



Cornell University

Cooperative Extension

Schuyler County

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Preparing for a Natural Gas Boom in Schuyler County

The summer of 2008 gave us a glimpse of things to come as energy companies aggressively leased natural gas rights in the Southern Tier. Since then, depressed natural gas prices and permitting delays by the DEC have caused these companies to put their plans on hold. But all factors indicate that we will soon again see a renewed push to develop natural gas resources in this area. This development will have a profound impact on our community - both good and bad - so we should use this time to better prepare for a significant increase in development and exploration activity over the coming years. Rather than each Town working independently to develop and adopt measures that will help them manage this development in a positive way, it has been suggested that an ad-hoc task force be convened in Schuyler County to collectively identify and assess these measures.

Some examples of potential recommendations from the Task Force which could be adopted by the Towns include:

- Updated commercial and industrial use permit requirements, especially for things like driveways (well site access roads)
- Traffic restrictions (hours, weight limits, patterns)
- Amended zoning laws and ordinances to address tree cutting, road traffic, road clearances, signage, and potential nuisance issues like noise and light pollution.
- Record Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) with the DEC to address and protect special environmental, recreational, historical, sensitive use and viewshed areas. This will make it easier for the municipality to request that the DEC amend a permit for a local well with special conditions.
- Budget for environmental and legal review of local permit applications (when needed), and possible challenges under SEQRA.
- Have an Emergency Response Plan in place for drilling contingencies
- Require local site plan review of activities that can be locally regulated like “general site layout”, access road construction, aquifer protection, stormwater mandates (MS4)
- Post escrow for technical and permit reviews
- Draft blanket operating agreements (aka “Host” agreements) between municipalities and operators (energy companies and their contractors) that encompass the above points, and create long-term enforcement mechanisms.

The adoption of rationale-based local laws requires time and is subject to SEQR, so towns should consider these tools before significant drilling activities occur.

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