

Four towns consider banning gas drilling

Written by

Aaron Munzer

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DRYDEN -- In a move echoing the actions of three other boards across Tompkins County, the Town of Dryden's leaders have taken the next step toward banning gas drilling in the town.

In front of a packed town hall Wednesday, the town board unanimously voted to advance its popular yet controversial law that would effectively ban gas drilling within its borders to a public hearing and final vote on July 20. The hearing will take place at 7 p.m. at Dryden Town Hall. If the law passes, it will become an amendment to the current zoning law, not the proposed new zoning.

"I think it's a really good first step," said board member Jason Leifer, who crafted the proposed ban with town attorney Mahlon Perkins. "If it does turn out the state takes over [drilling regulation], at least we'll have a bargaining chip. Towns have to tell these companies that we aren't going to let them run roughshod over us."

Dryden is only the third town to advance a gas-drilling ban to the public hearing stage. Ulysses board members did the

same at their board meeting Tuesday night. Ulysses has scheduled a public hearing for 7 p.m. June 29 at the Trumansburg Elementary [School](#).

In addition, the Town of Ithaca has scheduled a public hearing for 7 p.m. July 11 at Ithaca Town Hall before its board votes on changes to the zoning law that would reassert the existing prohibition on gas drilling, according to town Supervisor Herb Engman.

All face a review by the Tompkins County Planning Department in addition to the public hearing before they can be voted into law.

The Danby town board has also begun the process of banning drilling, asking the planning board in a resolution from June 6 to draft a law that would ban the drilling process known as hydraulic fracturing.

At the Dryden board meeting, residents both for and against the ban spoke fervently for their cause, although the pro-

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drilling speakers, who urged more consideration, were outnumbered by those who spoke in favor of a ban, citing the July 1 deadline for the state's final drilling regulations as good reason to move the proposal into law quickly.

Residents described trips to Pennsylvania, where hydraulic fracturing for natural gas is occurring, and told horror tales of bucolic rural townships sickened by industrialization. Members of the Dryden Resources Awareness Coalition also asked the board to include more specific language that would prohibit ancillary impacts of drilling as well.

"The history of fracked communities has shown us that it destroyed the peaceful character that is the reason many of us moved here," said Joe Wilson, a resident and member of DRAC.

Opponents used similarly dramatic language, likening the board's actions to denying landowners the **freedom** to do what they wished with their property.

"I don't like people telling me what I can do with my land," said resident and farmer Louis Stuttle. "Farmers in Pennsylvania (where landowners are being paid for drilling leases) are buying a lot of new machinery, and I think it's helpful for the economy."

Resident and **developer** Bruno Schickel, who has previously announced that he is running for town supervisor, told the board its approach needed to find a middle ground between "total prohibition" and the

"do whatever you want" approach of gas companies in Pennsylvania.

"There is enormous ground between these two extremes that can address the issues you have before you," Schickel said. "You're confiscating the value of people's land."

Other residents, such as Joanne Cipolla-Dennis, however, said allowing drilling to occur in the town would violate their rights by poisoning neighboring wells and inundating them with noise, **truck** traffic and air pollution.

"Our residents are fortunate that our town board is fighting so hard to keep us a clean, rural community," she said. "This is a critical moment in our town's history."

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