

## **East Hope OKs Rock Creek Mine concerns**

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### *City may sponsor lakeside bike path*

EAST HOPE -- It was less than Rock Creek Mine opponents asked for, but after months of discussion, the City Council Tuesday night approved an open letter outlining official concerns about the environmental damage an accident or poor regulation at the proposed mine might cause .

Despite several requests by the anti-mine Rock Creek Alliance that the city pass a resolution opposing the mine's development, East Hope officials balked at taking a stand against it, citing potential legal liability by "naming names" and rejecting a "not in my backyard" attitude against mining in general.

But several council members said the city had a duty to reflect the wishes of its residents - the majority of whom appeared to be against the mine because it posed a potential threat to Lake Pend Oreille.

The "Letter of Concerns," unanimously adopted by resolution on a motion by Council President Ray Lucky, is addressed to officials at the Kootenai National Forest in Libby, Mont., and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality in Helena. The letter will be posted at City Hall and other East Hope locations this week.

Drafted by council members Ed Butler and Paul Madden, the letter does not oppose the mine, as do resolutions previously passed by Bonner County, Sandpoint and Clark Fork. Instead, it places responsibility on government regulators and the mine's designers to strictly enforce environmental laws.

An addition by Madden to cite the poor past operating record of the Rock Creek developers was allowed to remain in the approved letter.

"I don't have a problem with that at all," said Council Member Fran Schuck, countering comments that identifying the developers might be "name-calling."

Schuck suggested the letter end with a request that the two public agencies send representatives to a public meeting hosted by East Hope to brief residents on what measures will be taken to protect the lake. The request was be added to the final version of the letter.

"I think they should come here and put our citizens at ease," Schuck said.

In other business, the Council was briefed on the basics of organizing and funding a pedestrian and bike path by members of North Idaho Bikeways, which has completed the Sagle Community Trail and the Sandpoint-Dover Trail.

East Hope officials are considering making the city the sponsoring governmental agency to begin planning a new path from Peninsula Road to Holiday Shores Resort, and possibly further west all the way to Hope.

The new path would run along the lake side of Highway 200, connecting several resorts, marinas and community facilities. A portion would require an elevated boardwalk over Ellisport Bay between Kramer's Marina and Pend Oreille Shores. The route is popular with tourists, who now have to walk or bike along a busy state highway.

Dr. Robert Carlson, NIB president, said a bike path would cost at least \$75,000 per mile, and likely significantly more for the boardwalk section. Matching grants are available to help defray the cost, he said, but the next available money would be in 2008.

"One of the best ways to build a trail, at least in our part of the country, is to utilize local expertise," said NIB's Terry McConnaughey, adding that many design and construction problems on the Sagle trail were successfully tackled by talented area people.

McConnaughey said Highway 200's status as a National Scenic Byway would help attract grants. He said his experience was that communities responded well to bike path projects.

"It's a contagious thing," he said. "Once you start, you'll be surprised how many people jump on the bandwagon."

East Hope may begin the process of planning and funding the bike path by appointing someone to bring together a group of interested residents to handle planning and raising funds and donations.

Council members agreed to put city water rates and water meters on next month's agenda. East Hope currently does not meter water usage, and city water customers pay a flat fee. Mayor Bud Moon said water rates may need to be raised, and meters may be required on all existing commercial hookups and new residential services.

The next regular meeting of the East Hope City Council is set for May 11 at 6:30 p.m. in City Hall -- a week later than the usual date due to scheduling conflicts.