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Provided by: Eric Treaster
24 October 2024

"Hartford Courant, 31 May 2024

A Massachusetts-based dredging and construction company pursuing a highly controversial proposal to run a quarry at historic Mount Decatur along the Thames River withdrew its permit application Wednesday, but the plan is still very much alive.

Cashman Dredging's bid to begin large-scale quarrying work on the former *Dow Chemical* property drew intense local opposition last winter, brining more than 200 residents to protest against it at a hearing.

Homeowners have banded together to fight the plan, warning that rock blasting could pollute the air and generate far too much new truck traffic and industrial noise.

On Sunday, the Gales Ferry Alliance is hosting a question-and-answer session at 3 p.m. at the Gales Ferry Community Center to talk about the quarry idea and its potential impacts.

“The impact and vibration caused by the blasting will not only be felt by us residents, but may result in large boulders being shaken loose and tumbling onto our properties and homes,” Chapman Lane resident Elizabeth Smith told town planners in the winter.

After the intense public pushback, Cashman abruptly withdrew its zoning application in February and then submitted a new one in April. Town planners anticipated such a large crowd for the June 13 hearing that they scheduled it for Ledyard Middle School.

On Wednesday afternoon, however, Cashman's subsidiary, Gales Ferry Intermodal, told the town it is temporarily withdrawing the new version of the proposal. The company emphasized it is doing that only temporarily, and only to allow freshly hired Town Planner Elizabeth Burdick enough time to fully review the complex technical and engineering data.

Gales Ferry Intermodal proposes blasting about 40 acres between Route 12 and the Thames for granite production. The company has said it wants to stage the work in five phases spanning about a decade.

Neighbors have cautioned that the site, which includes the remnants of a fort used during The War of 1812, is home to foxes, deer, eagles and more.

The tract is part of a larger 165-acre brownfield previously owned by *Dow Chemical*. But Gales Ferry Intermodal has emphasized that *Dow* still uses part of the property for producing Styrofoam, and that the site has a long industrial past.

Gales Ferry Intermodal contends it can do the quarrying without health hazards or excessive noise for neighbors, and argues that it would benefit the town overall.

“The area of proposed excavation is intended to create 26 acres of prime, level industrial land to promote future industrial growth, ratables (taxable properties) and employment opportunities within the Ledyard community,” it wrote in its most recent application.

“It is significant to note that it will create approximately 30 well-paying construction jobs and additional support service employment opportunities, and by virtue of the payment in lieu of taxes proposed in conjunction with this application provide significant ratables to the town of Ledyard during the industrial site plan preparation phase of this project,” the company wrote.

Levelling the land will create “a highly attractive site for very significant future economic development” in the future, it claimed.

But neighbors so far have not been convinced.

“One can only imagine how loud and disruptive the blasting will be, not only for us but for our pets,” Phil and Denise LaPierre told planners in the winter. “We purchased property on the river for its tranquility and peacefulness and would like to protect that.”

The Ledyard Historic District Commission noted that the nearby Gales Ferry village has 64 buildings constructed in the 18th or 19th centuries, mostly on masonry foundations with masonry chimneys.

“It is inconceivable to us that blasting such a large quantity of granite over such a period as it would take to effect such removal would not damage these foundations and chimneys as well as others of note in the vicinity,” the commission told planners.

Resident Bruce Edwards recently said the Key Bridge catastrophe in Baltimore Harbor shows another risk of allowing bargeloads of granite to pass frequently by the nearby submarine base.

“When you put a little weight behind it, 8 mph is deadly fast. Though a fraction of the weight of the Dali, a loaded barge — even dragging a tug — hitting a docked sub could conceivably cost about as much as the fallen Key Bridge, and it could be worse,” he told The Courant.

Town officials anticipate getting a new application this summer.

“The applicant intends to resubmit this application in the very near future,” according to the letter that planners received Wednesday from Heller, Heller & McCoy, the law firm representing Gales Ferry Intermodal.”