

Mining opponents in Welcome win a reprieve

Facchina withdraws proposal for now

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Welcome residents vow they will continue to fight a local developer's plans to mine sand and gravel from 138 acres of a former horse farm in their community when the proposal surfaces again early next year.

About 150 local residents turned up at a public hearing in La Plata on Tuesday to protest Paul Facchina Sr.'s request to surface mine the former Mill Run Horse Farm in Welcome — an unexpected turn of events that convinced the developer to temporarily withdraw the proposal.

The withdrawal of the special exception application is just a lull in the battle, said members of the Welcome Environmental Coalition — a group

that formed several months ago to fight the surface mining proposal.

"This is a victory for the citizens of Welcome, but we realize we only won a skirmish. There's a long war ahead," said Dennis Sullivan, the president of the coalition, who lives less than a mile from the proposed mining site.

Facchina, who did not attend the hearing, made a request late Tuesday afternoon to the Charles County Board of Zoning Appeals to continue the hearing until Nov. 25 so that the residents' concerns could be fully addressed, said Tom Mudd, the local attorney representing Facchina.

In addition, Mudd said a supplemental staff report prepared by Charles County planners identified several issues that needed to be addressed before the special exception request could move forward.

Facchina was surprised at the intensity of the opposition to his proposal to surface mine the former horse farm on Route 6, said Charles McPherson, chief operating officer of the



Facchina

Facchina Group.

"We were caught off guard, frankly," he said Thursday. "We've done a really poor job of communicating with everybody. We've got to sit down and re-evaluate what we're going to do."

"([Facchina] wants to try to address the concerns of the community so everyone has a thorough understanding of what he wants to do," Mudd told the board during the hearing. "If the board does not wish to continue the hearing, Mr. Facchina will withdraw the application and refile when he is prepared to do so."

The board of appeals unanimously denied the request to delay the hearing, stating the case was already postponed in May.

"At some point we're going to have to hear this," said A.J. Perk Jr., board chairman. "I think this is going to be a very long ordeal for everybody. ... It's going to take at least three sessions to hear this case."

"It wouldn't be fair to grant a continuance," said board member Fred Mower, adding Facchi-

na cannot continue to delay the hearing. "This is going to be a lengthy hearing. It's going to take a lot of time."

If Facchina resubmits the special exception application, the board would not be able to schedule a public hearing until the beginning of the year because of a full docket of cases through the Christmas and New Year's holidays, said Charles Rice, the county's manager of environmental programs.

So many members of the Welcome Environmental Coalition showed up for the public hearing the crowd spilled out of the county commissioners' meeting room in the county government building into the cafeteria.

The group's concerns about the mining proposal range from the adverse impacts the operation would have on the land's ecosystem to traffic hazards created from the additional dump trucks that join hundreds of others hauling aggregate along Route 6.

Residents said they realized that the mining proposal will surface again.

"This just gives Mr. Facchina time to regroup," said Cheryl

Thomas of Welcome. "He'll end up filing a new proposal. The board's denial of the continuance is good and bad. He's going to be back."

"Mr. Facchina doesn't like to lose," said Nanjemoy resident Johnnie DeGiorgi, who is running for the District 2 county commissioner seat. "He's a go-getter."

It was heartening to see the number of residents who turned up to testify against the surface mining proposal, Sullivan said.

"The turnout was incredible," he said. "Clearly the citizenry is totally against strip mining in their community."

"The people of Welcome are very concerned about the environment, especially the water quality issue," said Deanna Wheeler, the Nanjemoy resident who led the charge to fight a huge surface mining proposal in Douglas Point several years ago.

"To see people who are willing to speak up about something that is dear to them gives me hope for Charles County."

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