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PRESS RELEASE

**County Planning Commission recommends NO to Foothills Gold Mine
Community Opponents Celebrate**

Nevada City, CA – The Nevada County Planning Commission, before an overflow crowd, unanimously denied recommending approval to the Board of Supervisors of the reopening of the Idaho-Maryland Mine and opted not to recommend certification of the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR). The final decision will be made by the Board of Supervisors later this Summer.

The decision came after two days of hearings, with over 900 people in attendance. Over 350 people signed up to speak to the Commission. The crowd flowed into the outdoor area surrounding the County Administration Center, where the hearing could be followed by outdoor speakers provided by the county. Food trucks provided lunch, and music lightened the tension. Those attending were overwhelmingly opposed to the mine, many holding what has become a common sight around the county – bright yellow “No Mine” signs.

The Commission’s decision was met with applause and cheers.

Ralph Silberstein, president of Community Environmental Advocates Foundation, the group that coordinated the MineWatch campaign, was relieved: “On behalf of CEA Foundation, I want to thank the Planning Commission for their diligence and patience in addressing this complex and controversial project. But even more, I want to thank the MineWatch team, our coalition partners, thousands of our supporters, and the community at large for their dedication and efforts leading up to the hearings. We can make a difference! We will move on to the Board of Supervisors vote, hoping that they will take the advice of their Commission and the overwhelming majority of their constituents.”

The MineWatch campaign includes [26 state, regional, and local organizations](#) that are concerned about the environmental and economic impacts of the mine reopening. Speakers at the Planning Commission

meeting summarized the large-scale public participation during the three years of project review by presenting to the Commission petitions with 5,500 plus signatures, over 1000 letters and postcards, a notebook filled with guest editorials, and unveiled a photo collage of hundreds of No Mine activists.

During public comments, opponents outlined concerns over the environmental impacts of the mine which would operate for up to 80 years, producing 1,000 tons of mine waste rock per day with unknown asbestos content, pumping thousands of gallons daily from limited groundwater supplies affecting over 300 residential wells, generating 100 truck trips a day on local roads, and releasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions the equivalent of that from the energy use of 5,575 homes.

Christy Hubbard with the Wells Coalition responded to the vote: “Wells owners are deeply grateful to the Commissioners, including our District 3 Commissioner Terry McAteer, for listening so closely to our concerns. We also want to thank NID for setting the record straight on the enormous complexities involved in providing assurances to so many homes. Without water, our properties are worthless. Well owners were weeping tears of joy after the decision.”

During the hearing, residents spanning ages and livelihoods made it clear that Grass Valley is no longer a gold-mining town.

High school student Josh Thiem, a Ghidotti High School Student and leader in the Sunrise Movement, led a group of students who (with permission) left school to participate in the hearing. In his comments before the Commission, he said: “Think not for you, but for me and all the generations after me. It matters not for the people in this room but for all the people after us.” After the hearing, he concluded: “I strongly believe that the County will vote against the FEIR. It sends a message to us that we can take action and be heard.”

Former County Supervisor Peter Van Zant and a leader of the environmental community’s participation in the 1995 General Plan Update, commented on General Plan issues: “I’m grateful that the Planning Staff recommended denial of the mine based on its being inconsistent with the General Plan’s requirement that projects maintain the County’s ‘rural character and quality of life.’”

Don Rivenes, speaking for CEA Foundation/MineWatch, and a leader in Nevada County Action Now, noted: “.... The mine’s 9,000 tons/year of emissions should be considered significant and unmitigated. The EIR should have established a net zero threshold for GHG emissions from the proposed project.”

Lauren Tackbarry represented the Sierra Club, Sierra Nevada Group: “...Simply put, this community deserves better, and we refuse to go back in time to reopen a mine that would cause irreversible damage to the foothills.”

Deni Silberstein echoed a concern heard throughout the hearing – the hazardous waste potential of mine waste (tailings) which would be produced by the mine: “... the mine waste has not been classified as Group C by the Water Board. Yet, only Group C mine waste is safe enough to be sold – or stored –

without restrictions. So it is not even known whether the waste can be dumped at the Brunswick and Centennial sites, let alone whether or not it can be sold off-site.”

