

HarrisonPatch

NEWS

Harrison Against NYS Hydraulic Fracturing

Town leaders said during a recent board meeting that they will oppose expanded hydraulic fracturing for natural gas extraction in the Catskill region.

By **Zach Oliva** 1:19pm

Although not asked yet in any official capacity, the Harrison Town Board made it clear earlier this spring that it opposes increased hydraulic fracturing in the Catskill region, fearing that any expansion could contaminate the town's water supply.

Hydraulic fracturing is a method of fracturing rock that contains natural gas and injecting fresh water and chemicals that maximize natural gas output in that rock. The process takes place thousands of feet below the ground and has been used in Ohio, Pennsylvania and other areas of New York as a way to create jobs and extract natural gas in those areas.

In the Finger Lakes region of southern New York, near the Delaware River, there is an abundance of Marcellus Shale that extends from Ohio and West Virginia through Pennsylvania to western New York. The entire Marcellus Shale formation contains between 168 and 516 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, according to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). It has been estimated that there is enough natural gas in the entire formation to supply the country for 15 years.

But there are safety concerns. Some people who live near areas of hydraulic fracturing in other states have reported problems with drinking water after the process has begun. Harrison Mayor/Supervisor Joan Walsh said that since Harrison receives its water from the Catskills, she views the fracturing as a safety concern for the town.

Right now, the practice is legal in New York State and has been taking place for decades, according to Yancey Roy, a media spokesperson from the NYSDEC. But the DEC is closely monitoring any expansion or increased drilling within the state and is weighing its options before green-lighting increased drilling within the Marcellus Shale region.

While the DEC considers ways to monitor the possibility, Walsh and the remainder of the Harrison Town Board have already taken a stand against increased drilling.

"As a trustee of the Westchester Joint Waterworks I take the possible threat very seriously," Walsh said. "The results in the other states were that they do this type of drilling, then many are saying their water had been contaminated."

Walsh added that she has researched the issue and spoken with representatives from state offices and New York City representatives after being asked by a resident for the town to take a stance on the issue. She said that after those conversations she decided that the town should stand against the increased drilling.

Walsh isn't the only local politician looking into the possible expansion. In a meeting held in Katonah Library on May 6, Assemblyman Robert J. Castelli, who represents Harrison and several other towns in the area, held a public meeting to discuss the possible danger the drilling may bring to local municipalities.

"It may be able to be done safely, it may not, we came here today to begin questioning as to whether or not that is possible," he said at that time, choosing not to take a direct stance on the issue.

Several environmental groups also attended that meeting and expressed concerns about what the drilling could do to drinking water both in upstate regions and areas like Harrison where water from that area is moved for consumption.

The NYSDEC says that it is taking every precaution to keep New York's drinking water safe. Because of New York's tight regulations on drilling, Roy said that the state has not seen the same problems that other states have.

Roy added that natural gas drilling is nothing new in the state and has been legal for decades. In fact, more than half of the state's 13,000 currently active wells use the method. The biggest difference would be that drilling in the Marcellus Shale would require higher volumes of water and would use the method on a larger scale.

But concerns about the increases still linger. No final decisions have been made about if, or how much, drilling will be allowed to increase in the Catskills, but Roy outlined a few precautions that have been proposed including strict government oversight and required approval for drilling close to private wells and public reservoirs.

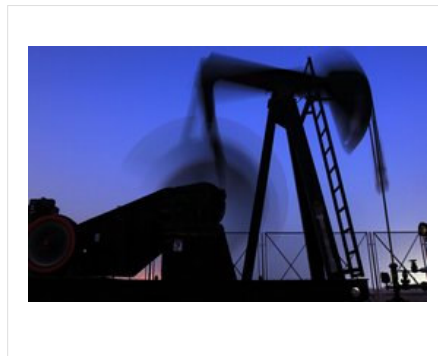
Last September the NYSDEC Division of Mineral Resources conducted a review of all of the risks involved with high-volume hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus Shale area.

To read the review in its entirety [click here. \(http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/58440.htm\)](http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/58440.htm)

The document outlines the department's role in regulating drilling of the area as well as describes some of the requirements that would need to be met if a company is allowed to move into the area to drill. Requirements include approval from a government agency to drill within a specified distance of a private well or public reservoir.

Furthermore, approval for drilling near the watersheds that connect to New York City and Syracuse will need approval in a case-by-case basis, according to the NYSDEC.

There were no requests to drill near those watersheds as of late April. But one must wonder how long that will last if drilling begins to expand and becomes



profitable.

Walsh feels that any type of drilling near the New York City watershed, which also serves Harrison, is simply too risky given the past examples of possible contamination.

Although Harrison has not been asked about the issue, she said that having a stance is still important. The town sent a letter to "add weight to those opposed to it because it is very important to our drinking water."



Advertise

Advertise on Patch and reach potential customers in your backyard and beyond. [Click here for more information.](#)

Volunteer

If you want to help local causes, or your cause needs local help, your next click should be right here.

Contribute

- + [Send us news tips](#)
- + [Put an event on the calendar](#)
- + [Announce something to everyone](#)