

LOCAL NEWS

Fremont County Commissioners OK Zephyr permit modification



Will Felderhof, the executive chairman and director for Zephyr Minerals, speaks during Tuesday's Fremont County Board of Commissioners meeting. Carie Canterbury/Daily Record 2-11-20

By **CARIE CANTERBURY** | canterburyc@canoncitydailyrecord.com | Canon City Daily Record

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Zephyr Gold USA Ltd.'s request for a major modification to a conditional use permit granted for exploration unanimously was approved Tuesday by the Fremont County Board of Commissioners.

The expansion will add acreage to the west of the current boundary of the CUP. The application was approved by a majority vote by the Fremont County Planning Commission in January and was tabled by the county commissioners Feb. 11 to allow the board more time to compile findings.



“First and foremost, we have to understand this application is for exploring and not mining,” Board Chair Debbie Bell said. “Also, there is no obligation, promise, commitment or duty for the county to approve any mining operations in the future regardless of what the applicant learns from their current exploration activities.”

During the February meeting, Will Felderhof, the executive chairman and director for Zephyr Minerals, said his company has demonstrated during the last eight years that they’ve been doing everything correctly, that they are committed to doing things properly and they are committed to following all of the rules and regulations.

“We’ve demonstrated that we have done so, and we will continue to do so,” he said.

The board heard from 13 people during a public hearing Feb. 11. Of those, 10 were against the expansion, two were neutral and one was in favor.

Gary Peterson, the chairman of the Royal Gorge Preservation Project, said the CUP expansion request “is an operational part of the process that leads to the development of a full-blown mining operation that has the potential to propel our community into just another dirty little mining community ...”

Others speaking in opposition shared concerns about water, noise, access and imposition the expansion could have on wildlife.

Findings presented Tuesday state that the Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Bureau of Land Management have expertise regarding the potential disruption of wildlife in the area and the lighting proposed for the drill site is minimal and does not exceed the amount that is necessary for the operations.

The board prohibits the applicant from conducting drill operations without a source of water to use in the process, which may require the use of a helicopter or other means without the use of roadways or other vehicular traffic.

“The acreage included in the exploration expansion request increases the total exploration area from 603 acres to 3,172 acres,” Bell said. “However, the Board also notes that the total affected area or surface disturbance in the original 603 acres was a mere 7.8 acres, and the proposed disturbance in the expansion area is three acres, which is a very minimal impact considering the entire size of the permitted area.”

Commissioner Tim Payne said he has been in constant contact with the Colorado State Land Board Trust regarding the Section 16 area of land, which was a concern to some residents.

“These land use issues are the hardest part of this job,” Commissioner Dwayne McFall said. “We have to take into consideration – there are people who are for issues and people who are against issues. We rely on experts – in this case, the Division of Wildlife. ... There are 10 conditions that are very stringent – we tried to use all the information to make a very good decision on these things and not just jump at one person’s opinion – which would not be the right thing to do.”

In other business:

- The board adopted the Fremont County Board of Commissioners’ 2020 Census Proclamation, encouraging residents to take part in the census in order to get a true and accurate count.
- The board approved the 2020 participation agreement with the Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments for the Upper Arkansas Recycling Program. The next event will be April 18 in Florence, with three other events to be held across the county throughout the year.

2019 Fremont County Sales Tax Collections

- **Retail Sales Tax:** \$5.89 million; this is \$987,378 more than 2018
 - **Auto Use Tax:** \$1.15 million; this is \$50,180 less than 2018
 - **Construction Use Tax:** \$417,308; this is \$43,247 more than 2018
 - **Lodging Tax:** \$255,528; this is \$19,623 more than 2018
 - **Sheriff’s Retail Sales Tax:** \$3.93 million; this is \$658,252 more than 2018
 - **Sheriff’s Auto Use Tax:** \$769,632; this is \$33,453 less than 2018
 - **Sheriff’s Construction Tax:** \$278,224; this is \$28,927 more than 2018
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