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Proposal for Gravel Mine Withdrawn

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A proposal to turn a 212-acre horse farm into a gravel mine near the tiny Charles County town of Welcome was withdrawn Tuesday night after the Charles County Board of Appeals rejected the developer's request for a three-month extension in the case.

An attorney for the developer, Facchina Construction Co., asked for a continuance because the firm was "surprised with the outcry against" the project and needed time to shore up support. Nearly 200 people attended the hearing in La Plata on Tuesday night, and many burst out in a cheer when the board voted unanimously to reject Facchina's request for an extension.

Their celebration may be short-lived, however. Facchina's attorney, Thomas Mudd, said the company will not abandon the proposal and intends to file a new application. When asked about a timetable, Mudd said Facchina will file "as soon as we get our ducks in a row."

J. Carroll Holzer, an attorney who represented a coalition of Welcome residents opposed to the mine proposal, said his clients are prepared to testify against Facchina's plan.

"We were ready to go ahead," Holzer said. "It appeared to me that maybe they weren't ready for all this opposition and they wanted time to regroup."

Some residents who live near the Mill Run Horse Farm billed this as a David-and-Goliath struggle: townsfolk against Paul Facchina Sr., one of Southern Maryland's most powerful developers and business leaders. Those who opposed the proposal said they feared the gravel operation would increase truck traffic and could cause their property values to decline.

But Facchina, who has been recognized statewide for his efforts to protect the environment, has said residents' concerns are overblown. His chief operating officer, Charles McPherson, said Tuesday night that the company will spend the next few months meeting with residents to explain the proposal.

"We've done a very poor job of communicating and we've got to do better," McPherson said. "There's no way that we want to leave it this way. It's our fault and we've got to fix it."

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