

Tuesday's gold mining meeting is canceled. What happens next?

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DILLWYN – The clock is ticking for Virginia's gold mining workgroup. A meeting scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 18 was canceled, leaving just one more before the group needs to finalize its report and send it to the General Assembly. The concern for some Buckingham County residents, and members of the group itself, is this won't leave enough time for everything they still have to go through.

"I'm unhappy and in opposition to the cancellation of the next to last meeting," said workgroup member Kenda Hanuman. "This negatively impacts public participation and the committee's ability to address the 131 public comments so far."

Hanuman also pointed out that the group still needs to finalize their draft report and questions if all that can happen within the timeframe of one meeting (9 am. to 3 p.m.) on Thursday, Nov. 3. Because of how the process has gone so far, Hanuman isn't sure she'll be back for that final meeting.

"I'm considering resigning from this committee after the way this has been handled," Hanuman said.

The Oct. 18 meeting was canceled due to some issues with Virginia Department of Energy staff, workgroup officials said. Scheduling conflicts prevented adding another one to the calendar.

"We (had) to cancel Tuesday's meeting because of some staff dealing with sickness," said workgroup member and Buckingham County board of supervisors chairman Jordan Miles. He added the sickness was bad enough the staff members couldn't work remotely.

He acknowledged that trying to fit everything into one meeting would be challenging. As a result, the Nov. 3 meeting could be extended past the noon deadline.

"It's gonna be a long meeting because we have to make up for lost time," Miles said. "We're gonna be under the gun, but I am confident we'll get the work done in time."

Why the rush?

The reason this has to be completed by early November is due to the multiple parts involved. Created by the General Assembly in 2021, the gold mining group consists of two parts. One of those is a technical committee, evaluating the scientific aspects of gold mining.

That group is led by officials from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM). The other group, which is the one Hanuman and Miles are a part of, includes representatives from Virginia Energy, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Department of Health, the Council on Environmental Justice, the Monacan Indian Nation and local citizen groups.

The idea is to evaluate the impacts of gold mining on the area. The work group looks into the effects gold mining will have on the environment, including public health in general and the air and water quality.

Are existing regulations strong enough to protect air and water quality? Are there areas where mining needs to be banned? To answer those and other questions, experts in mining, hydrology, toxicology and other fields are being brought in. Also representatives of potentially affected communities in localities with significant deposits of gold are also included.

These reports have to be finalized over the next month. The same law that created the workgroup requires that it “report its findings to the General Assembly by Dec. 1, 2022.”

What the draft gold mining report says

Part of that work’s already been finished. The group just needs to vote and sign off on it. In their draft report, which *The Herald* obtained a copy of, the group warns an open-pit gold mine would put the health of Buckingham County residents at risk.

The report is very clear on two points. First, it warns of a risk to local residents. Second, because of how close the James River is to the prospecting site, it raises concerns about health impacts outside of the county.

“Any open-pit gold mining project would pose a serious threat to the Buckingham community and other localities in the state,” the draft report says. “Science has proven time and time again that an open-pit mine pollutes nearby rivers, even when there is no accidental release of toxic mine waste.”

The report goes on to point out the James River is only two miles away from a portion of the land where Aston Bay Holdings is prospecting. That river delivers water to nearly 2.7 million Virginians. All it would take is one accident during actual mining, the report says, and if the protection systems fail, that would release poisonous chemicals and by-products into the river, possibly damaging the drinking water for millions of Virginians.

Even if there’s no accidents, the draft report says, any mining runs the risk of putting chemicals in the ground.

“With modern technology, gold mining involves drilling deep into the Earth, producing massive amounts of waste rock, tainted with dozens of compounds that, when exposed to the elements, can easily leach into the water table, streams and rivers,” the report says. “The waste may contain as many as three dozen toxins, including mercury, arsenic, cyanide, lead, acids and petroleum by-products.”

We go into more detail about the [draft report here \(https://www.farmvilleherald.com/2022/10/draft-report-warns-of-imminent-threat-to-buckingham/\)](https://www.farmvilleherald.com/2022/10/draft-report-warns-of-imminent-threat-to-buckingham/).

What happens next?

As we mentioned, the next scheduled meeting for the workgroup will be on Thursday, Nov. 3 from 9 a.m. to noon. This will be held at the Buckingham Community Center, located at 16268 N. James Madison Highway in Dillwyn.

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