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PAUL POST, The Saratogian

01/26/2005

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GREENFIELD -- Opponents of a proposed hard-rock mining project say the town should hold a public referendum on the controversial issue.

More than 60 people turned out Tuesday night at St. Joseph's Church for a Land Use Committee's public hearing. The panel has spent more than a year drafting a report designed to guide the Town Board on a variety of long-range planning and zoning issues. Mining has generated strong feelings among people on both sides of the debate.

'There's just seems to be one question that's never answered,' said resident Anne Fitzgerald. 'What is the benefit? There's no money, no jobs. Pompa is the only one that's going to benefit.'

Pompa Brothers Inc. has plans to mine 237 acres between Lake Desolation and Coy roads, in the western part of Greenfield. Half of this site is outside a town-designated materials extraction district.

The Town Board must approve a zoning change for mining to occur there.

Walter Chandler, a self-employed logger, criticized mining opponents for raising concerns about increased truck traffic.

'We've been mining and logging in this town for generations,' he said. 'You can't just say 'no trucks.' It's all right when they come to your house with stone and lumber.'

Chandler said that Pompa Brothers provided the stone and aggregate needed to build many homes in Greenfield.

Longtime resident Greg Davis accused newer residents of trying to take over the town, and not respecting the contributions of established families.

Mining isn't new to Greenfield, but hard-rock blasting and mining is, said Tom Siragusa, a member of Greenfield Concerned Citizens, which opposes Pompa's expansion.

'This is clearly not what the people want,' he said. 'The committee is supposed to be the voice of the residents.'

He said the town should hold a public vote on the matter.



People have until Feb. 22, the committee's next meeting date, to submit written comments on the issue. In either late February or early March, the panel will submit its planning recommendations to the Town Board.

After reviewing them, the Town Board will hold a public hearing of its own on the committee's report. Supervisor Robert Stokes said recommendations won't be formally adopted until at least April.



Stuart Mesinger of the Chazen Companies, the committee's paid consultant, defended the panel's decision not take a stance either for or against mining. Expert information will be presented during environmental reviews of Pompa's proposal and a final decision shouldn't be made until that point, he said.

By then, the issue will be in the Town Board's hands.



Opponents pointed out apparent contradictions in the committee's report. For example, it says that the Kayaderosseras Ridge should be protected from scenic detraction and erosion. But at the same time, it says the town should support mining in this same area, if negative effects can be mitigated.

Pompa has enough permitted land to keep mining for the next 50 years, said Kevin Brown, the firm's attorney. The site Pompa wants to mine would have less visual impacts, he said.



'We will design the mine to minimize these impacts,' Brown said. 'Can we eliminate these impacts? No. In the end, we'll have a good design that meets as many of your concerns as we can.'

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