

## **Day tour of Bradford County PA - April 30, 2011 and Conclusions**

Attending: Ed Hobbie, Russ Smith Sr., Bill Michaels, Paul Kuhn, Jennifer Huntington, Alan Springett

Departed 7:00 AM, Returned 8:30 PM

### **10:00 – 12:30 – Bradford County EMS and Planning Office, Towanda, PA**

Bob Barnes – Manager of Bradford County Emergency Services

Ray Stolinas – Planning Director, Office of Community Planning and Grants (6 person dept.)

Bradford County Stats:

~60,000 population plus ~30,000 transient gas related transient workers

1162 square miles

Two existing pipeline run though the County

Conservative estimations show almost 363 trillion cubic feet of gas in the Marcellus Shale.

1666 wells have been permitted to-date with a maximum of 6 wells per drilling pad.

Barnes and Stolinas presented a factual and informative presentation regarding Bradford County's present state of gas drilling. They also explained the structure of government in a commonwealth system where by Counties are limited in the services they provide (no highway) and most of the power and decisions are made at the local governmental level. All black topped roads are maintained by the State and all gravel roads are locally maintained.

Maps were provided showing the locations of the permitted wells in addition to their monthly status sheet on drilling activity.

Items of particular interest from the meeting:

- Statistics show that unemployment in the County dropped 2.5% in one year.
- Many employees have transitioned from their current jobs to working for the gas companies. Mr. Stolinas has lost two employees.
- It was recommended that NY establish a severance tax on drilling operations. NYS presently has an ad valorem tax that can be assessed on the local level.
- Housing for workers is a concern. RV housing and usage is currently being reviewed in regards to adequate septic and housing codes. Temporary worker dormitory housing is being proposed with a life span of 10 – 15 years.
- A \$50 million compressor station has been permitted and sited to mitigate noise levels.

- A new closed-loop Hydrofracking waste treatment facility is presently under review that will recycle water. Solids from this facility will be removed for further treatment and disposal.
- Vehicle accident have risen slightly however fatalities have risen substantially. Most are a result of impatient and distracted drivers.
- There is no oversight on the gathering lines between wells and some are above ground. Above ground lines allow for easy inspection however tampering may be more accessible.
- Tailings from the drilling activity are being placed in County land fills. Radiation tests are performed and tailings that exceed the radioactive limit are turned away for processing and disposal elsewhere.
- There are road agreements with the gas companies to improve and repair the roads but the challenge is that they are being improved and maintained to a higher standard than originally built without widening them. The result is higher roads with deeper berms and soft shoulders.
- The planning department would like to update the County's comprehensive plan with language regarding renewable resources and also include a natural and historical resources protection plan.
- During the recent spill the County EMS Department worked with DEP to collect water samples around the spill.
- Many Towns and local governments do not have zoning.
- Rental housing costs have increased substantially displacing many current residents.
- Truck traffic is significant and has tremendous effects.
- Bradford County has existing industrial uses including a DuPont plant and a factory that manufactures particle board.
- Two new chain-style hotels are currently under construction.
- Mapping showed the deposits of Marcellus Shale in the region for West Virginia to NY's Southern Tier. It appeared that southern Otsego County might provide some area where Marcellus Drilling would occur.
- Mapping showed the companies involved in gas drilling. A review of the material indicates 26 permitted gas drilling companies. Some are international companies holding many permits while others only hold a few.

Personal conclusions from meeting:

Bradford County is very similar to Otsego County but with the existence of more established industry other than gas drilling. The County is dealing the best they can with the limited resources and authority they have available to manage the drilling activity. One piece of advice that was given is that Otsego had better make plans for when, not if gas drilling enters the County. Bradford was ill prepared and has continued to play catch-up through the entire process.

## **1:00 – 2:30 – Bradford County Library, West Burlington Township, PA**

Diane Siegmund - Psychiatrist and local anti-drilling community activist

Diane started with a ½ hour video segment with Lawyer Todd McNally interviewing residents whose water has been allegedly contaminated.

Diane distributed current communications that she has made to a County Commissioner urging the County to address public health and safety issues from recent spills and water contaminations.

Written testimony to the County Commissioners of a victim of contaminated water was distributed.

Diane shared her professional account of helping patients deal with depression, anxiety and the feeling of being trapped as a result of gas drilling. She also stated that violent crime has risen in Bradford County since gas drilling has started.

She voiced frustration that there was no official mechanism or advocacy channel or network established that addresses the concerns and problems that residents are facing. If a resident has a contaminated well there is no where to file a claim. She said that the residents of Bradford County are simple, honest and trusting people who are being taken advantage of by the drilling companies and State.

Proof of contamination is often placed on the resident and not on the drillers. Many people have not had a base-line water test making proof unobtainable. A thorough test can cost more than \$900 and many companies are not providing funding.

Conclusions from meeting:

Diane is fighting a one person battle against an established industry. There seems to be no organized advocacy group opposed to the drilling activity. While she points to people that have been effected by pollution it is often difficult to prove. In addition to drilling she is concerned with air quality from the local particle board manufacturing plant. She alleges that her eyesight was effected buy the air quality in the area and has concerns with the quality oversight of routine monitoring in the area. Diane's long list of concerns and multitude of "isolated incidents" makes it difficult not to conclude that there are some valid concerns in regards to gas drilling.

