

S. JOSEPH SIMITIAN

SANTA CLARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, DISTRICT FIVE

COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER, EAST WING
70 WEST HEDDING STREET, 10TH FLOOR
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA 95110
TEL: (408) 299-5050 or (650) 965-8737 FAX: (408) 280-0418
supervisor.simitian@bos.sccgov.org • www.supervisorsimitian.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 24, 2021

For More Information, Contact:

Kelsey Martinez Combellick, (408) 299-1277

Office of County Supervisor Joe Simitian

kelsey.m.combellick@bos.sccgov.org

Kori Skinner, 650.691.1200 x 571

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

kskinner@openspace.org

SIMITIAN AND LEE PUSH HILLSIDE PROTECTION: BOARD OF SUPES AGREES

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District approves pursuit of shared enforcement rights to protect viewsheds and habitat bordering Lehigh Cement Plant & Quarry

SAN JOSE – This week, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 to protect the hillside and surrounding habitat bordering Lehigh Cement Plant & Quarry by taking the first step to grant shared enforcement rights associated with a 1972 preservation easement to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen). County Supervisors Joe Simitian (District Five) and Otto Lee (District Three) championed the proposal.

The proposal from Simitian and Lee had strong support from the environmental community including Midpen, Green Foothills, Sierra Club, and half a dozen other environmental advocacy organizations: Mothers Out Front, Audubon Society, Muwekma Ohlone, Greenbelt Alliance, Clean

Creeks Coalition, Santa Clara Valley Native Plant Society, Grassroots Ecology, and Bay Area for a Clean Environment.

The Midpen Board of Directors formally agreed to pursue the grant of easement authority during their Wednesday, June 23 meeting. The two entities will collaborate on drafting the legal mechanism to effectuate the grant, and report back to the Board of Supervisors at the Supervisors' August 17th meeting.

"For five decades this easement has protected our hillside views and habitat. Now there's a proposal by Lehigh Southwest Cement to essentially 'chop the top' off the ridgeline," said Simitian. "Violating the easement is something we can't let happen. Having an enforcement partner with a strong commitment to open space protection will help ensure it doesn't."

According to the County Planning Department, Lehigh's proposal would remove approximately 100 vertical feet (297 to 514 linear feet from top to bottom), across a width of almost 4,000 feet, which would result in a loss of over 20 acres of hillside.

"There can be no doubt as to the importance of protecting our hillsides. The public clearly values them both for the viewshed they provide (as both an economic and aesthetic matter), and their inherent habitat value," continued Simitian. "By partnering with Midpen, we strengthen the County's effort to protect the hillside, more efficiently use public resources, and preserve a significant public asset."

In bringing the proposal forward, Supervisor Otto Lee observed that the quarry currently sits less than a quarter mile way from popular hiking spots Rancho San Antonio and Stevens Creek County Park.

"Protecting public lands can be a challenge when multiple agencies are involved, and I want to make sure we highlight the collaborative effort across the community. We are stronger when we work together, especially

when we have this opportunity to save our environment, right here locally,” said Lee.

“We have suffered enough dust, air and water pollution caused by the mining operations at this quarry. Additionally, with a climate crisis on our hands, we must do everything we can to protect our green and open spaces,” said Lee.

County staff will begin working on a legal agreement with Midpen, whose District boundaries include the quarry, to protect and enforce the ridgeline and hillsides. Midpen has a mission and focus, of preserving, protecting, and restoring open spaces to protect the natural environment and for public enjoyment and education, and the County has a long history of successfully collaborating with Midpen when it comes to open space protection.

“Midpen, established in 1972 by a vote of the people, is uniquely suited to partner with the County to protect this ridgeline easement,” said Yoriko Kishimoto, Board Director, Midpen (Ward 2) and Chair of Midpen’s Lehigh Quarry Ad Hoc Committee.

“Nearly 800,000 people per year visit Rancho to enjoy the benefits of nature that is so essential to our well-being. Not only does the ridgeline protect the viewshed and critical wildlife habitat, it’s also vital to protect the preserve and the surrounding communities from the impacts of the operations, reducing the spread of dust, blocking the noise, and protecting the preserve from potential landslides,” Kishimoto continued.

At a June 17th press event announcing the proposal, support for the effort to bolster hillside and open space protection was echoed by James Eggers, Director of the Sierra Club’s Loma Prieta Chapter; Brian Schmidt, Legislative Advocacy Director, Green Foothills; and local mayors Darcy Paul (Cupertino) and Neysa Fligor (Los Altos). The Cities of Cupertino and Los Altos and the Town of Los Altos Hills have also expressed support for the proposal.

Local labor leaders, including Jim Riley, District Representative for Operating Engineers Local 3 and Eddie Venancio, Business Representative for Teamsters Local 853, joined the discussion last week to share their support of the proposal. “We are friends of the environment. We all love to go hiking and love the beauty of the mountain. We would love to see the reclamation process take place and use our labor to put the mountain back to the way it was so people can enjoy it that way it’s meant to be,” said Venancio.

“I’m confident the County and Midpen can reach an agreement around sharing enforcement rights,” concluded Simitian. “And I look forward to a long partnership with Midpen and our other conservation partners, including Labor in this instance, to deliver a good outcome; in this case, an intact ridgeline that best serves our community.”

A link to the agenda and video stream for the Board of Supervisors’ discussion and the vote on can be found here under item 22:

http://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_Meeting.aspx?ID=13224

###