



**TOMPKINS COUNTY
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

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Tompkins County Council of Governments Takes Comment on Proposed DEC Gas Drilling Rules

Area residents had the opportunity to officially weigh in on New York State's proposed gas drilling rules, at an Ithaca hearing tonight sponsored by the Tompkins County Council of Governments (TCCOG). Citizens from Tompkins County, the Finger Lakes region, and beyond were able to provide verbal and written comments on the draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (dSGEIS) on the Oil, Gas and Solution Mining and regulations that will govern high-volume hydraulic fracturing.

About 850 people attended the four-hour hearing, held at Ithaca's State Theatre. TCCOG took the initiative to sponsor the hearing to make it easier for citizens to participate in the comment process on the proposed regulations to the DEC, even though no DEC-sponsored hearing was scheduled in the Finger Lakes region. The proceedings, including all oral and written comments, were transcribed for submission to the DEC.

"TCCOG decided to sponsor its own public hearing on the dSGEIS because it is vitally important that citizens have the opportunity to comment," says Ithaca Town Supervisor Herb Engman, co-chair of TCCOG. "Having to travel many miles to the few sites sponsored by the DEC in effect restricts the public's ability to address the plan. There have been problems with the DEC's website for comments, so appearing in person is the best option for many people. Residents of the Tompkins County area have strong feelings about the gas drilling issue and should be able to get their points of view on the public record. TCCOG is happy to facilitate that process."

Among those submitting comments were Tompkins County legislators and municipal members of the Council of Governments—among them Ulysses Town Councilwoman Liz Thomas, who also chairs TCCOG's Gas Drilling Task Force. Thomas stated her town, which has banned gas drilling within town limits, sees the SGEIS as insufficient to protect the health, safety, and well-being of all its residents, with flaws including those related to air quality, health, preservation of aquifers. The document, she maintained, must also take a stronger stand in honoring the right of municipal home rule related to zoning and land use.

County Legislature Chair Martha Robertson, also a member of TCCOG, noted that, from the thousands of public comments received in response to the DEC's initial draft, the revised version is somewhat improved, but still sorely insufficient—for example, failing to deal adequately with cumulative impacts; to establish thresholds of activity that could be sustained without permanent damage; to analyze the negative impacts of drilling in its socioeconomic analysis; and to assess such impacts as the industrialization of rural landscapes, greenhouse gas emissions, and the cleaning of wastewater. Until and unless a more benign technology is developed and required, she maintained fracking should not be permitted, with a total statewide ban "the only appropriate mitigation."

From his observations regarding the effects of hydrofracking through his work in Pennsylvania, Legislator Nathan Shinagawa commented he has observed little economic benefit for the vast majority of residents, and therefore questions how our government can justify the environmental cost. As the document that is supposed to provide answers to help mitigate the risks of fracking, Shinagawa maintained it does not do enough—failing to adequately address air quality, municipal infrastructure, public health, planning, and how oversight would be funded.

County Legislator Carol Chock, who chairs TCCOG's subcommittee examining impacts on tax assessment rolls and land values, pointed to conflicts in the SGEIS, the proposed regulations, and existing law with long-standing setback requirements of residential mortgage lending, including secondary mortgage lenders which are already posing problems related to real estate transactions. Chock commented, "The fact that New York State was so clearly unaware, and then chose to ignore the specific

needs of this competing and essential industry undermines our confidence that New York State has done its due diligence to protect even the basic homeownership rights of New Yorkers and the needs of our existing businesses—the lifeblood of our communities.”

Comments submitted by the County’s Strategic Tourism Planning Board maintain that the Economic Assessment Report that is now part of the SGEIS “does not provide a balanced analysis of potential impacts to the tourism economy in our region, an industry that generated \$157 million in local spending in 2010. The Board urges the DEC “to conduct a more balanced and robust analysis of potential impacts on tourism” before issuing any drilling permits.

TCCOG leaders thank the many elected officials and community volunteers who effectively worked together to make the event happen, as well as the many citizens who turned out to submit testimony at the hearing.

Citizens may still submit written comments to the DEC through TCCOG, but to be included in the TCCOG packet comments must be received by 5 p.m. December 5. Comments may be sent by mail to the Tompkins County Legislature Office, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca, or by e-mail to TCCOG@tompkins-co.org.

The dSGEIS can be viewed at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/75370.html> and the proposed regulations at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/77353.html>. A paper copy of the document is available for review at the Tompkins County Public Library.

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