

STATE: 'It's just not fair', local officials say

FROM PAGE ONE

followed," said Jordan Miles. "It's just not fair." Miles, the chairman of the Buckingham County Board of Supervisors, is part of a state study group designed to recommend changes to how Virginia regulates gold mining. He spoke Friday, Aug. 26, as part of a public hearing at the Buckingham County Community Center.

AN ORDER VERSUS A REQUEST

Another problem for Miles, other members of the study group and Buckingham residents in general is how the current laws and proposed ordinances are written. As of now, state law gives the Virginia Department of Energy the right to oversee most of what takes place on a mine site. But what it (and the proposed recommendation) also offers is a bit of a gray area.

For example, let's say a company applied to mine gold. During the permitting process, there are specific circumstances when a groundwater withdrawal permit is needed. A company would also have to meet certain requirements before having to apply for a Virginia pollution abatement permit.

"Until we have a proposed project in front of us, we don't know if the regulations are applicable or not," James Golden told the group. Golden serves as regional director for the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

But for most people in attendance, Golden's statement was the problem. They wanted the same regulations to be enforced for everyone. As another example, the document said "may be required" instead of "will be required" for many of the parts put in place for the permitting process. The concern is that companies could use the wording as a loophole, doing just enough to avoid having to enforce stricter regulations.

WHY NO FINES?

Also, there are no fines involved, even if companies do violate parts of the permit. Members of the study group equated that to pulling someone over for speeding, but not giving them a ticket.

"Well heck, why should I not speed?" asked George Neall. The retired Buckingham County mining engineer questioned how likely it is that companies would obey the rules if there are no consequences for breaking them.

Michael Skiffington from the Virginia Department of Energy said in a case like that, his department would act as a traffic cop.

"(We) can reach in, take the keys and close the car down if we need to," Skiffington said.

Several residents then asked if the department had ever actually done that, as in closing a mine down. Skiffington said he didn't know.

People in the room also received an answer to the question of why the state doesn't step in more, to help local governments regulate gold mining.

Study group member Suzanne Keller asked if Skiffington's group actually has the resources to regulate gold mining, to monitor or "close the car down," if need be.

"We very well may need additional resources," Skiffington admitted.

HOW DID WE GET TO THIS POINT?

This issue stems from a situation that started more than two years ago. In April 2019, the Canadian prospecting company Aston Bay Holdings announced they were beginning to search for gold 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. As of Friday, Aug. 26, the company has purchased 4,953 acres of land in Buckingham County to prospect on.

But as of now, prospecting is all that's happening. Skiffington confirmed there have been no applications to the Virginia Department of Energy to mine for gold. And he said his department isn't aware of any activity or plans to do so in the near future.

GETTING AHEAD OF AN ISSUE

Members of the General Assembly wanted to get ahead of the issue, however. That's why Del. Elizabeth Guzman (D-Prince William) filed HB 2213 in 2021. The bill, which passed in that year's regular session, put a few requirements in place.

First, a work group had to be set up to study the issue. 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 to be included. That's what was happening on Friday.

After hearing from experts and holding public hearings, the group will put together a report by December. That will be discussed in the next General Assembly session, which begins in January 2023.

A GOLD MINE OWNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Meanwhile, another member of the study group says they have plenty of time to get this right. In fact, he doesn't expect to see any type of gold mining application anytime soon. Paul Busch owns Big Dawg Resources, running a gold mine in Goochland County.

The Buckingham County resident works to reopen old mines, remove the metals left behind and clean up the sites. That includes removing mercury contamination on the sites, reclaiming the shafts and removing underground timbers that have been leaching crossite into the groundwater. As a mine owner and mining engineer, Busch says he just doesn't see enough to be concerned about an industrial mine.

"This state has been drilled since the 70s," Busch said. "No one has and no one will probably find a deposit large enough in this county to start an industrial scale gold mine."

Aston Bay officials couldn't be reached for comment by presstime, to say if they agreed with Busch's comments.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

There will be two more public hearings between now and November, both of which are currently unscheduled. The Virginia Department of Energy caught significant criticism for scheduling Friday's meeting at 9 a.m., when so many people are at work. Even most of the study group had to call into the meeting, as they were either at work themselves or otherwise unable to make it in person.

Buckingham residents will also have a chance to speak about this at the next county meeting. The Board of Supervisors meets on Monday, Sept. 12. Sign up for public comment begins at 5:30 p.m.

Finally, if you'd prefer to give your thoughts on the issue from your laptop, you can email comments to goldstudy@energy.virginia.gov.

REPAIRS: No major leaks, Prince Edward staff says

FROM PAGE ONE

no major leaks to worry about.

"There are no major leaks... but we are watching it very carefully," said Johnson.

Over the years, many leaks have sprung in the roof of the elementary school. Unfortunately, no matter how many times the roof was patched, the leaks kept coming back and traveling to new locations. As winter snow and rain storms

throughout the year pounded on the roof, parents raised many concerns about the condition of the school.

At the November 2021 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board voted on a plan to replace the roof and do renovations to the classrooms to modernize them. This came after the Board voted in the September 2021 meeting to include the renovations or replacement to the Capital Improvement Plan for 2022-2024.

Labor Day Savings

Canon Image Runner Advance C535i Laser Multifunction Color Printer

Only \$3,999.

- PRINT • COPY • SCAN • FAX
- 35 ppm print speed
- 1200 dpi resolution
- Various finishing options
- Mobile printing
- 10.1" intuitive touchscreen

"We Service What We Sell"

KEY OFFICE SUPPLY, INC.

434-392-5485
1-800-669-4586

121 NORTH MAIN ST., FARMVILLE, VIRGINIA
www.keyofficesupply.com

www.FarmvilleHerald.com

FARMVILLE AREA BUSINESS DIRECTORY 2022-2023



- Full Page In Color
 - Written Profile
 - Free Full Color Photo
- Full Page - only \$259.00**
- Space is Limited - So Act Fast!!
Distributed in October 2022
Deadline is Friday, September 30, 2022

Contact Jackie or Rachel
For more information 434-392-4151

The Farmville Herald
114 North Street, Farmville, VA • www.farmvilleherald.com

Price Supply Co., Inc.

WHOLESALE • PLUMBING
ELECTRICAL • HEATING • COOLING

Carrier **AKER**
TUBS & WHIRLPOOLS

DELTA
FAUCET COMPANY

Local Complete Service for Your Plumbing, Fixtures and Supplies

105 Plank Road, Farmville, VA 23901
Phone 392-8555
Hours: Monday - Friday
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Saturday 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM