

Supplemental Planning Review Update

Case 7-B-26-UR

Vulcan Dixie Lee Quarry Expansion and Graybeal Road Relocation

Submitted to: Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission and Planning Staff
Attention: Planning Commissioners and Mike Reynolds, Planning Staff
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Capacity: Individual resident and citizen representative, CARE, Citizens for Accountable Review and Engagement
Date: August 11, 2026

This memorandum supplements my July 15, 2026 planning review comments and is intended to update the public record before the August 13 hearing. It does not repeat the earlier technical memorandum. Instead, it identifies what materially changed during the 30-day postponement, recognizes the progress made through continued engagement, and identifies the principal Use on Review questions that remain for the Commission.

1. The Postponement Produced a Materially Different Record

At the July 9 hearing, the Planning Commission voted unanimously, 10-0, to postpone Case 7-B-26-UR for 30 days. CARE used that additional time to continue discussions with Vulcan, review revised materials, meet and communicate with Planning Staff, and refine the community's technical and planning concerns. Vulcan likewise continued its outreach and submitted an updated application and additional commitments. The August 13 Staff Report now recommends approval subject to 10 conditions, rather than the 8 conditions presented for the July 9 hearing.

CARE appreciates the additional work by Vulcan and Planning Staff. The changes demonstrate that the additional review period was productive and that continued public engagement improved the proposal. CARE remains actively engaged with Vulcan in an effort to identify practical protections in the event the application is approved.

That progress, however, does not eliminate the Commission's threshold responsibility under the Use on Review standards. Mitigation and compatibility are related, but they are not the same question. CARE continues to believe the record has not yet demonstrated that expansion of mining and mineral extraction east of Graybeal Road is compatible with the residential and Rural Living community that exists today.

2. Material Improvements Since the July Hearing

The revised Staff Report and updated applicant materials contain several meaningful changes that should be recognized in the record:

- Staff Condition 4 now prohibits clearing or grading of the expansion area before the Graybeal Road realignment Concept Plan is approved by the Planning Commission.
- Staff Condition 6 expressly addresses the relationship between the road realignment and the quarry layout, requires the relocated road to return to Planning as a Concept Plan if County Commission approves the road action, and states that minimum buffers, setbacks, berms, and landscape screening may not be reduced merely to accommodate the road alignment.

- Staff Condition 7 requires a preliminary berm and landscape screening plan for the area between the realigned road and adjacent properties and authorizes Planning to require adjustments during Concept Plan review to mitigate headlight impacts.
- Staff Condition 8 requires an updated Plan of Operations before the Graybeal Road Concept Plan application is submitted.
- Planning Staff now expressly states that maintaining Graybeal Road as a north-south connection is consistent with the recommendations of the Hardin Valley Mobility Study. That conclusion is also consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's emphasis on transportation connectivity, network redundancy, and alternative routes.
- Vulcan's updated materials include increased drilling/blasting setbacks, five additional vibration monitors, expanded pre-blast notifications, quarterly access to blasting data, low-sound backup alarms, a higher large screening berm, additional landscape screening, and evergreen planting along the large berm.

3. Important Questions Still Require Express Findings

The revised report is stronger than the July report, but several central findings remain unresolved or should be clarified before final action:

- **Compatibility.** Staff continues to state that "mining and extraction, while not generally compatible with surrounding residential development, already operates in this area." The relevant question is not simply whether quarrying already exists west of Graybeal Road. The Commission should expressly determine whether extending the use east of Graybeal Road, adjacent to existing and developing residences, is compatible with the character of the neighborhood where the expansion itself is proposed.

I also believe my own experience is relevant to the compatibility question. I purchased my home at 12605 Buttermilk Road in 2003, before Vulcan's 2009 expansion. When I purchased the property, I was aware that Dixie Lee Quarry existed and understood its location relative to my home. Neighbors told me that quarry activity could occasionally be heard or felt, but that the active quarry was sufficiently distant that it was not considered a significant concern.

I participated in the 2009 review process and worked with Vulcan and other residents on the compromise that allowed expansion while leaving the land east of Graybeal Road outside the approved quarry operation and subject to a future Use on Review. I have therefore personally experienced what occurs when active quarry operations move closer to an established residence. Since the 2009 expansion, I have experienced greater quarry-related noise and perceptible air overpressure and vibration at my home, including occasions when windows have visibly shaken and household pets have reacted by hiding. I have also found small stones on my roof, although I cannot independently establish their source. Vulcan has, in my experience, respected the commitments made through the 2009 process. That is important and should be acknowledged. But compliance with those commitments does not eliminate the practical reality that moving quarry activity closer changes what neighboring residents experience.

That experience is one reason I believe the Commission should distinguish between the existence of Dixie Lee Quarry and the proposed location of this expansion. **The question is not whether residents can live in the general vicinity of a long-standing quarry. We already do. The question is whether extending mining substantially closer to homes east of Graybeal Road is compatible with the residential community that exists there today.**

The fact that an industrial use has historically existed nearby does not establish that every geographic expansion of that use is compatible with every subsequently developed portion of the surrounding community. Distance, location, intervening land uses, buffers, and the actual effects experienced by neighboring properties are part of that determination. Nor does long-term ownership of adjacent property establish that future quarry use of that property was predetermined. The County's subsequent land-use decisions and adopted plans are also part of the record against which the present application must be evaluated.

