



WHAT'S IN IT FOR TELLER? (top) — Teller resident Elle Garnie asks Graphite One COO Mike Schaffner about Graphite One's financial projections and whether the company plans to pay reparations if the land was irreparably damaged by the mine.

PUBLIC MEETING— Graphite One representatives inform Teller residents in a meeting on June 2 at the Teller James Isabell School gym on updates to the proposed graphite mine.

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sultation and that the "chosen date coincides with a time that the ice is moving out of Port Clarence Bay, a crucial period for tribal members to take part in vital marine mammal harvesting activities." In a press release, the traditional council stated that they are open to "collaborative dialogue with Graphite One" but continues to oppose "the creation of a 1.1-mile long, 1,340-foot-deep open pit, or any pit of any depth, and all associated roads, gravel pads, and stream diversions in and around the hunting, fishing, and cultural grounds traditionally used by the people of Brevig Mission, Teller, and Mary's Igloo."

Project overview and update

Graphite One's Chief Operating Officer Mike Schaffner gave a brief overview of the project, starting with making the case why graphite is needed — citing a rising demand for electric vehicle batteries mostly — and the plan that the mine at Graphite Creek would produce 175,000 tons of graphite concentrate per year, stored in 8,600 20-ft shipping containers, which would be trucked to Nome on a daily basis and shipped out from the Port of Nome in the summer time for further processing at a plant in Ohio. He highlighted the ongoing commitment to incorporate community feedback via subsistence advisory committees that were stood up in 2018 to inform the company of the communities' concerns. One of the most pressing points is the resistance to barge or shipping traffic through Grantley Harbor to the Imuruk Basin to pre-stage materials for the beginning phases of construction. Schaffner acknowledged the concerns and the company is looking at a work-around.

Vice President of Mining Kevin Torpy delivered a project summary. In broad strokes, the project would entail an open pit mine, a processing plant that would process 10,000 tons per day; a mixed dry and wet tailings storage facility including a dam to contain the wet tailings, water management and treatment facilities and a substantial power plant to power the mill. In order to build the mine, an access road over state land from the state-owned and maintained Kougarok Road — a rough gravel road in no shape to accommodate industrial trucking traffic — is needed.

The company's plan is to operate the mine and mill year-round, to truck concentrate from the mine to Nome on a daily basis, to truck fuel from Nome to the onsite powerplant and to shuttle mine employees daily from Nome to the mine and back.

This summer, the state has permitted geotechnical drilling along the proposed access road corridor. The proposed access road would start at mile 30 of the Kougarok Road, be a double lane road, cross over several streams via single-lane bridges, lead through Mosquito Pass and by Windy Creek to the northside of the

Kigliuaks. Incorporating concerns voiced during Subsistence Advisory Committee meetings over the fear that people traveling from Nome would use the road to access subsistence resources and put undue hunting and fishing pressure on Teller and Brevig Mission, Graphite One plans to propose that the road would not be open to the public.

According to Torpy, the plan is to cover the crushed ore stockpile to control dust, saying that photos one sees in the media of Chinese graphite mines showing communities covered in fine black graphite dust, won't be possible in the USA due to regulations. For dust control on the roads, Torpy said capping of the Kougarok and access roads as well as running watering trucks should keep dust caused by traffic down.

A slide in the presentation showed how the partnership with Bering Straits Native Corporation resulted in community commitments, such a company contributions to SAR equipment, washing machines, four-wheelers and contributions to the seasonal emergency shelter NEST in Nome, scholarship accounts and promises of preferential hiring of BSNC shareholders or descendants.

Reactions

At the end of the presentations, questions and comments centered on the proposed access road, the feared permanent loss of an unspoiled subsistence area and jobs. An audience member said bluntly: "If this mine goes in, we're going to starve to death."

When will the mine open? Schaffner said the earliest would be 2029. "That is if everything goes perfectly," he said. First, the access road needs to be built and Graphite One needs to secure permits from the state to do so. To get a head start on building the facilities, Graphite One proposed to barge some construction materials through Grantley Harbor, Tuksuk Channel to the Imuruk Basin but the proposal met resistance to the point that the company reconsidered.

Another audience member asked pointedly how much the company will make in revenue and what will be it for Teller? Schaffner answered saying that it is hard to predict the price of graphite on the world market. He said this year alone tariffs on graphite have changed 13 times, which influences the price of graphite, but he expects the mine to break even.

When it's time to close the mine, what if the land is irreparably harmed will there be reparations paid? Schaffner answered that Graphite One has to place a bond with the state and if damage or harm is done, the state would take over and a legal case could be made against Graphite One.

Company commitments

The land of the mine is a state lease, and the access road corridor is also on state land. Since the area is not located in an organized borough, none of the communities would see



a tax benefit from the mine. In an interview with The Nome Nugget, Mike Schaffner mentioned the possibility of payments in lieu of taxes to be negotiated.

But the biggest concern is not about money or jobs and has no price tag attached to it. It is what residents of Teller and Brevig Mission express over and over: The land is sacred to those who live nearby and have deep connections to the water, land, plants and animals. Schaffner said he is sensitive to these concerns. "How can we do this without changing the way you live?" he said. "The only thing we want to do is make things better for you, give you opportunities."

Asked for clarification that the objective is not to mine and sell graphite but that the betterment of the local residents is the driving force behind the mine, Schaffner pointed to his past experiences of running mines that improved communities by offering housing incentives. "The one thing that showed clear and true benefit was how that community of Battle Mountain developed and evolved, because we set up the same housing that we're proposing for here," he said. The mine would employ about 250 workers, and proposes to develop a subdivision in Nome, to co-sign mortgages and after a set time of paying rent and working for Graphite One, the employees would end up owning the house. "You heard the comments

about no housing," Schaffner said. "I am sincere when I say we need to make the quality of life better here, so you can believe it or not believe it."

He added, "You can see my passion on this is because you can't go in like an old mining company and rape, pillage, plunder and get out. You cannot do that, and you shouldn't do that."

He added that this is where the MOU is intended to add a layer of accountability to verbal commit-

ments made. "The MOU is a starting point," he said. Graphite One so far is an exploration company with the goal to become a producer. It has no track record of operating a mine, but Schaffner said that between him and Kevin Torpy, they have a combined 70 years of experience in the mining industry. As Graphite One Inc. is a Canadian-owned company with an Alaskan subsidiary. The company is a publicly traded and a buyout or

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JOBS AND SCHOLARSHIPS— Graphite One COO Mike Schaffner responds to a question on jobs and scholarships.

Photo by Diana Haecker



Summer Reading Program 2026

Registration continues this week at the Kegoayah Kozga Public Library.

Weekly youth programs:

Tuesdays (Recommended ages 3-7):

Storytime & Crafts 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

(Children must be accompanied by an adult and adults must be accompanied by a child for storytime.)

Thursdays (Recommended ages 8-13):

Crafts and Activities 10:30 a.m. - 12 noon

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