

Fracking with propane eyed in Tioga County

Andrew Casler 6:15 p.m. EDT July 8, 2015



(Photo: KELLY GAMPEL / Ithaca Journal)

BARTON – A proposal to frack for natural gas using gelled propane and sand was announced Wednesday morning at Barton Town Hall in Tioga County.

Snyder Farm Group spokesman Kevin “Cub” Frisbie said an application was filed Tuesday with the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

The move comes after Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s administration officially banned large-scale hydraulic fracturing on June 29. The state announcement ended a seven-year review process that drew hundreds of thousands of public comments and sharply divided the general public.

“We are outside of the state’s ban,” Tioga Energy Partners, LLC legal counsel Adam Schultz said. “The state banned high-volume hydraulic fracturing, but that’s not what we’re doing.”

Tioga Energy Partners is the contracting company working with the Snyder Farm Group on the drilling application.

More than 60 people attended the press conference, which was held outside the town of Barton municipal offices.

The Snyder group is a collection of five Tioga County farm families who have leased land for natural gas development. The group is seeking to develop a 53-acre natural gas well in Halsey Valley, which is in the town of Barton, Tioga County — about 25 miles south of Ithaca and 30 miles east of Elmira.

The well pad would occupy about 3.5 acres on Ernest “Bucky” Snyder’s 150-acre hay and corn farm.

The group has applied for two drilling permits, Frisbie said.

The well would get drilled into the Utica Shale formation, about 9,500 feet underground, according to Frisbie. “Then we will do a horizontal turn and go into the Marcellus Shale at approximately 4,400 feet,” he said.

Town of Barton Supervisor Leon “Stick” Cary said that fracking may mean “a happy time for the residents of the town of Barton, as well as Tioga County.” Cary said that he anticipates increased taxes for local government and new jobs.

“The Snyder Group ... have done a good job to harvest what is theirs,” Cary said. “It’s the gas under their lands, and they have picked a way that is safe ... it will make this area flourish, there’s no doubt in my mind.”

Tioga Energy Partners said it would use gelled propane and sand to hydraulically fracture Marcellus Shale and release natural gas.

“What the state studied, and eventually decided to ban, was the use of high volumes of water for fracturing purposes,” Schultz said. “This process that we are proposing doesn’t use any water, the fracturing takes place using liquefied petroleum gas.”

The groups are seeking to develop the well under a New York state Generic Environmental Impact Statement on the Oil, Gas and Solution Mining Regulatory Program from 1992.

“(The application) will be subject to rigorous review, which we fully support,” Schultz added.

The state’s fracking ban started a 120-day clock for fracking proponents to examine whether the ban has any legal holes; fracking opponents have lauded the ban. If a lawsuit isn’t filed by Oct. 27, state law says the decision can no longer be challenged.

The DEC issued a 43-page “findings statement,” which laid out the agency’s rationale for implementing a statewide ban on fracking with more than 300,000 gallons of fluid. The document cites a number of uncertainties about the process’s impact on human health and the environment while questioning whether it would be economically feasible in New York.

Economic gains sought

Snyder, the owner of the land where the well pad could be located, said that he thinks the push to develop gas in Tioga County is a positive step.

"It's going to create a lot of jobs, and it's going to create a lot of well-needed help for this area," Snyder said. "There's a lot of people who don't have jobs in this area."

Sen. Tom Libous, R-Binghamton, sent spokesman Jim Thomas to the Wednesday press conference.

"We think that this will be a resource for the county after the Tioga Downs announcement (Tuesday)," Thomas said. "I think things are really starting to bounce back in Tioga and look forward to moving forward with this."

The Nichols racino is proposing a \$195 million investment that would double its workforce and lead to \$32 million in new gaming tax revenues.

"I think we have a resource beneath our lands that we're not using, and other states are reaping an economic benefit from it, but we aren't," said Terri Tyson of Halsey Valley. She owns 92 acres where she farms dairy cattle.

"If the opportunity arises, I wouldn't be afraid to have (fracking) on my property," she said.

Tyson added that she wants to see gas drilling developed safely, and she believes that the Snyder Farm Group will do just that.

"I have young children that want to take over the farm when I'm done with it, and it's very important to me that our land is protected, but also that we do have some benefits," she said.

Cecil Coons, who owns 68 acres in Halsey Valley, said his town needs industry and new tax revenue.

"We're going to get jobs, we're going to get lease money, and it's going to help everybody," he said.

Andrew Casler is a staff writer for the Ithaca Journal.

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