

Beverly Hills News – Beverly Hills City Council Approves Ordinance to Ban Fracking

Victoria Talbot, Beverly Hills News, 4-23-14

The Beverly Hills City Council approved an ordinance to ban “fracking” Tuesday, making it unlawful to use hydraulic fracturing, acidizing or any other stimulation technique from any surface area in the City. The ordinance also prohibits these activities from any site outside the city limits that would drill and extract oil and gas underneath the City.

About 40 people attended the meeting and spoke in support of the ban. Several people who said they were residents of Carson were fighting to ban fracking and acidizing in their own cities, citing reports of illnesses in University Park that residents blame on fracking. Many appeared on behalf of organized coalitions, such as Food & Water Watch and the Citizens Coalition for a Safe Community.

One person who opposed the ban on fracking was the Director of Regional Affairs for the California Independent Petroleum Association.

Councilman John Mirisch said it was a matter of local control. “In Beverly Hills in many cases people take potshots at us and call us NIMBYs. Well, we control land uses here,” he said. “I don’t think we’re jumping in too early.”

Councilman Willie Brien agreed. “Jumping in too early? Maybe fracking has come too soon. Maybe its the industry that has jumped in too early,” he said.

Vice Mayor Julian Gold said that fracking is not a “compatible land use underneath our homes, schools and businesses.”

Fracking has created more than half a million jobs recovering some 1,000 trillion cubic tons of shale oil in North America alone. Fracking produces natural gas that is readily available and inexpensive, and that is domestically produced. With shale, the United States would not have to depend on foreign oil. There is a wealth of natural gas in shale rock that could last more than 100 years at the current rate of consumption, accordant to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

And natural gas is the cleanest fossil fuel, emitting far lower levels of carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide compared to coal or oil.

The practice of well stimulation treatments has come under increased scrutiny over the past several years. Environmentalists are concerned that fracking produces millions of gallons of wastewater that may contain heavy metals. They say the process potentially contaminates groundwater.

Locally, the cities of Santa Monica, Culver City, and the City of Los Angeles have taken steps to ban the practices. In addition, State Bill SB 4 was signed by California Governor Jerry Brown to regulate fracking by requiring any oil company that wants to utilize hydraulic tracking and/or acidulation to test and monitor groundwater, notify neighbors of tracking activities and disclose the acids used in oil extraction processes. The bill also requires the State Department of Natural Resources to conduct an independent, peer reviewed assessment of fracking. Other bills are in the pipeline to further restrict the practices.

On Jan. 7, 2014, the City's Legislative Committee requested that the City Council consider formally opposing fracking over concerns that there is a lack of stringent federal and state policies that protect against the potential negative impacts of hydraulic fracturing and lack of scientific information on hydraulic fracturing.

"It will probably be one of my proudest votes," said Mayor Lili Bosse. The City Council voted unanimously to support the ordinance.