Residents Leery of Reopening Western Pa. Mine

FINLEYVILLE, Pa. (AP) — Some residents say they're concerned about a proposal to reopen a western Pennsylvania coal mine, fearing that it will bring dust, noise and traffic into their bucolic surroundings.

Ramaco Inc., a company based in Lexington, Ky., wants to build a mine on 42 acres zoned for agricultural use in Washington County's Nottingham Township, the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review [1] reported.

Township officials are expected to vote May 6 on conditional use and land developments permits for the project. More than 100 people attended a hearing earlier this month on the proposal, and officials expect at least that many to show up for next month's vote.

Company president and co-founder Michael Bauersachs said officials are "trying to resurrect an old coal mine." Under the plan, Ramaco would spend "tens of millions of dollars" to access coal in the seam once mined by Mon View Mining Co., which operated the Mathies Mine that closed in 2005 due to bankruptcy, Bauersachs said.

The firm would dig as much as 500,000 tons a year of metallurgical coal, used in steelmaking, employing 40 people fulltime and leading to 150 total jobs through subcontractors. Township officials estimate that 70 trucks a day would transport coal from the mine. If the company gets township approval, it would apply for a state mining permit.

The plan has worried residents of the community of 3,036, where country roads often draw bicyclists and horses graze in pastures.

Lorraine Noel, who posted signs against the project on her Nottingham property, said the project "doesn't fit" with the area and why people moved there.

"If this goes through, it will completely wreck everybody's home values and quality of life," she said.

Dennis Franks said he moved to the area because of the quiet, country surroundings and "now they're going to put an industrial park in it."

The retired U.S. Steel mechanical repairman said his problem isn't with coal mines or business in general.

"We're not against industry. A lot of us worked in industry," he said. "But we are against industry in an agricultural setting."

Bauersachs said Ramaco considered less costly access options but settled on the site after talking with township officials.

"We tried to find a site that would have the least amount of impact," he said. "We plan to be a very good neighbor. We know there is an impact in the community with something like this. But we believe the impact overall will be positive."

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Information from: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, http://pghtrib.com [2]

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