

Candor Adds “Frack Here” to Comp Plan

by Jaime Cone | Posted: Sunday, November 22, 2015 6:00 am

At a meeting Tuesday night, November 10, the safety, environmental impact and quality of life issues surrounding natural gas fracking sparked a tense debate between Candor Town Board supervisor Bob Riggs and a small but vocal group who disapproved of the board’s unanimous decision to strongly endorse Snyder Farm Group’s proposal to explore and develop mineral resources in Tioga County.

The resolution urges the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to conduct a “thorough but timely review of the Snyder Farm Group’s proposal that examines factual evidence, science and technology” and that the Town of Candor Board and supervisor strongly believe in and support rights of private property owners to explore and recover mineral resources on their land.

High-volume hydraulic fracturing is banned in New York, but Barton-based Snyder Farm Group, comprised of five Tioga County farm families, argues that using petroleum and sand instead of water, a process often referred to as “gel fracking,” should still be allowed.

In July, Tioga County Farm Bureau President Kevin 'Cub' Frisbie held a press conference to announce that the Snyder Farm Group would be petitioning the DEC to allow fracking on 53 acres of land owned by Ernest Snyder. The property is located in Barton at the crossroads hamlet of Halsey Valley and is in the Spencer Van Etten School District. Superintendent Joseph Morgan has voiced his support for the new permit.

One clause of the board’s resolution says that the DEC “has referred to the proposed means of stimulating and recovering the gas as ‘environmentally friendly.’” Candor resident Joe J. Bish questioned the accuracy of that statement and argued it ought to be amended before the resolution was put to vote. He cited a DEC environmental impact statement that says “the ‘environmentally-friendly chemical alternative’ and ‘Special Places’ alternatives address potential environmental impacts for only certain resources, namely water resources and community character, and do not comprehensively address all of the potential adverse environmental impacts from the activity.”



Involved Citizens

Peter Ward, Becca Rodomsky-Bish, and Joe J. Bish at the Candor town board meeting Nov. 10.

When questioned by Bish about the clause in question, Riggs said he could not point to where the quote “environmentally friendly” was located in any DEC document referring to gel fracking. Riggs said that the protesters could “nitpick” the wording all they wanted, but the fact remains that the majority of his constituents approve of fracking.

“Especially since I just got reelected and I feel like I’ve been endorsed a second time on this position, I’m going to do my very best to represent what I believe is the majority position of the town,” he said.

Becca Rodomsky-Bish, wife of Joe Bish, brought up a survey that town officials sent to all residents to help inform changes to the Candor Comprehensive Plan. “When respondents were asked which of the following natural resources they would support development of, 80% support solar as their top choice, 75% support wind as their second choice and natural gas was supported by only 59%, taking the third position,” she said. “This bodes well for your solar initiative you are considering, not for the LPG/Propane Resolution.” The visibly pregnant Rodomsky-Bish, who works for Cornell University’s lab of ornithology, told The Chronicle after the meeting that she’s most concerned about negative consequences to her family’s health.

Of the seven members of the public who spoke on the matter, one was in favor of the resolution. “Solar and wind is not there yet to take the place of fossil fuel, and any of this regulation increases energy costs,” said Peter Ward, Candor Town Planning Board member and former town supervisor.

In a phone interview Thursday afternoon, Riggs said his belief that the town supports fracking stems from a Cornell survey that showed overwhelming support for the extraction method as well as previous public meetings, one in 2012 where the majority of the members of the public came out to support fracking and one in October where the crowd seemed to be split 50/50.

The resolution passed unanimously, and copies of it will be sent to state lawmakers including Governor Andrew Cuomo and Joseph Martens, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner.

Fracking also came up in discussion about revisions to the Town of Candor Comprehensive Plan. Amendments were made to specifically state that the town supports the extraction of natural gas, an addition to the plan that Candor Town Planning Board Chair Arthur Cacciola said he tried to dissuade the town board from making; Cacciola had wanted to use more ambiguous language. “The plan is around for 20 years,” he said. “What if they outlaw fracking by then?”

Riggs told the Chronicle that he believes vague language may not stand up in court. “There are lots of ways to disallow it now, and there may be only one narrow path allow it.” The board voted unanimously to approve the town plan, which will be sent to the county for approval. The Candor

Town Planning Board will be responsible for organizing a SEQR (environmental impact statement) prior to the town officially adopting the revised plan.