



Inclusion Through Diversity

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December 15, 2009
TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **December 15, 2009** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Takes Firm Stand on Natural Gas Drilling

The Legislature, made the County's concerns official about the issue of natural gas drilling in the Marcellus shale. The vote was unanimous, as the Legislature approved its comments to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) regarding the agency's proposed program to regulate natural gas drilling in the shale underlying Tompkins County and surrounding regions of New York State. The measure cites many concerns—which include proposed regulation that is too lax; disregard of cumulative impacts; and potential harm to the area's water supply, air quality, land use, and highway infrastructure. The Legislature concludes that the regulatory document in its present form is insufficient and urges that the entire process be reevaluated and that no drilling be permitted using the hydraulic fracturing technique until an adequate environmental review is completed. Such review would include findings of a soon-to-begin study by the federal Environmental Protection Agency regarding the risks to water posed by "hydro-fracking."

The Legislature's resolution notes that, in addition to technical comments provided to the DEC by the County's Planning and Health Departments and other advisory boards, the Legislature has "a duty to provide community leadership" in evaluating the possible impacts associated with the proposed drilling. It states that Tompkins County "does not believe that the document establishes adequate specific conditions, criteria and thresholds" to allow drilling permits to be issued without extensive additional environmental review for each issued permit, and that "Tompkins County and its municipalities have a responsibility to preserve and protect natural resources, water resources, highway infrastructure, economic development in many other sectors, public health, and quality of life for our residents now and in the future."

Among specific concerns the Legislature stresses in its three-page, 12-section comment to the DEC:

- That taxpayers not be required to bear financial cost of implementing natural gas water well monitoring and tracking, such as through county health departments;
- That water quality monitoring focus on groundwater resources, not just existing drinking water wells;
- That mitigation measures not simply be "proposed" or "suggested," but protective mitigation measures or management practices be required to assure the protection of public health and welfare and the natural environment;
- That additional protective measures for the New York City watershed be extended to all watersheds with municipal water supplies, including Tompkins County;
- That binding road use agreements with municipalities governing drilling be required, not just attempted;
- That cumulative impacts on Greenhouse Gas Emissions be addressed;
- That no drilling be permitted until a safe method for disposal of flowback water and other wastes is in place;
- That cumulative impact on local landscapes, industrial development, water resources, and air quality be addressed, with thresholds of activity established that the environment could sustain without permanent damage;
- That potential negative impact also be addressed on sectors of the economy which depend on the environment, clean water and area view sheds.

In more than half-an-hour of discussion, Legislators focused on the importance of the issue and the potential long-term impacts, and why it is important for regulations to be properly crafted. Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee Chair Pam Mackesey called it a compelling and critical issue; Legislator Martha Robertson said the drilling could transform the entire Upstate region. Legislator Mike Sigler said that, while he supports drilling in the Marcellus shale for natural gas to tap an important energy source, the State's report "fails to give a clear set of rules that people can wrap their minds around and industry can follow." Legislators Frank Proto and Nathan Shinagawa were among those who discussed perceived economic impact, Proto saying there's no clear sense of whether drilling will produce long-term jobs or local economic benefits. *Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203*

Reflections and Recognition at Legislature's End-of-Term Session

At the final scheduled meeting of the four-year legislative term, members of the County Legislature looked back, acknowledging and thanking their five departing colleagues, including Legislature Chair Mike Koplinka-Loehr, who will be leaving the Legislature after 12 years of service, two as Chair. Legislator Mike Hattery, himself leaving at the end of his four-year term, praised the outgoing Chair for his "quality leadership" which demonstrated patience, fairness, and diligence. He said, "You, among others, give the term 'public servant' a good name." Legislator Pam Mackesey predicted the Legislature will sorely miss Koplinka-Loehr's attributes, including his knowledge and understanding of the budget process. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne thanked the Chair for his ongoing commitment and his support and inclusiveness regarding her role as Vice-Chair. County Administrator Joe Mareane thanked Koplinka-Loehr for his support and guidance and expressed his appreciation to all five departing members—Koplinka-Loehr, Hattery, Mike Sigler, Greg Stevenson, and Tyke Randall, calling working with all of them both "a pleasure and a privilege." Koplinka-Loehr saluted those graduating from the Legislature and said working with them has been an honor. Legislator Randall was one who thanked not only his legislative colleagues but department heads, and Legislator Stevenson thanked his constituents and staff of the Legislature Office for their support. Legislator Martha Robertson remarked that the end-of-term transition is difficult, since the current Legislature "has been over a lot of ground together." Legislator Jim Dennis predicted that the Legislature, and the County, will greatly miss their involvement and contributions of his five departing colleagues.

Contact: Michael Koplinka-Loehr, Chair of the Legislature 274-5434 or 257-2329; Legislator Michael Sigler, 339-7978; Legislator Duane T. Randall, 898-3995; Legislator Greg Stevenson, 273-2439; Legislator Michael Hattery, 844-4361; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Nobel Htoo Recognized as Distinguished Youth

Nobel Htoo, a native of Burma who relocated to Ithaca within the past year, after spending time in a refugee camp in Thailand, is the Tompkins County Distinguished Youth for December. Nominated by Kathleen Morrow of McGraw House, Nobel is praised as an "outstanding" and dedicated employee in the McGraw House dining program through the Youth Employment Service. Morrow told legislators, Nobel "really stands out" in a crowd of about 100 teens with whom she has worked with over the years. "She will be a mover and a shaker," Morrow predicted, "so watch out!" The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by A&B Awards and Engraving, Bangs Ambulance Service, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Approved a dozen resolutions governing road swaps between the County and municipalities, affecting maintenance of various sections of road in the Towns of Dryden, Groton and Lansing.
- Approved a series of standard year-end resolutions, including resolutions to formally implement provisions of the 2010 Tompkins County budget.

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