Many area realtors joined in urging the Commissioners to consider impacts on property values and the local economy. The Nevada County Association of Realtors (NCAR) presented results from a recent survey of realtors. The poll included 162 survey answers, with 87% of survey participants believing that property values will be negatively impacted. In addition, realtors cautioned about the devaluation of residents’ properties and the impact on property taxes, estimating that the loss to the County could be significant. Residents echoed their sentiments, explaining that they were already having trouble selling their homes. One realtor presented a letter signed by 150 businesses and 100 realtors opposed to the project.

Proponents of the mine touted job creation. Opponents disagreed. George Olive, Board President of the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), reminded us to prioritize projects that are constructive, progressive, and future-oriented. Restoration projects that are forward-looking “make life better,” provide sustainable jobs and bring in millions of dollars to our region.

“We hope to work together with the union members who testified to continue to add jobs in the growing restoration economy. SYRCL’s restoration work last year supported nearly 70 skilled equipment operator positions,” said Aaron Zettler-Mann, Interim Executive Director and Science Director.

“CEA Foundation supports good jobs in the county and sympathizes with those hoping for mine jobs, but not jobs at the expense of our health and safety, and having adverse effects upon other thriving elements of the economy that are more sustainable,” added Ralph Silberstein.

The Final EIR

Throughout the two days, opponents continuously brought up the concern that even if the mine were denied, a county-certified EIR could be relied on by any future mine proposal on this site.

Jillian Blanchard, a CEA Foundation supporter and a land use attorney, advised the Commission during the hearing: “The next applicant will claim that the County is bound by this FEIR’s analysis and mitigation. And you, Commissioners, will have your hands tied by a legally deficient document.”

The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) drew attention to a number of failings in the final EIR. “Inadequate sampling, poor computer modeling, and baseless assumptions about aggregate sales and the failure to address the related water quality concerns mean the final EIR is inadequate. There is no market for their mine waste, the restoration economy is here and growing, and the environmental impacts of the project will be significant,” said Zettler-Mann. “SYRCL applauds the County Planning Commission for its final recommendation and looks forward to continuing to build a more resilient future for Nevada County residents absent destructive gold mines.”

Gary Pierazzi, one of the last speakers at the end of day 2, reminded the Commission: “With the three proposals to reopen this mine over the last 30 years, I and many in the community have spent 20 of those years fighting to protect our wells from the mine. We don’t want to have to re-live this constant burden. This FEIR does not protect us, and certifying it would have come back to bite us.”

Commissioners unanimous

Commissioner Terence McAteer questioned consultants on many inadequacies of the report. Among them was the erasure of an earthquake fault line that ran directly under the mine workings. McAteer’s concern was confirmed when an actual earthquake occurred just 20 minutes later. Alarms sounded, the floor shook, and the Commission chose to continue with the hearing.

In the end, the Commissioners were unanimous, voting 5-0 to recommend to the Nevada County Supervisors to not certify the FEIR and deny the mine project.

In his closing statement before the vote, Commissioner McAteer told the packed house about the work of Judge Lorenzo Sawyer. Sawyer, a former miner who worked in Nevada City, became a lawyer and then eventually a judge. Fueled by his experience of mining’s destructive impacts, he wrote the 1884 Sawyer decision that states the environmental effects of mining “must not be foisted on neighboring property or community.” McAteer stated: “Today we are faced with a similar situation which has the potential to infect our air with asbestos and exhaust fumes, impact the wells of our neighbors, discharge harmful elements into the water, destroy many acres of wetlands, add significant amounts of greenhouse gases into our environment, and return to our legacy of mining.”

The community has a rich history of mining with a “hotel called the Miner’s Inn, the high school’s mascot is the Miners, and...there’s a miner in the County logo,” stated Commissioner Mike Mastrodonato. “But things change.”

The Nevada County Supervisors will consider the Commission’s recommendation no earlier than August 2023. More on the next steps can be found on the County’s website and this Nevada County News Flash.

The 2-day hearing is available on the Nevada County YouTube site. [Nevada County Planning Commission Special Meeting May 10, 2023 – YouTube](#) and [Nevada County Planning Commission Special Meeting May 11, 2023 – YouTube](#)

For more information about the potential re-opening of the Idaho-Maryland Mine visit: www.MineWatchNC.org

The mission of the Community Environmental Advocates Foundation (CEA Foundation) is to perform research, education, and advocacy to promote public policy and actions resulting in responsible land

*use and environmental protection in Nevada County and the Sierra Nevada region. www.cea-nc.org/.
MineWatch campaign, a grassroots effort to oppose the mine. www.MineWatchNC.org*