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Escondido council approves proposed asphalt plant

By Craig Gustafson
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ESCONDIDO – Citing the need for asphalt production in North County, the City Council yesterday unanimously approved a plant that is expected to create an average of 500 tons of the material daily.

While a handful of residents expressed concerns about air pollution, about a dozen business owners, contractors and residents spoke in favor of the project.

The plant would be at Escondido Sand & Gravel, a concrete and asphalt recycling facility, on Tulip Street near the Gateway shopping center.

Owner George Weir said he expects production to begin in mid-October. He said there's a tremendous demand from contractors for a plant in Escondido.

"They're lining up," he said.

Asphalt is used in paving roads, driveways and parking lots, and it's used in roofing shingles.

The plant is a stark contrast to one that Vulcan Materials Co. proposed to build in 2003. That plant would have produced up to 3,200 tons of asphalt and generated 300 truck trips during a typical 10-hour day. The council rejected it on a 3-2 vote.

Weir's plant would increase traffic with an additional 35 truck trips per day. It's also a much smaller plant, standing 45 feet tall compared with Vulcan's 72-foot plant. Weir's plant also includes a noise wall.

City officials said the plant would meet all state and federal emission standards.

Dan Fauchier, who represented San Diego-based Engineering and General Contractors Association, said a plant is desperately needed for the area.

North County has only one working asphalt plant, located in San Marcos, and it could close when its permit expires in two years. One in Pala closed this year.

Weir's plant won't meet all needs, Fauchier said, but it will ensure that asphalt is available for projects in Escondido. Without it, contractors would likely see supply dwindle and prices soar, he said.

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