

Pepper tries to stop Anderson mine

BY SHARON COOLIDGE AND STEVE KEMME • SCOOOLIDGE@ENQUIRER.COM
| SKEMME@ENQUIRER.COM • JULY 13, 2010

A Hamilton County commissioner on Tuesday came out with a plan to stop a controversial underground limestone mine from being built in Anderson Township.

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Commissioner David Pepper is calling on fellow commissioners to sign a resolution that would block approval for Martin Marietta Materials Inc. to build a tunnel necessary for the mine beneath Broadwell Road, which is owned by the county.

Under state law, businesses that want to excavate or mine under a county road must get the commission's consent. So far Martin Marietta hasn't asked for permission, Pepper said.

"I think common sense tells you the risks and cost of the proposal to have underground blasting in the heart of several county communities and in the middle of pristine green space dramatically outweighs any benefit," Pepper said. "At some point in this process someone has to speak up for the citizens who have expressed serious concern about the project's impact on their community."

Richard Brahm, attorney for Martin Marietta Materials, accused Pepper of playing politics with the mining issue.

"He's got a political agenda," he said. "There are specific standards that apply to the permit that's needed for us to go under the roadway. We have our property rights and we have a process to go through, and we're doing that."

Pepper's proposal was met with applause at a news conference Tuesday attended by local activists who have been fighting the mine proposal for over a year.

Last July, Commissioner Greg Hartmann joined Pepper in passing a resolution opposing the mining proposal. Commissioner Todd Portune abstained.

Martin Marietta wants to build an underground limestone mine on 480 acres it owns in the vicinity of Roundbottom and Broadwell roads in Anderson Township.

Township zoning officials in June approved the mine in a 3-to-2 vote after a year of public hearings. The board put in place 25 conditions designed to prevent the mine from endangering the community's safety and from causing a significant increase in dust, traffic and noise.

That vote came over objections from neighboring communities. Terrace Park, Newtown, Indian Hill, Mariemont, Columbia Township, Union Township and the Mariemont and Milford school districts enacted resolutions in opposition to the mine, saying it would undermine the quality of life, property values, safety and health.

Pepper, who is running for state auditor and lives in Anderson Township -- though not near the proposed mine -- has several objections to the mine:

- Underground blasting would take place at least once each workday and would happen as close as 50 feet from the property line of businesses, 250 feet from the property line of residences, and 50 feet from public rights of way.
- Expert witnesses have said the mine presents risks of noise, light, dust, air pollution, heavy truck traffic, perceptible vibration, and lost value to surrounding properties and communities.
- The presence of an underground mine as proposed might deter other types of job-creating and revenue-creating businesses from locating nearby.
- The Martin Marietta property is close to several recreation areas, as well as the Little Miami River.

"We have to preserve our green space, baseball fields, soccer fields and classic farmer's market, not to mention this is right along the little Miami River," Pepper said. "That far outweighs any economic benefits to the Township, surrounding communities and the county as a whole."

A group called CABOOM – Citizens Against Blasting on Our Miami – is appealing the zoning board's decision.

A lawyer for the communities opposed to the mine praised Pepper. "We have good legal reasons to think we can overcome the decision, but we're glad commissioner Pepper came forward," said attorney Tim Mara. "We're looking for any and all venues in which to stop Martin Marietta."

After the zoning board approved the mine Pepper began looking into what the county could do about it.

He zeroed in on Martin Marietta's proposal, which said the company needed to dig two very large tunnels—each 25-feet in diameter and 4,000 feet long – about 50 to 100 feet below Broadwell Road.

Thousands of pounds of explosive material each month would be transported through the tunnel, according to the company's proposal. Plus an additional 250 trucks would be transporting 80,000 pounds of limestone from the mine daily using Broadwell and Roundbottom roads.

If the commissioners deny permission to tunnel under Broadwell, Martin Marietta will explore other ways to run the mining operation without the tunnel, Brahm said. But that would require the company to go back to the Anderson Township Board of Zoning Appeals for approval.