

# Commission rejects lime rock mine in Marion County

**Proponents and opponents of the proposed quarry held a fierce debate for four hours Tuesday.**

By [Bill Thompson](#)  
Staff writer

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Opponents of a lime rock quarry proposed for northwest Marion County turned out in force Tuesday night to deliver a simple message to the County Commission: They weren't coming to the mine; the mine was coming to them - and they were saying no thanks.

The commission agreed - unanimously.

The commission had previously rejected the mine. A hearing officer recommended a reversal. But at 10 p.m. Tuesday, four hours after the meeting started, the board voted unanimously to stand by its earlier ruling.

At issue was a proposed quarry for 167 acres on a former horse farm owned by CB Three LLC at Northwest Gainesville Road and 100th Street, in the community of Martin. It would have been the first new lime rock mine approved in Marion County in 10 years.

The commission rejected a permit for the mine last May, even though county planners had backed approval with certain conditions. Commissioners ruled that the mine did not fit with the character of the community. They sided with neighbors who had expressed concerns about their peace and quiet, their drinking water, their roads and their livestock.

On Tuesday, residents returned with many of those same concerns, with more than 30 of them urging the board to stand by its initial vote. They also asked the board to not lose sight of the people who must live next to the site, and at one point they even counted a lime rock miner as an ally.

"Believe me, we don't need polka dot mines all over this community. They're not nice to live next to," said Ocala businessman Whit Palmer, whose company operated a 700-plus acre mine near Reddick.

On the other hand, one voice recommended the board think of the economy.

"Marion County needs jobs. This could provide a huge amount of income for Marion County residents," said one mining proponent.

Tuesday's meeting came about after an appeal process that included two hearings before a special magistrate - in this case, Ocala lawyer Jean Bice, who was selected by the county and the mining companies.

She recommended in March that the county reverse its position.

Steve Gray, the lawyer for CB Three, offered a revised mining plan to try to alleviate concerns by the commission and the project's opponents.

He proposed that the land be mined in six phases, beginning in the center of the property.

The last phase, which would be launched 17 years into the permit, would concentrate the mining on the property's eastern edge, which is closest to most of the neighboring homes.

Gray also said there would be a larger buffer around the property boundary than was initially proposed, and that would be installed before any mining took place.

He added that greater efforts would be made to control dust.

The presentation also included a blasting expert who told the board that the effect on homes from explosions would be "nil" and that nearby wells would be safe.

Gray added that the "best evidence" there is a "degree of compatibility" between horses and limerock mining was the 40-year history of "co-existence in close proximity" of horses and mines with blasting activity.

David Theriaque, a Tallahassee lawyer representing four neighbors fighting the mine, said the issue was not damage to structures but to people's emotional well being. He called it "inconceivable" that the neighbors' quality of life people would not be affected by blasting, not to mention truck traffic, dust clouds, lighting, heavy equipment noise and so on.

"They're not making a choice to live next to the mine," he said. If they were, they would forfeit their right to complain.

"You adopted a policy that said mines and people don't mix, that mines and horses don't mix, and the flip side of that is that you don't put a new mine next to people. You don't put houses and people and horses and mines together," Theriaque said.

*Bill Thompson can be reached at 867-4117.*