

Marathon County: Mining resolution stalled for fears of repercussions from lawmakers

Posted on Wednesday, Oct 5, 2022

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The Environmental Resources Committee (ERC) of the Marathon County Board held a meeting Tuesday, October 4th at which a resolution to restore local community control over whether or not to permit metallic sulfide mining. The ERC defied the will of numerous Wisconsin Indian Tribes and Wisconsin Environmental Groups and over 500 community members who signed petitions supporting the resolution.

The ERC committee raised the concern multiple times that if Republican Politicians in the State Legislature found out that they passed a resolution that went contrary to the wishes of the Legislature that those Politicians would get “ticked off” and not send State money and other favors their way. Other repercussions the ERC was concerned about was the fear that if the resolution passed that the Politicians could restrict more of the slight authority that the County currently has. Which Republican Politicians the ERC was concerned about being pressured by was unclear but they certainly had some names in mind when they made their statements. Perhaps media sources can ask the ERC for the names of the Politicians they feared.

As in all meetings held by the ERC, members of the public were prohibited from any chance to engage in conversation with the Committee or any other County Board Supervisors attending. Numerous requests by the public to have a conversation with the Committee have gone unanswered. This imbalance seems oddly unfair after the ERC granted GreenLight Metals (the company planning to develop a 450-foot deep open-pit gold mine) over two hours to pitch their plans at an August meeting. The public was forbidden to ask GreenLight any questions during that meeting also.

During the meeting, ERC Chairman Langenhahn was looking up information on his phone to support his stance against the resolution, and he read from an outdated reference from 20-years ago that claimed any sulfide mine would need to go through an extensive process that involved obtaining ten separate permits. This misled the rest of the Committee and attendees as the requirements Langenhahn highlighted were eliminated by the law the resolution requested be repealed and actually reinstate those requirements. The focus of the resolution was to call upon the State Legislature and Governor to repeal 2017 ACT 134 that stripped away the permit requirements Langenhahn was referencing. The obsolete document Langenhahn was reading from is

here: https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/Mines/HowTheDNRRegulatesMetallicMining_2003-05.pdf

The Environmental Resources Committee's mission statement includes their duty to *"protect and enhance the quantity and quality of potable groundwater and potable surface water supplies"*. During the meeting Langenhahn said he did not know what the term "cone of depression" referenced in the resolution meant and asked if any of the ERC members or other Supervisors in the room knew what it meant. Not a single County Board Supervisor could provide an answer. When a member of the community audience raised a hand to offer an answer Langenhahn refused to acknowledge them for an answer. Aside from the continued disrespect shown toward community members, it was odd that Langenhahn took the initiative to look up references about permitting on his phone but not the definition of a term that a Committee tasked with *'protecting water quality'* should know.

A cone of depression results when high capacity pumps run continuously to drain water out of an excavation like a 450-foot deep open-pit mine. The intense pumping away of water results in the water aquifer being pulled down into a depressed cone shape. This drains water away from nearby wells used by residents and for agriculture. This was one of the points of concern in the resolution.

The intent of the resolution to restore local decision making to local units of government and citizens about potentially water damaging activities like sulfide mining was lost. Instead the brief conversation the ERC had mostly turned to everyone's opinion on how they felt about mining and the fear of repercussions from Republican Lawmakers. Many Supervisors and ERC members made unsupported statements about the safety of sulfide mining and touted the benefits a mining project would bring. County Board Chairman Kurt Gibbs ironically raised the concern that since ACT 134 stripped away the County's ability to make

decisions for itself and forced them to implement a County Ordinance that included allowing sulfide mining and that passing this resolution would pose an internal County conflict. The point of the resolution was to restore the County's ability to make its own decisions and not be held hostage to the will of State Lawmakers - as was evidenced throughout the meeting.

The Resolution portion of the meeting can be viewed at (fast forward to 1:28 of the 2:05 meeting): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CA4gF0Pu_QQ

The Resolution can be viewed on page 52 here:

https://www.co.marathon.wi.us/Portals/0/Departments/MCB/Archives/Standing%20Committees/Environmental%20Resources%20Committee/2022/ENVR_20221004_Packet.pdf