

News

# Residents discuss gas development at Morrisville State College

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MORRISVILLE — A crowd of more than 100 area residents participated in a gas development meeting featuring guest speakers ranging from a gas company representative to landowners who experienced the drilling of a nearby well.

The meeting at Morrisville State College on Saturday was organized by the Madison County Citizens for Safe Energy.

Norse Energy Public Relations Representative Scott Ives spoke about the gas drilling process from pre-planning with seismic testing to obtaining permitting from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to site selection. Following site selection, the landowner is notified of the potential well. The access road and well site are constructed, then pipeline routing is completed.

Norse Energy has been one of the major gas development companies in Madison County.

Ives also gave a brief overview of how the construction process works, which is followed by extraction and later site restoration.

One particular gas development process has drawn heavy criticism. Hydrofracking involves the high-pressure pumping of water, chemicals and sand deep underground to create fractures in rock to help release natural gas. New York currently has a moratorium on high hydrofracking, allowing the DEC more time to study the environmental impacts and gather public input.

Some in attendance raised concerns over the disclosure of the chemicals used during the process.

Ives said the chemicals used are disclosed to and regulated by the DEC, adding that the mixture used is 99.5 percent water and sand.

Members of the audience also raised questions about the storage of waste water and the closing of a well after use, which Ives said would be "plugged" at the wellbore with cement.

John and Patty Grossmann, of Vosburgh Road in Lebanon, spoke about the drilling of a natural gas well approximately a quarter mile from their home.

John Grossmann said they were concerned about how close it was going to be to their property, with one of their biggest concerns being possible pollution of ground water.

He said having a water test prior to the well being drilled can provide the landowner with some record of the water quality.

A new access road was made into the forested area where the well site would be developed, creating a disturbance with the trucking of materials to the site, John Grossmann said.

The couple stayed involved and contacted the DEC to get a map of the planned drilling to educate themselves on what would happen. All through the process, John Grossmann said Norse Energy was cooperative in answering questions and allowed him and his wife to tour the 2.5 acre well site on two occasions.

Both Grossmanns spoke about the issues during drilling, including feeling the house shake and being unable to hear each other speak above the noise. John Grossmann said one neighbor's foundation developed cracks from the seismic testing.

The issue of a lack of regulations for drilling in New York state was brought up many times by those in attendance.

Speaker and CSE member Jane Welsh highlighted some types of legislation she hopes can increase public safety as well as protect landowners and the environment.

Nelson Supervisor Roger Bradstreet spoke about the Madison County Natural Gas Development Working Group of which he is a member.

Bradstreet said the group is working to develop regulations on gas companies. He highlighted issues with landmen who solicit landowners to sign leases with the gas companies.

He said the county will continue to listen to the input from the community about the direction of gas development.

The concept of neighbors working together was a common theme of the presentations.

Harmon Hoff, of the Southern Madison County Landowners Coalition, spoke about forming the group to provide collective bargaining power and legal council to negotiate with gas drilling companies.

He said the group is unique in that its members include farmers, business owners and soil conservationists, adding that they include people for and against drilling.

CSE member and event facilitator Chris Rossi said she felt the meeting was productive but only gave a "snapshot of what's going on."

She said the topic is so large that an entire meeting could be devoted to just one of the many issues talked about on Saturday.

"There are a lot of ramifications to what's being proposed," she said. "The more we talk and we educate ourselves then the better equipped we are to make some good choices."

The CSE is comprised of area residents seeking a balanced dialogue about the issues which does not always work in its favor, Rossi said.

"There was a woman in the audience who was very unhappy because she realized partway through the presentation that we weren't going to start saying, 'No drilling'," she said. "Emotions do run high and when we first started we were kind of scared. We had seen stuff about shouting matches. Our thought was that we just want to have a balanced conversation.

"Sometimes even talking to your neighbor about this can get people very unhappy because it touches on perceived rights about property rights," she continued. "Questions like how I can develop my property and my right to be able to make

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money off of my property or conversely my right to protect my property. It's a very hot topic. We honor and salute the passion behind all of these feelings but in order to work well together, we have to kind of lay that down and be able to talk to each other."

She said in the end it's about being neighbors and working as a community, even with diverging opinions.

"I really don't think there's only one approach to this," she said. "If your passion is that this is just a bad idea, I'm saying no and it has to be stopped, then you go work on that and that's fine. In the mean time, some of us are concerned that the drilling is happening already and it's legal in New York State. It is going to keep going so we'd like to be prepared for that eventuality and to deal with what's going on now. I don't think only one level of discourse can go on and not the other. I think this can all be going on simultaneously, all these voices are good."

Minutes and material from the meeting will be posted at the CSE website:

[www.csemadco.org](http://www.csemadco.org)

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