

Residents ask for board to step in

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Some Buckingham County residents want their board of supervisors to take action, rather than waiting on the state to make a decision about gold mining.

During the supervisors' meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 11, 18 residents signed up to list their ongoing concerns on the future of Buckingham and the safety of its citizens. They also promised not to go away.

"This is only the third month for Gracie and me, so we know the last two had around 14 people speaking out against the gold mining in this county," said Santoshi Young, with her daughter Gracie strapped to her chest. "If we have the same amount again tonight, that is roughly 45 minutes of time spent listening to us. I feel like it's safe to say that there has been much more time spent in the months previous to that. I'm sure that you can guess that we are going to keep coming back and speaking out until something is done about it."

Young, along with numerous others, asked supervisors to pass a proposed ordinance. The "toxic trespass" ordinance would require a metallic mining company to "Prove It First" before getting approval. That means the company would have to provide proof of at least one metallic mine that did not cause harm.

Residents in attendance agreed that having that ordinance in place before the General Assembly meeting in January can send a strong message.

Other speakers, including Mindy Zlotnick and Jeff Creed, suggested having Joe Lerch, director of local government policy with the Virginia Association of Counties, come to the November board of supervisors meeting and give a presentation on what Buckingham County can do to ban metal mining.

"What I want you all to do is think of the people first. That's the biggest issue. Care about the people and think about what the consequences are for anything for the people," said Marie Flowers.

A GOLD PROSPECTING OPERATION

Currently, Canadian company Aston Bay is interested in Buckingham County. To be clear, Aston Bay isn't a mining company. It's a prospecting company. That means they search for gold, silver or other minerals, identify and purchase a location, then sell that information (and property) to the highest bidder. They can do this because under Virginia law, prospecting doesn't require a state permit if you're searching for anything other than uranium.

In statements given in March 2019 and July 2020, company officials declared their drilling confirmed a "a high-grade, at-surface gold vein system at Buckingham, as well as an adjacent wider zone of lower-grade disseminated gold mineralization." In other words, they found enough to keep going. At the beginning of 2020, the company secured the right to prospect on 4,953 acres of land in Buckingham County.

In an interview last month with The Herald, Aston Bay CEO Thomas Ullrich said the gold vein they've found is almost vertical, approximately one to two meters wide, 200 meters in length and extends into the subsurface to about 100 meters deep.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

Buckingham County supervisors didn't make any decision on the proposed ordinances Oct. 11. They did, however, agree to let Joe Lerch speak at next month's meeting.

