

Now is time to talk about oil drilling

Arroyo Grande Times Press Recorder, 5-28-11

When the lowest price locally for a gallon of unleaded regular gas is \$4, and \$5 a gallon now seems completely plausible, who in their right mind would turn down an oil project?

We can think of about 200 local residents who just might say “no” — the folks living in and around a proposed oil-drilling/

processing facility in Huasna Valley.

Excelaron LLC, a subsidiary of an Australian oil company, has plans for up to

12 wells on 260 acres of the huge Mankins Ranch in Huasna. Experts have been in the field in recent months, and their environmental analysis is due to be made public soon.

That document will trigger the start of a 45-day review and comment period, the conclusion of which will find the proposal — including public comments — up for final consideration by local government.

During that review time, the company will hold community workshops at which details will be explained and citizens will be able to ask questions.

It’s a long, delicate process — that will be over before you know it, which means if you have thoughts, pro or con, about oil drilling in Huasna Valley, you’d best get to one of those workshops or to a County Planning Commission meeting and make those opinions known.

If Excelaron wins approval for a conditional-use permit, drilling could begin immediately, and if test wells show positive results, full-scale development would likely begin soon after that.

And that level of oil-drilling activity could continue for the next 30 years.

There is a lot for residents to think about. There is the inevitable increase in local traffic from such a project. There are the effects oil drilling likely will have on property in the immediate vicinity. There are fire, spills and other safety issues. And there would be that clot of industrial activity in the heart of rural Huasna Valley.

All those issues need to be discussed, and local residents need to hear from company officials how the most unpleasant of those things can and would be mitigated.

This is not a decision to be taken lightly or dismissed as insignificant. This is a project that, if approved, could become a part of our community. And although the pro-drilling voices gain new strength every time the price of a gallon of gasoline ramps up, this is one of those purely local decisions that needs careful consideration — and it needs your voice to be heard. You wouldn’t want an important decision to be made without your input, especially when it will be a decision we all must live with for the next three decades.