- **Adopted-plan consistency and community character.** The proposed expansion area is not mapped as Mining and Heavy Industrial on Knox County's adopted Future Land Use Map. It is mapped primarily as RL (Rural Living), with portions also identified as HP (Hillside/Ridgetop Protection). The Comprehensive Plan describes Rural Living as primarily single-family residential within a rural setting, with private open space and forestry among its primary uses and agriculture, limited small-scale commercial, and civic uses as supporting uses. Mining and Heavy Industrial is identified as a separate place type, and the Plan states that those areas mostly represent existing conditions and are generally associated with existing industrial areas or interstate or arterial access. The Future Land Use Map therefore distinguishes the existing quarry area from the proposed expansion east of Graybeal Road.

Vulcan's long history in the area and its 1989 acquisition of the property are relevant historical facts, but they do not end the planning inquiry. Knox County subsequently adopted a Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map that made an equally real policy decision about how this particular land should fit into the County's future. The Future Land Use Map does not extend the Mining and Heavy Industrial place type across Graybeal Road into the proposed expansion area. Instead, that land is shown principally within the Rural Living planning context.

That distinction does not itself prohibit mining, and CARE is not asking the Commission to treat the Future Land Use Map as an absolute prohibition. However, the Plan expressly states that the Future Land Use Map identifies future place types and expresses Knox County's intent for where and how it could grow. The Plan therefore deserves consideration as part of the present compatibility determination even though it does not itself dictate the outcome of an individual Use on Review. It also directs the County to "ensure that development is sensitive to existing community character" and calls for appropriate transitions between different land uses.

Staff itself states that the proposal "may be inconsistent" with Comprehensive Plan Implementation Policy 2 because quarry activity will produce dust, noise, and vibrations on neighboring properties. CARE respectfully asks the Commission to explain how expansion of mining and extraction activity into land the County has designated Rural Living is reconciled with those adopted policies and with the required finding that the use is compatible with the character of the neighborhood where it is proposed.

- **The 100-foot "undisturbed" buffer.** The revised Staff Report states that most trees in the 100-foot buffer will remain, but also states that some trees will be removed to construct the approximately 10-foot small berm within that buffer. CARE requested the small landscaped berm to reduce road noise and visually screen the relocated road from nearby homes, but not at the expense of the required undisturbed buffer. The final plan should separately dimension the property line, the full 100-foot undisturbed buffer, the CARE-requested small roadside berm, the relocated road right-of-way, the large quarry-side berm, and the quarry disturbance limits so that each serves its intended purpose without reducing another required protection.

- **Differing residential drilling/blasting setbacks.** The revised materials provide 500 feet for lots fronting Hickory Meadows Drive and 450 feet for identified Buttermilk Road and Pittman Drive properties. CARE appreciates the increased separation, but respectfully asks for either consistent enhanced residential protection or a documented technical, engineering, or planning basis explaining why similarly affected residential properties warrant different setback distances.
- **Blasting frequency.** The updated language states that blasting is generally anticipated up to two times per month but permits as many as ten occurrences in a calendar month. If the lower frequency is relied upon as mitigation supporting compatibility, the Commission should understand that it is not the enforceable maximum and should determine what condition it actually intends to approve.
- **Relationship among conditions and commitments.** The Staff recommendation contains 10 Planning conditions, while Vulcan separately presents 10 modified or additional commitments. These are not necessarily the same ten items. Any applicant commitment relied upon by Staff or the Commission to make a required approval finding should be clearly incorporated into the controlling Plan of Operations or expressly made a condition of approval.

4. CARE's Request for the August 13 Hearing

CARE respectfully asks the Commission to evaluate the revised application on the complete record now before it and to make express findings under each applicable Use on Review criterion. CARE respectfully recommends that the proposed expansion east of Graybeal Road not be approved because, on the present record, we do not believe the required finding of compatibility with the community that exists today has been demonstrated.

If the Commission reaches a different conclusion, CARE respectfully asks that the decision identify the facts supporting each required finding and incorporate every material protection relied upon into clear, measurable, and enforceable conditions. The Commission should also make clear what quarry-related activity, if any, may occur after approval of a road Concept Plan but before County Commission finally resolves the road disposition and the relocated public road is engineered, constructed, dedicated, and accepted.

The postponement has already demonstrated the value of taking the time to engage. CARE appreciates Vulcan's continued participation and Planning Staff's additional work. This remains a long-term land-use decision that may affect the surrounding community for decades. The additional protections developed during the postponement are meaningful, but the final decision should still turn on the County's Use on Review standards, adopted plans, the community that exists today, and a complete public record.

Principal source documents: July 9, 2026 Planning Commission minutes, Item 53; July 2, 2026 Use on Review Staff Report; August 6, 2026 updated Use on Review Staff Report for the August 13 hearing; Vulcan August 3 and August 6, 2026 revised application materials and conditions; 2009 Use on Review record; Knox County Comprehensive Land Use and Transportation Plan and Future Land Use Map; and Hardin Valley Mobility Plan.