

Fracking opponents address commissioners

BY MARIAN MCMAHON
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LAKE COUNTY – The issue of horizontal hydraulic fracturing, otherwise known as fracking, was again brought before the Lake County Board of Commissioners at its Nov. 29 meeting. Dan Philipps and Wanda Chop of Leroy Township and Pat Denny of Concord Township expressed their concerns about the possibility of fracking coming to the county.

“Really, what this is focused on ... is the health and welfare of the residents of Lake County,” Philipps said.

Sometimes people forget history, he said, so he noted some previous issues which the area has had due to conventional drilling.

From a presentation by Laura Kramer Kuns of Lake County General Health District on May 30, which noted there was a forced evacuation of 51 families in August 1982 in northeast Madison Township. Gas entered water wells, basements, sump crocks and Arcola Creek.

“There was a small explosion in one basement sump crock, and some cracked foundations,” Philipps said.

He said Kuns also mentioned there had been some contamination of private water wells from brine between 1982 and 1995, along Route 20 in Perry and Madison. There were also some contamination issues on Middle and South Ridge, Davis, Shepard and Call roads.

Another issue occurred in the area when an above-ground storage tank leaked March 15 in Madison Township. About 800 gallons of

crude oil entered a Grand River tributary and moved several thousand feet to a one- or two-acre pond.

Philipps said there have also been issues from gas and oil wells in other parts of Ohio such as Bainbridge, Medina County and Broadview Heights, as well as in other states, such as Dimock, Penn., Bradford County, Penn. Wetzel County, W.V.

“There have been a number of lawsuits throughout the U.S. from physical injuries and real estate value losses; many of those are ongoing right now,” Philipps said.

He noted, in Ohio, landowners can have their properties force-pooled to make up a drilling parcel, even if they do not wish to lease their land.

He expressed the opinion that leases did not adequately protect the homeowners.

In his written presentation, Philipps included a Chesapeake Energy investor disclosure, which he said stated the company could incur certain liabilities in the course of doing business and its insurance might not cover the full amounts of them.

He said, in his 26 years in Leroy Township, the community has never faced such a threat as horizontal fracking.

“... This is a very large industrial activity that the local townships are really not prepared to handle,” Philipps said.

In reviewing how it would affect an area, he said it involves large infrastructure, five-acre well pads with six to eight wells per pad, a 20-acre work zone, large-scale

pipings, compressor stations, access roads, in close proximity to homes (100 feet); schools (100 feet), roadways, businesses, parks, wetlands, tributaries and rivers (50 feet) and into riparian setbacks.

Philipps said he was concerned for some of the following reasons: truck traffic of 1,000 to 1,500 trucks per well; water usage up to eight million gallons of water per well; use of toxic, carcinogenic chemicals in up to 40,000 gallons per well; light and noise pollution; low number of state inspectors; and water contaminations, casing leaks, air pollution in areas of heavy horizontal fracking activity.

Philipps recommended local officials take some steps to help protect residents including: doing baseline well water sampling; setting up air monitoring/sampling stations; having seismic monitoring stations near injection wells; improving emergency response and health monitoring; improving traffic safety plans; passing resolutions not to sign leases on city, village, township and county-owned properties without public consent of local citizens; and increasing education on fracking.

Philipps noted a number of sources where people could find more information about fracking, including: NEOGAP – Network for Oil and Gas Accountability and Protection, website: <http://www.neogap.org>; CELDF – The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, website: <http://www.celdf.org/> (communities/citizens rights); Garrettsville BPA – Board of Public Affairs, e-mail:

frances.teresi@gmail.com; and Colorado School of Public Health, website: <http://www.ucdenver.edu/> (air monitoring).

Commissioner Dan Troy asked if he knew how many leases had been purchased in Leroy Township.

Philipps said he found about 50 leases totaling 1,000 acres had been purchased in Leroy Township by leasing companies. Those companies would need to package parcels to then sell to an oil company.

Troy noted some years ago the Ohio legislature took away local control of oil and gas leasing.

He said the County Commissioners Association of Ohio has discussed this issue on a number of occasions and the members are divided. There are those in the southeastern counties, which had a depressed economy, who see the fracking operations as “gold mines.”

There are also disagreements about how much to tax the industry and how those taxes should be used. Some feel the taxes should be used for environmental purposes related to byproduct disposal. Others believe it should not be taxed, while still others feel the taxes should be used for taxpayer relief or to shore up the state budget.

Some believe the companies need to sign agreements prior to starting operations because the heavy equipment brought in would likely deteriorate the roads they use.

Troy said he agreed the state and local governments needed to ensure residents were properly protected, but county and local governments could not legislate.