

April 1, 2024

To : Cathy Johnson, Chair , Alna Planning Board and the Planning Board Members

From: Amy and Mike Preston, 36 Bailey Road, Alna

RE: Thoughts on Crooker Application to renew blasting permit for 2024-2025 year

We urge you to minimize the blasting permit for 2024 (while the proposed ordinance has yet to be passed.) Limit the blasting permitted to not increase from last year-size of blasts, number of blasts(no more than 20 blasts/year), and yards of production per year (a maximum 55,000CY or prior production limits form 2022 or 2023.)

We feel continued blast and further expansion (changing the use of the land which will never be returned to its original beautiful landscape, tree growth, barrens, and wildlife habitat) will only leave a larger scar in Alna, reduction in real estate values, unending wear and tear on our infrastructure, and the potential for irreversible harm to our water, land, and air quality.

In 2003 we purchased our blueberry farm in Alna. A mile away there was a small gravel pit up at the corner in Whitefield; owned by a family business Harry C Crooker & Sons. There were acres of blueberry barrens along Bailey Road and up 218 to the Thayer Road. Our property has 17 acres of farmed wild blueberries and we've planted 170 fruit trees over the years. Whitefield had an ordinance with set standards for gravel pit/mining operations and average life span of this type of operation said to be 15-20 years (Harry C Crooker & Sons' words).

In 2014, the Whitefield pit was sold to a group of investors and Crooker Construction LLC started running operations while Crooker Realty Equipment LLC pays the taxes. The blueberry land along 218 offered more sand and gravel but this resource has been exhausted and Whitefield's ordinance limited the operation to sand and gravel extraction. The gravel pit operations expanded into Alna and in 2018 Crooker Construction LLC presented its first application for blasting to the town to "quarry an outcrop of ledge in the gravel pit"... "the project is anticipated to take 1-3 years". In early 2019 Crooker Construction LLC applied for and received Alna Quarry intent to comply Performance Standards for Excavations for Quarries with the DEP. **Today Crooker Construction LLC is applying for another annual permit application to blast in Alna. And it is still operating under the Topsham ordinance for blasting and mining operations, not our own.** Topsham has over 9,000 people, more than 3700 households, town water and sewage. A far cry from our rural town of fewer than 800 persons and 280 households which all live off the land with wells and septic systems.

The quarry area has expanded and acres of tree growth have been clear cut, in order to blast and mine out ledge beyond the original natural gravel pit operations. The rock being removed is also processed on the premises (before it is loaded and removed)– very loud constant machine operation Monday thru Friday, in addition to noise from gravel truck traffic, reverse beeping from the trucks, and the loading of the trucks- it all adds up to a lot of noise during the week.

The actual blasting is documented with proper notification and defined working area. But this process creates uneasiness from our house shaking, noise, traffic, wear and tear on roads; in addition to risks of water table disruption, toxic run off into the Sheepscot, damage to quality and source of home water (already noticeable debris build up in faucet filters), and potential damage to historic buildings shifting

over time. Long term effects or an accident could pollute our water sources, air, land, The Sheepscot, and other aspects of our town's beautiful local environment with limited resources.

We would like to see the blasting cease, but until then we ask that the blasting minimized or at least restricted to a prior year's limits of blasting material and CY excavated. With restrictions placed on size of blasts, number of blasts (no more than 20 blasts/year), and yards of production per year (a maximum 55000 CY or prior production amounts in 2022 or 2023.)

Sincerely,

Amy & Mike Preston, Windy Ledge Farm

(Paying more in taxes to Alna than Crooker Realty Equipment LLC, corporation/landowner since 2014)