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Gas impact, nature top concerns list

Tioga County Charting group meets for initial 'dialogue' session

February 17, 2011 - By **CHERYL R. CLARKE**
cclarke@sungazette.com

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WHITNEYVILLE - The benefits of gas drilling and preserving the area's natural beauty were on the minds of many as the first full-scale meeting of "Charting the Future of Tioga County" was held Wednesday.

Following a special presentation by the Hamilton-Gibson players about the history of the county, Bill Shuffstall, Penn State Cooperative Extension facilitator, broke the crowd of about 100 into 10 groups of about 10 people who spent about an hour assessing the county.

Shuffstall said the job of the group is to "think through the changes that are coming and make sure they leave a positive end result behind them."

"Change happens, and that is a good reason for charting. Change will happen, no matter what, you can't stop it. Successful communities have people who work together to create local efforts and shared vision with a positive attitude," he said.

Most of the opinions fell into the same general categories. Following natural gas drilling and its impacts, the second-most voiced opinion was that the county needs to find a way to maintain the natural beauty and resources of the area, while at the same time benefiting from the presence of economic opportunity brought about by the new industry.

In answer to what people liked best about the county, the opinions overlapped, with most listing the natural beauty, diversity, strong work ethic, rural solitude, abundance of dark skies, great weather, relative safety, small, close-knit schools, teachers who care about students and parents, community support groups, strong churches, veterans groups and benefits for the needy.

The trends people think will strongly influence the county's capacity to improve people's lives were a bit more difficult to assess.

Once again natural gas drilling took center stage as the main trend impacting people's lives, in both positive and negative ways.

On the positive side, many think gas drilling has provided a needed replacement income for farmers who are retired or no longer farm, but the negatives concerning potential environmental impact cropped up over and over.

Improvements people thought the area needs to make the county a better place to live include more revenue from taxation of the industry coming to and remaining in the county to help with impact on the environment, social services and housing needs.

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Fact Box

IF YOU GO

WHO: General public

WHAT: Charting the future of Tioga County meeting

WHEN: 4:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesday

WHERE: Tioga County Fairgrounds, Whitneyville



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Shuffstall said the opinions expressed will be gathered and transcribed and available on the projects website, www.tiogacharting.com hopefully by this weekend. He said the groups will meet again at 4:30 p.m. next Wednesday at the Tioga County Fairgrounds.

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