



Hunterdon County Democrat

Wells worry Nockamixon as quarry seeks to expand

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By Kevin J. Guhl

Hanson Aggregates Inc. will present its case for expanding its Nockamixon Township quarry in a public hearing on Aug. 30.

In the meantime, the township is investigating what impact the quarry's expansion might have on residential wells.

The township Board of Supervisors granted the hearing on May 17 despite the township Planning Commission's recommendation that it not move forward with Hanson's request to start quarrying a 20-acre area between the Ottsville quarry and Route 611.

Supervisors Jim Litzenberger, Ken Gross and Henry Gawronski voted for the hearing to proceed. Supervisor Nancy Janyszeski was not present at the meeting.

Gawronski said township solicitor Terry Clemons advised the board to let the hearing proceed, as the process was guaranteed when Hanson paid its application fees.

Gawronski said he wants to consider both Hanson's case and evidence provided by hydrogeologist Matt Mulhall, who the township hired to review Hanson's application.

"I'd rather see them expand and go forward and not (drill deeper and) tear up the aquifer," Gawronski said.

He said groundwater is "crucial to our area and I don't want to see it lost."

Supervisor Bruce Keyser, who voted against the quarry hearing, said, "They have been pretty good neighbors, actually."

However, the data the quarry has given about its operation's effect on wells, in a study prepared by Hanson's own experts, does not satisfy Keyser.

"Until our own experts give us the answers...I don't want to talk with (Hanson)," said Keyser. The township hired Mulhall, a licensed hydrogeologist, to review Hanson's application, at the request of the township's Environmental Advisory Council (EAC).

The supervisors agreed to pay Mulhall no more than \$5,000, at \$135 an hour.

EAC member Steve Donovan said the EAC has data from wells close to the quarry that have diminished water levels and will be seeking to examine about 50 more wells in order to get a broader picture of the quarry's potential effect on drinking water.

"We have concerns about (the quarry) adversely affecting neighboring wells," said Donovan.

He said the EAC will share its data with Mulhall after Mulhall has reached a conclusion about the quarry's application.

Donovan said Hanson's data is mostly "theoretical" and claims quarrying would not have any negative

impact on wells.

However, Hanson has also promised to replace any wells within 1,500 of the quarry that go dry, Donovan said.

"The problem with that is it's under the assumption that drilling deeper would find new water. Drilling into unfractured rock doesn't gain you anything," said Donovan.

Planning Commission member Al Santopietro said the commission's unanimous decision was mainly due to unanswered questions about the quarry's plans.

These include the effect on wells, as well as the possibility of needing to close Route 611 during blasting at the quarry.

Santopietro said there is a problem if emergency vehicles are stopped by a road closure.

"I personally believe health and welfare is put at risk by the road (being closed)" said Santopietro.

Keyser is also frustrated that Hanson will be able to avoid the township's ordinance banning blasting within 1,000 feet of underground gas tanks. Keyser said that although the expansion would put Hanson within that distance to the Turkey Hill gas station on Route 611, the Environmental Protection Agency informed the township that the tanks are considered above ground because they are at ground level in a concrete vault.

The quarry already is permitted by the state Department of Environmental Protection (PDEP) to dig down 300 more feet, to 60 feet below sea level. The bottom of the quarry is currently 260 feet down, said Donovan. Santopietro said Hanson is seeking zoning relief to expand the quarry outward into an area zoned for commercial use.

Santopietro said Hanson told the Planning Commission that, without expansion, the quarry will be exhausted in 12 to 13 years. With expansion, it could last about 19 years.

The township is still seeking a location for the hearing, although it will likely be held at Palisades High School or Palisades Middle School, according to Township Secretary Arlene Eichlin.

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