## **4:00 – 5:45 – Warren Township Building Facility – Warren Center, PA**

Fred Wheaton – Town Supervisor

Sally Dewing – Postmaster

Warren Township Stats- very similar to the Town of Westford in Otsego County.

Located in the extreme northeast corner of the County

No existing industrial uses other than an existing gas pipeline.

Former dairy/ag area and is now mostly a bedroom community for the Tri-city and Towanda area.

Small niche/hobby farms do exist.

50 miles dirt roads

35 miles maintained dirt roads year-round

Township has three elected supervisors. Fred is also paid more to handle the Highway Department with one other full-time employee.

960 residents

43 active drilling sites.

Both Fred and Sally have gas leases at about \$4500 per acre

Items of particular interest from the meeting:

- The Township receives no monetary benefit from the Drilling as they hold no leases.
- The Township did not seek to post and bond the roads. Fred felt that his agreement with the drilling companies and due diligence to see the roads repaired was adequate.
- The drilling companies have damaged and repaired roads to Fred's satisfaction. In some cases road improvements were made before drilling started.
- When talking with Drilling companies regarding lease prices Sally recommended that it is in the best interest of the residents to openly discuss among themselves their on-going negotiations.
- When asked if there was concern regarding possible ground water contamination they were both aware of other areas in the County with problems and have had their water tested by the Companies. They said that if there was a problem the Companies would take care of it.
- Property values have increased significantly on vacant land going from \$2000 to over \$8000 per acre with gas rights. Even smaller properties with dwellings have increased due to the demand of housing.

After the meeting Fred took the group to a site that had just established a drilling rig on it right across from his house. The rig had just become active and he said that it will take 19 days to finish the hole then they move on to the next pad. Once all the pads have at least one well they will return to finish drilling the remaining wells. Apparently

there is a time requirement on the leases to establish a well before the lease runs out in order to re-negotiate the lease.

Personal conclusions from meeting:

The Township is strikingly similar to the Town of Westford and to some extent, Otsego. Fred and Sally were two very pleasant people and absolutely open and honest of their opinions and circumstances. There was little regard for potential contamination and complete trust in the drilling companies to do the right thing. My perception is that they are excited with the activity and proud of what is being accomplished in their Township. I felt that the well site could have been located away from residences and better screened. To place it on the side of the road across from homes instead in the middle of what looked to be a large parcel seemed inappropriate.

Final Conclusions:

The tour was very well planned and balanced. I believe everyone with a concern on this issue should not only visit the area but more importantly speak with the residents. Gas Drilling is a heavy industrial use and has completely changed Bradford County. The quality and quantity of the gas is very good and it appears that Bradford is in the "sweet-spot" of the Marcellus Shale deposits. The government and history of energy production in Pennsylvania is much different than in New York State. It appears that Pennsylvania is seeking to take full advantage in exploiting this substantial find. It is unfortunate that more planning and oversight on the State level was not put in to minimizing its effects on communities and the environment. The residents themselves are very trusting and down-to-earth people. I am concerned with their high regard and trust of corporations in the extraction business that have historically negatively impacted their State.

Final Conclusions Regarding Gas Drilling in relation to the Town of Otsego and Otsego County:

The Town of Otsego's Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Law's do not permit heavy industry therefore without successful legal challenges I do not envision horizontal gas drilling occurring within the Town. That being said the powers of the State to override our laws and plans will most likely be used to tap this enormous energy supply. Before that happens I believe it is in the best interest of land owners, concerned residents and local governments to be prepared for the boom that is occurring in Pennsylvania. Part of the preparation should be working with land owner coalitions to include lease restrictions or covenants on the activity of gas drilling to promote health and safety. Such items may include the following:

1. Using benign hydrofracking fluids.
2. Placing tracers or marking tags in hydrofracking fluids.
3. Not allow additional hydrofracking on a well that a leak/crack has occurred
4. Promote better casing standards including cementing the entire casing and inspecting casings before and after hydrofracking.
5. Establish contingency plans for possible safety errors.
6. Institute periodic subsidence checks.
7. Mandate a closed system for hydrofracking fluids with no open pits.
8. Recycle brines and flow back fluids on site to reduce water use while promoting less trucking.
9. Promote only multi-well pads to decrease the volume of well sites.
10. Establish safer well site setbacks from other wells, residential areas, water supplies, parks, schools and areas of historical importance.
11. License all drillers and sub contractors.
12. Pre-test all drinking water sources before drilling occurs.
13. Mandate performance bonds and mandate contractor contributions to clean-up funds.
14. Increased set-backs, screening and noise control for all operations.

From the people I interviewed in Bradford County and my discussions with large land owners in the Town I have not met one person who did not have a high regard for the environment and concerns regarding the health and safety of residents. Supporting safe drilling while minimizing its impact on the Town is in the best interest of residents before the State opens all lands for exploration. Until then I support our local Land Use Law changes.

Respectfully submitted:

Howard William (Bill) Michaels  
Councilman, Town of Otsego