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Roblar Road quarry west of Cotati gets final OK

By [BRETT WILKISON](#)
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A divided Sonoma County Board of Supervisors gave final approval Tuesday to the Roblar Road rock quarry west of Cotati as well as the project's habitat proposal involving county-protected farmland.



PD FILE, 2010
Dozens of anti-quarry signs line the length of Roblar Road in West County.

The quarry, on 70 acres north of Two Rock Valley, was proposed by former North Bay Construction owner John Barella.

Supervisors Mike Kerns, Paul Kelley and Valerie Brown voted for the quarry and the habitat proposal without comment. They have previously voiced support for the quarry because they said it provides a local source of construction materials.

Supervisors Shirlee Zane and Efren Carrillo were opposed, citing concerns about the quarry's potential impacts on the environment and implications for county open space policy.

The approval, which had been signaled in earlier 3-2 straw votes, came during review of the consent agenda, normally a group of routine items that receive little deliberation. Carrillo and Zane made specific mention of the quarry issue, with both affirming their 'no' votes.

The decision followed an October 19 public hearing that featured several hours of public testimony on the quarry and a preliminary vote backing the rock project.

A separate hearing and straw vote backing the quarry's habitat proposal was held last week. That plan calls for using 105 acres of adjacent, county-protected private ranchland to replace amphibian habitat that will be lost to the rock project.

Opponents again voiced their opinions on the quarry and the habitat deal Tuesday in public testimony allowed as part of the consent agenda.

They called for the board to postpone its decision to allow further study of the quarry's potential impacts on groundwater. The project is adjacent to a former unlined, uncapped county landfill and opponents fear blasting and digging in the area could release toxins from the landfill.

Barella has said safeguards will prevent such problems from occurring.

"A vote on this is premature," quarry critic Ann Maurice of the Occidental-based Ad Hoc Committee for Clean Water told supervisors. She said state water and wildlife regulators still have questions about the project.

Dairy belt landowner Kathy Tresch, who has said that her family's ranchland could be affected by the quarry's habitat deal, also blasted the vote.

"I believe that the board of directors of the open space district has gone rogue," she said, referring to supervisors, who also oversee the county's 20-year-old Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

A group of neighbors opposed to the rock project, Citizens Against Roblar Road Quarry, have vowed a legal challenge.

Barella received congratulatory handshakes from supporters after the hearing. He declined an interview request.

His attorney Steve Butler praised the board's final decision.

"We'll just wait and see what happens and react when and if any (legal) action is taken," Butler said about potential litigation from quarry opponents.

In the works for seven years, the quarry would produce about 11 million cubic yards of construction-grade rock worth about \$60 million over at least 20 years.

Tuesday's vote approved a zone change, a use permit, a mining and reclamation plan and it certified the project's final environmental impact report.

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