truck transport. The proposed operation is certainly not “adequately buffered from surrounding uses” which are rural and village residential uses. The proposed industrial development clearly detracts from the existing character of the community.

We request that, in reviewing the proposed sand mining project and request for a major use permit, you put yourself in the position of the homeowners of properties immediately adjacent to the proposed project's location and ask, "Would I want a sand mining operation in my back yard (literally)?" Also, please carefully review the Valle de Oro Community Plan and ask, "Is this proposed project compatible with existing uses? Does it contribute to a pleasant, safe environment for present and future residents? Is the proposed zoning and land use consistent with the community plan?" We are certain that your responses to these questions will be a resounding "**NO**"! We request that the proposed sand mining project and request for a major use permit be **DENIED**.

The public scoping meeting of November 4 asked for alternatives to the project that may be less damaging to the environment. It is suggested that that portion of the Sweetwater River now occupied by the Cottonwood Golf Course become part of the San Diego County River Parks system. Willow Glen Drive is used extensively by bicyclists and joggers. Although a bicycle lane is indicated, the road is not safe for these users, nor is it healthy because they must breathe the exhaust fumes from motor vehicles. A bicycle/jogging/equestrian path adjacent to the riverbed would get the bicycles off of the Willow Glen roadway, provide a practice track for cross-country runners from Steele Canyon, Valhalla, and Granite Hills High Schools as well as recreational joggers, and extend equestrian trails through the river valley. Such a path is a natural **extension of the existing Steele Canyon River Trail**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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