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LOCAL

Concerns over proposed mining operation in Cambridge Township continue

Dan Cherry Special to The Daily Telegram

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CAMBRIDGE TWP. — For more than an hour Wednesday, Cambridge Township residents offered questions or concerns about a proposed aggregate operation in the Irish Hills.

The Cambridge Township Planning Commission met Wednesday before a packed audience to examine language in a proposed ordinance pertaining to gravel and sand mining operations within the township.

SSP Leasing/Cambridge Lake LLC last year submitted a conditional use application to the township to allow mining on more than 325 acres along the south and north sides of U.S. 12, near Wamplers, Kelly and Allens lakes. The property eyed for mining borders Person Highway to the west, Killarney Highway to the south and ends near Egan Highway to the east.

The township board at that time imposed a six-month moratorium on the matter while it examined its ordinance and to develop clear language on regulations of such an operation. However, the township is being sued by the mining company, owned by Tim Warvel, over the six-month moratorium, which ends June 25. A pretrial hearing is scheduled for June 12 in Lenawee County Circuit Court.

The planning commission continued to examine the proposed wording in the ordinance, which will then go to the Region 2 Planning Commission, a board which works with government entities in Lenawee, Jackson and Hillsdale counties and makes recommendations based on their findings.

Region 2 will then make its recommendation to the Cambridge Township Board to vote upon.

The matter has packed previous township meetings, mostly by residents asking questions or speaking in opposition about the proposed operation. A residential opposition group, Citizens Protect Irish Hills, was formed in response.

On Wednesday, Cambridge Township resident Megan Beard presented to the planning commission 29 questions, concerns or comments about the ordinance, passing out copies to the board and township representatives. Beard and other residents were each given three minutes to speak, with a line forming up to the microphone.

Karen Zavicar went over the proposed ordinance language and asked that a traffic study be added to the requirements for mining operations.

Sally McNamara said the township has the power to say yes or no to any application.

“In my long life, I've had to put in a number of different applications, some for loans, some for jobs. and I received positive feedback for a majority of them. Sometimes applications are turned down. I am asking you to do that,” she said to audience applause.

Wayne Turner, upcoming resident at Killarney Lake, expressed concerns about silica dust, a byproduct of mining.

Diane Schilling, an 11-year Killarney Lake resident, said she is vehemently opposed to the planned mining operation for silica and other reasons.

As a nurse, she said she is opposed to the project, citing mining operations place a lot of contaminants, including silica, into the atmosphere.

“No one wants to hear” noises from a mining operation, she said.

“What about our groundwater? she asked. “Is my well going to be contaminated or defunct? I respectfully ask you to decline the mining operation. We don't need gravel and sand.”

Dave Hartley also addressed the board with his concerns.

“If you were in the same position as we are, would you be receptive to it?” he said to the board. “Ask that one question. We all moved from the city for tranquility. We all came here to get away from noise. You can reject it. A lot of this land at one time was farmland. I have lived in the Irish Hills for nearly 50 years. I bought property five years ago. Is this right for the Irish Hills? I say no, it's not. It's not right. These people were here long before this company.”

Theresa Anders-Hughes, who said she has been vocally opposed to the operation, said she has been intimidated by truck drivers, alleging they have thrown items onto her property northwest of the land in question as they pass by.

Thomas Emerson, owner of Evans Lake Resort, also voiced concern about the proposed mining endeavor.

“We don’t want any more carpetbaggers coming in, buying up all the land,” he said, then moving on when the money is made and abandoning any potential land problems.

Eric Link also asked questions about the proposed ordinance. Legal consultants stepped in a few times to reiterate the township is currently in litigation with the company over the moratorium.

Counsel also said the ordinance is a general document, not specific to any one company.

“We are looking at this ordinance not because of an application; we are looking to update an out-of-date document,” Burke Castleberry said during the meeting.

Resident Kelly Cichy was among the last to speak, thanking the planning commissioners for their attentiveness to the concerns of the township homeowners.

Email, phone and text message attempts to reach Warvel since the project was announced have been unsuccessful.