

Drilling from page A1

West Bay's application is "clearly deficient" under city codes for such exploration, said Councilman Jerry Ellis, who presented a motion to turn down the permit. Ellis had support.

"I don't care how many study sessions I have on this issue, I'm not going to vote in favor of it," said Jon Grant, Farmington Hills councilman.

The council unanimously decided to table the decision after Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi noted that he had told residents the council wouldn't decide the issue this week.

Afterward, a West Bay official said they'll look at their options and whether council's impending denial is appropriate.

West Bay officials continued to dismiss fears of hydrogen sulfide, a by-product of oil and gas drilling. The Farmington Hills

site is below the "sour gas" line where H₂S is prevalent.

Such drilling at the site would produce no more than a trace of the naturally occurring toxin. 1 or 2 parts per million, West Bay officials said. Natural gas lines into homes typically carry 4 parts per million.

City law requires that any well producing more than 100 parts per million be immediately shut down and capped.

State Rep. Andrew Ruczkowski said he's talked to a scientist with the Legislative Services Bureau and a Department of Environmental Quality official. How much H₂S is at the site is not certain, Ruczkowski said.

"I have to caution, no one will know until a well is drilled," he added.

The legislator also unearthed a state law which stipulates a

company can force nearby residents — including those who didn't lease their mineral rights — to pay for drilling costs if a well is dry.

That only applies if the oil company doesn't have the required amount of leases within 40 acres of the site, said Gary Gottschalk, West Bay vice president. West Bay has lease agreements from 60-60 residents covering 120 acres in the Haggerty/Nine Mile area.

Oil companies have threatened townships with lawsuits in order to be allowed to drill, said Arlin Wasserman, Michigan Land Use Institute president. They also claim to be public utilities.

"These are tactics, not truths," Wasserman said.

If an abundant amount of oil is found, other drilling companies will likely want in on the action,

Wasserman added. The landscape of the area will dramatically change.

Frank Brennan of Novi spoke of these changes. Brennan has an oil well 300 yards in front of his house and receives \$29 every three months in royalties.

"Here's a buck," said Brennan, placing a dollar bill on the podium. "I'll bet neither of these gentlemen (West Bay officials) in the front row have an oil well within 300 yards of their homes."

"It didn't make sense in a residential area like Novi. We didn't have the balls. We weren't strong enough. Don't make that same mistake. Just say 'no.'"

One Meadowbrook resident didn't agree with overwhelming public opinion.

"From listening to this, it seems to me to be a lot of fear-mongering and half-truths expressed to council here tonight," said Steve Morillo, a Meadowbrook homeowners' association vice president.

Royalty money will be used to construct a sound barrier to buffer residents east of I-275. He admitted he was in the minority among 140 homeowners who are against the drilling.

"The reason I don't have a lot of my homeowners here is because they have a life," Morillo said. "They don't have time to spend six to 12 months doing research as these residents have."

Another Meadowbrook resident, Dave Heist, countered that he does have a life.

"I have a quality life and I want to maintain that quality of life," Heist said.

Sellers from page A1

drilling. The gas produces a rotten egg smell and in heavy doses can pose health risks.

West Bay and a geologist with the state Department of Environmental Quality both said H₂S is not prevalent in this area.

A pastor at First Church of the Nazarene, which is near the drilling site, said his board of directors became aware of potential for H₂S through a flier distributed by residents. The church subsequently received information from West Bay stating any traces of hydrogen sulfide found would not be a health risk.

"One is saying it's a problem; the other is saying it's not," said Dr. Carl Leth, who arrived after the church board agreed to lease its rights. "At this point, we have made our decision. It wouldn't be right or ethical to sell our rights and then oppose them later in court."

The board is satisfied with the assurances the drilling will not pose a safety risk.

The Meadowbrook Park subdivision president understands his neighbors' concern, but is comfortable with his decision to let West Bay drill. Other homeowners in the sub reviewed the matter carefully, said Daniel Belanger.

Belanger worked 10 years with Consumers Energy, then Consumers Power, in its Livonia office.

"I'm familiar with gas in the area; as far as I know, there has never been a hydrogen sulfide leak in the area," Belanger said.

Some information circulating is disconcerting for another reason, though.

"My integrity was called into question in one of the emotionally charged letters, which was not appreciated," Belanger said. "It made me sound like I was selling my soul for a few pesos or something."

Residents who lease their mineral rights receive royalties in exchange. An average producing well could return \$200 a month per acre of property, a West Bay official said.

The association has leased an eight-acre commons area to West Bay.

At Monday's public hearing, a member of the homeowners' association said money from royalties would possibly be used to help construct a sound barrier to protect residents from traffic noise and exhaust fumes on I-275.

Otherwise, royalty money could be used to reduce or eliminate association dues, build a playground or tennis courts in the commons area.

Asked why she and her husband, Sal, signed over mineral rights, Rose Khoury said, "for improvement."

Residents wouldn't sign leases if there was a known wouldn't risk health and safety of neighbors if there was scientific proof oil drilling would release harmful amounts of hydrogen sulfide, Steve Morillo, Meadowbrook Park association vice-president.

So far, he added, those opposed are using half-truths to get the project shot down.

"It's not a question of right or wrong, good or bad," said Morillo, who spoke out at Monday's public hearing. "It's a question of use of property rights."

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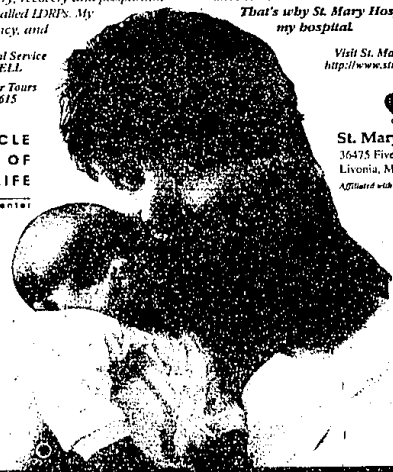
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