

Yolo County opts for jobs in approving plant expansion

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WOODLAND — Yolo County supervisors on Tuesday approved Clark Pacific's planned expansion of industrial operations at the old Spreckels Sugar Co. site near Woodland.

The unanimous vote will allow Clark Pacific, which manufactures precast concrete structures — including key pieces of the new San Francisco 49ers stadium being built in Santa Clara — to increase from the current 90 acres to 143 acres, and to begin operating around the clock.

At full build-out, the county estimates the industrial park could employ hundreds more workers and generate up to \$120,000 in property taxes every year, in addition to sales and use tax revenue. Clark has said upon approval of the project, the company would immediately hire 20 new employees.

"The Bay Area has a lot of expansion going on," company president Bob Clark told supervisors on Tuesday. "Our strategy is to take jobs that might have been done (on site there) and import (those) jobs to Yolo County.

"To stay competitive on these larger jobs," he added, "we do need facilities."

It was the prospect of more jobs that drew the support of supervisors.

"We have to have jobs that will allow a person to be in the middle class, to pay for a home and lead a decent life in Yolo County," said Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis.

"We are in a down economy," he noted. "Businesses are cutting back and yet here in Yolo County we have a business that is expanding and taking work from the Bay Area. That's what we need to have."

Provenza and his colleagues praised Clark Pacific — locally and family-owned for 50 years — for its local hiring as well as the way it treats its workers.

"They have employees that have worked there for decades," said Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland. "The only equivalent I can relate it to is Nugget Markets. This is the kind of business we need to keep in Yolo County.

"It would be foolhardy to say (you) support jobs expansion and not support this project," Rexroad added.

Supervisor Don Saylor of Davis also praised Clark Pacific as "a creative company (and) a caring company."

The environmental impact report done on the proposed expansion is "thorough and complete," Saylor said, adding that "issues have been identified and mitigations are appropriate. It's consistent with the General Plan and I'm delighted to vote for it."

Among those speaking out in favor of the project were a union representative who talked about the union jobs Clark Pacific would be creating and Woodland Vice Mayor Tom Stallard, who said, "I'm for as many jobs as we can get."

"With unemployment over 10 percent in our area," Stallard told the supervisors, "do the reasonable things that keep people employed."

One neighbor of the property, who had previously opposed Clark Pacific's move into the old Spreckels site in 2008, also spoke in favor of the company's expansion on Tuesday.

"I have the farm directly south of the whole factory," said Bob Sternes. "We were kind of negative when they first came here ... (but) over the years they've been here, they've been one of the best neighbors we could possibly hope for."

Rexroad called his comments "the best testimony I've ever heard."

Sternes' daughter, Rexroad said, "read us the riot act" when the board approved Clark Pacific's operations in 2008.

"And he stood up today and said they were great neighbors."

Speaking out against the expansion on Tuesday was another neighbor, Brenda Cedarblade, owner of the historic Nelson Ranch, who was the plaintiff in a lawsuit filed in 2008 against the board. That lawsuit contended that the county failed to properly consider impacts to biological resources, air quality, global warming, traffic and noise when it approved Clark Pacific's original operations. The court ruled in favor of the county in that case.

On Tuesday, Cedarblade urged supervisors to move the project to a more industrial area, saying the increased industrial activities would negatively impact Swainson's hawks that nest in the area. Cedarblade was the only person who testified against the expansion.

Under the approved environmental impact report, the company will have to mitigate for any Swainson's hawk habitat that is affected.

The same day supervisors approved Clark Pacific's expansion, the company welcomed representatives of the 49ers and the media to its Woodland plant to see the concrete sections being built for the 49ers' new stadium. The company is building prefabricated treads, risers, steps and stadium walls that will be trucked to Santa Clara beginning in October.

Clark told supervisors on Tuesday that 80 jobs were created when the company landed the stadium project.