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Tompkins bans fracking on county-owned land

By Liz Lawyer

elawyer@gannett.com

Land owned by Tompkins County will not be leased for natural gas drilling if hydraulic fracturing is used, the county legislature decided Tuesday.

The legislature voted 14-1 to approve a resolution prohibiting the leasing of any county-owned land for hydraulic fracturing, a natural gas-drilling method used in the Marcellus Shale in which a mixture of water, sand and chemicals are pumped into the ground under high pressure to crack the shale and release the natural gas.

The process is highly controversial, with opponents arguing it is detrimental to the environment, threatens drinking water, and the traffic from the drilling pads destroys local roads.

Supporters say the natural gas trapped in the Marcellus Shale, part of which reaches into western and central New York, would be an economic boon to the region.

Legislator Frank Proto, R-Caroline and Danby, cast the only vote against the resolution. He said the wording was unnecessarily complicated and a simpler, more direct resolution, accomplishing the same thing, should have been presented.

An alternative resolution was not presented Tuesday.

In other business, a \$2.5 million project to upgrade and expand the Tompkins County Recycling and Solid Waste Center was approved unanimously. The project will add several services to the county's recycling program, including single-stream recycling, which allows residents to put all recyclables into one bin rather than sorting them, and improving access to the drop-off area at the recycling center on Commercial Avenue in Ithaca.

Single-stream recycling will start in mid-March. Legislators congratulated Solid Waste Manager Barb Eckstrom and Sean Duffy, president of FCR LLC, the company the county is contracting with to provide recycling services over the next 10 years, on completing the project planning.

Legislators also unanimously approved an allocation of \$50,000 for a study on a proposed Center of Government building, which would alleviate pressure to find more space for county offices and provide a central location for several departments. The study will help determine if the project is feasible.
