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## Boyne City gravel mining proposal gets cool reception from city commission

Steve Zucker (231) 439-9346 [szucker@petoskeynews.com](mailto:szucker@petoskeynews.com)

Jul 16, 2020



This aerial image and map provided in Tuesday's Boyne City City Commission packet shows the current Elmer's Crane and Dozer gravel pit in Wilson Township (marked as parcel B) and another parcel immediately to the north (marked parcel A) that it proposed to give to the City of Boyne City in exchange for a contract to mine sand and gravel from the site.

Courtesy image

**BOYNE CITY** — A Northern Michigan roadbuilding contractor's proposal to donate land to the city for future housing development after sand and gravel mining operations are complete received a cool response from the city commission Tuesday.

The proposal comes from Elmer's Crane and Dozer, which currently owns and operates a gravel pit operation just outside the city limits on the east side of Fall Park Road. The site was formerly owned by the C.H. Smith company. Elmer's also owns the parcel immediately to the north, which is just inside the city limits. The 14.9-acre northern parcel is undeveloped and partially tree-covered.

In a letter to the city commission, Elmer's representative Joseph Quant states the company's proposal to give the northern parcel to the city for future use for any municipal purpose it desire, but in particular as a possible site to locate "affordable housing." Quandt points to the fact that Boyne City officials — along with many other officials, groups and businesses in Northern Michigan — for years have been dealing with a lack of available "affordable" or "workforce" housing in the region.

In exchange, Elmer's seeks a contract with the city that would allow it to remove or "mine" sand and gravel from the property for several years.

In the letter Quandt notes the the northern property currently has a substantial hill on it, making it unusable for most forms of development. However, Elmer's proposed to removed the sand and gravel from the hill for its purposes, over the course of several years, ultimately leaving the site much flatter and more conducive to development.

In the letter Quandt notes that Elmer's would agree to contour both the current Wilson Township extraction site as well as the site within city limits, and plant vegetation on the land. Elemers also would maintain a 100-foot buffer of existing trees on the north and east sides of the northern property and would agree to not expand any mining operations on the Wilson Township site until mining was complete on the city site.

"My client believes this is an outstanding opportunity for the city to execute some long-term planning for affordable housing and also allows Elmer's to access sand and gravel next to an existing excavation operation, so that construction materials for road projects and other improvements in Northwest Michigan can be obtained," the letter states.

The property is currently zoned "rural estate district," which would not allow for mining operations.

At Tuesday's meeting, city planning director Scott McPherson noted that Elmer's has submitted no formal application or proposal to the city. Elmer's representatives noted the purpose of their presentation was to simply get some initial feedback from the city commission to see if there was any interest in the proposal before taking further action.

Speaking during the public comment period, three residents who live either immediately adjacent to, or across the road from the northern parcel voiced opposition to the proposal, citing many concerns such as increased noise, truck traffic, concerns about various forms of potential environmental impacts and the overall impact the operation would have on the appearance of the area.

McPherson noted that the parcel would typically need to be rezoned — which involves several steps and approvals — to allow for mining to take place on the site, but it appeared that Elmer's was at least initially proposing a contractual agreement with the city.

All of the commission members voiced at least some level of concern about the proposals, and some were outright opposed.

I can't visualize how this project will benefit Boyne City," commissioner Ron Grunch said. "It's not the right time and it's not the right place."

Commissioner Dean Solomon, who has an extensive background in municipal planning, noted that mining doesn't happen very often in cities, but the activity does "have a special spot in the planning enabling act." He noted that a company that is highly motivated in its efforts could be successful in winning approval.

However, near the end of the meeting, after sensing the tenor of the commission's comments, an Elmer's representative said if the proposal was not something that the city and/or community is interested in, the company would not pursue it.