

Clear Creek Courant Article

Empire residents concerned over proposed gravel pit

The community is pushing back over potential increased noise, traffic

By Ian Neligh

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While Empire residents are concerned about a proposed sand and gravel pit at Douglas Mountain Ranch Mine, owners say they are willing to work to find a compromise to make the pit less impactful to the area.

Residents are concerned about noise, dust, increased traffic and the area's viewshed at the 75-acre site just east of town.

"Most of the citizens are upset. They don't want to look at a gravel pit," Empire Mayor Richard Sprague said. "That's an excellent piece of property, and it is beautiful, so there's a group of folks that are meeting and trying to come up with alternatives and, hopefully, the (property owners) who own it will listen to them and see if there's some other use for it besides as a gravel pit."

Owners expect that in about 20 years, the pit will become a reservoir to provide water to area landowners and recreation in the form of fishing and small boating. If everything goes as planned, Ben Langenfeld with Greg Lewicki and Associates — the firm representing the property owners through the permitting processes — said they would like to see work begin on expanding and building road infrastructure as soon as this fall and mining work beginning in 2019.

Clear Creek County Planning Director Fred Rollenhagen said the county hasn't received a complete application for the project yet. The application is for a rezoning and when received it could take between two to six months or longer for a final decision from the county.

The proposal

Langenfeld said the idea was initially conceived as an 80-acre reservoir project between the west fork of Clear Creek and Douglas Mountain.

"That's the long-term plan. In order to do that we have to excavate a tremendous amount of material. You've got to dig out a pretty big depression to be able to store all that water," Langenfeld said. "And the best way that we've all decided to do it — all the landowners together — has been to open a construction material pit: sand, gravel (and) rock, the sort of stuff that is used to make roads and concrete for foundations, that sort of thing."

Langenfeld said they're taking the feedback they've gained so far and making modifications or additions to make the project proposal less impactful to the community.

“I don’t look at this as a process you just steamroll through and run everybody over. I think you take your time, and we hear everybody out, and then we try to make the best compromise we can that everybody can live with,” Langenfeld said.

Resident reaction

Resident Hans Berg is spearheading local concern about the project. An Empire resident for 10 years, Berg said he appreciates the efforts of the project to keep the mine hidden from view and the noise to a minimum.

“(But) the bottom line is with this type of development, there’s no way you can meet the community standards for our area,” Berg said. “The land at issue is spectacular and a welcoming viewshed. I think it is important for the entire county frankly because it is in the heart of the county but particularly for Empire.”

Berg added with the wind, there’s no way the noise and dust can meet the community’s standards.

Berg said that he and others who are opposed to the plan would rather work with the property owners to come up with an idea that everybody likes.

“Let’s come together and decide what we’re going to do with this property once and for all,” Berg said.