

MARCELLUS MONTHLY

“All the Fracking
News that Fits”

FEBRUARY 2013

Fracking Our Airports? and Fracking Our County Government?

Photo: A landing at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, where gas well pads are located only 300 yards from runways. County Executive Rich Fitzgerald has not said what restrictions, if any, will apply to drilling pads at Pittsburgh's airport.



MOON TOWNSHIP, PA: A public hearing is set for Thursday, February 7 (6pm) on proposed legislation to approve fracking at the Pittsburgh International Airport (and eventually at the County's general aviation facility in West Mifflin).

At issue in this decision are not only the predictable health and environmental impacts of fracking upon citizens of the County, and the less predictable—but easily imagined—catastrophes that may come from mixing drilling with flight operations. We are also seeing the anti-democratic nature of the political juggernaut which the natural gas industry is driving through our region.

The February 7 meeting is the only public session where citizens will be heard on the matter of fracking the airport(s); and there is no reason to believe that this citizen 'input' will carry any weight in the decision process. Although County Council voted to 'to allow the opportunity for public comment,' only three of the fifteen members of Council have committed to be there. For his part, County Executive Rich Fitzgerald says only that 'If the public can make a good case why we shouldn't drill at the airports, ... I will consider that.' But not be governed by it.

We haven't forgotten Mr. Fitzgerald's well-documented shake-down of the gas industry for donations to his election campaign. Nor, apparently, has he. Most recently, he strong-armed the Board of Health (who, like the Airport Authority, serve at his pleasure) into scrapping air-quality regulations which they had adopted after years of deliberation and expert testimony.

Now, after 'public comment,' Council will vote on an Ordinance which (a) declares Council's '*considered opinion that the public interest of the citizens of Allegheny County would be advanced by ... drilling and other operations,*' and (b) authorizes '*any contractor to conduct drilling and other operations*' and authorizes the County Executive to '*take any and all such actions deemed necessary*' to open the airports to drilling.

Allegheny County Council has conducted no studies, gathered no data, reviewed no detailed plans, nor apparently performed any due diligence whatsoever before coming to such a 'considered opinion' as the proposed ordinance attests. Instead, they will hand *carte blanche* to Mr. Fitzgerald, who has demonstrated no due diligence either. His plan: Frack the airport, no matter what.

[See our [calendar](#) for details on the February 7 meeting. You must register by February 6 if you want to speak.]

Editor's Note: This month's issue has more than our usual number of links to additional information. If you are reading a 'hard copy,' please also check our online edition, where you can click-through to details and sources.

News in Review

PITTSBURGH: If you follow us on Twitter or Facebook, you know that our volunteers send updates to you almost minute-by-minute. In fact, so much is happening that some news can scroll out of sight before you've even seen it. So here are a few of our nominations for 'Stories you wouldn't want to have missed':

The Good:

- Cecil Township **was upheld in court**, when MarkWest sued to allow construction of a compressor station. The court rejected MarkWest's attempt to shift the 'burden of proof' from the company, onto opponents of the proposed plant.
- DOE received **over 200,000 comments** on its economic analysis of Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) exports.
- Dozens of **Shadbush** protestors (some 'locked-down') protected Maggie Henry's farm from Shell's nearby fracking.
- The Maryland House of Delegates will take up a measure to **ban fracking across the state**. Meanwhile, all applications for drilling permits have been withdrawn.
- Members of the New York state assembly **called for a ban** on fracking, after public comment on proposed regulations.

The Bad:

- A **government study** confirms earlier findings that leaking gas from fracking is even greater than previously estimated, more than enough to negate any climate benefit versus coal.

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'Marcellus Protest' is a project of the Thomas Merton Center (Pittsburgh, PA): www.thomasmertoncenter.org

We encourage you to print copies of this newsletter and to distribute it freely. You can download it from our website: www.marcellusprotest.org/news.

Shell we dance?

PITTSBURGH: Last March, to great fanfare, Royal Dutch Shell announced that it had 'selected' Western Pennsylvania as the location for a new ethylene 'cracker' plant. Gov. Tom Corbett took credit for 'winning' the project—finally admitting that he'd obligated taxpayers for more than \$1 billion just to get to the table, while Shell had put up only an undisclosed sum for a one-year 'option' on the site. Mr. Corbett's big 'win' was merely to be Shell's first target, when (and if) it decides to negotiate for real.

[Details in our April, 2012, [newsletter](#).]

Now, with much less news coverage, Shell has given itself six more months to think things over— extending its option agreement with Horsehead Corporation, the current owner of the soon-to-be-vacated site. (No further payment was mentioned; but, with no other buyers in sight, Shell can probably have as much time as it wants, just for the asking.) At about the same time, it announced an upgrade to its Singapore ethylene plant, with a project budget estimated at 'easily hundreds of millions.'

So, with Mr. Corbett's voter-approval ratings in free-fall, should we expect another blast of 'good news' from the Governor in May or June (and a new raid on the Commonwealth treasury) if Shell does decide to give him a call?

Meanwhile, in related news, Shell's Arctic investment continues to founder, with its 'Kulluck' drilling rig broken free of its tow and run aground off of Alaska's coast. This follows the failure of a 'containment cap' during testing in September, and the out-of-control drifting of another drill ship which slipped its mooring in July. Opponents of Arctic drilling have called on the Obama Administration to reconsider its approval of drilling in the region, the most fragile and unforgiving in the U.S.

Contribute to Marcellus Monthly

We welcome submitted articles and letters. Send submissions to news@marcellusprotest.org.

If you would like to volunteer to work on the newsletter, or any of our other activities, please use the [contact page](#) on our website, or email us at volunteer@marcellusprotest.org

Thanks!

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- A 'trade secret' product in fracking fluid is **found to contain a known toxin** linked to kidney and liver damage.
- Health care providers in North Dakota say that fracking in that area is **causing skyrocketing losses** because of injuries to uninsured drilling workers.

The Ugly:

- The EPA admitted that it **canceled an investigation** due to pressure from Range Resources. EPA had compiled evidence to blame Range's drilling for methane in Texas drinking water.
- The Colorado Oil and Gas Association filed legal motions to **forbid public comment** at open hearings, characterizing citizen testimony about the impacts of fracking as 'harassing'.
- Life imitates art: After the gas industry's front group, 'Energy in Depth,' mocked a key plot twist in *Promised Land*, EID's own reporter was **unmasked** as an imposter, posing as an environmental journalist while she interviewed demonstrators at an anti-fracking rally in Washington DC.

A Range of Resources

Some of the publications and presentations that we recommend: (Click the links or see our [Resource page](#).)

DeSmog Blog: This website strives to be 'the world's number one source' to push back against the disinformation campaign of climate-change deniers in industry and politics.

Dory Hippauf: Blogger with a relentless commitment to "Follow the Money." Her "Connect the Dots" series is the definitive "Who's Who" (and "Who's Whose") in the fracking racket.

Follow us on Facebook ([MarcellusProtest](#)) and Twitter ([@Marcellus SWPA](#)).

Upcoming Events in February:

(Full details, with latest updates, and a more extensive list of events, on-line at www.marcellusprotest.org/event_calendar.)

February 7 (Moon Twp, Allegheny County, PA): Public Hearing (7:00 pm). Register in advance to comment on Allegheny County's proposal to lease the Greater Pittsburgh Airport for fracking. (See this issue's lead story, p. 1)

February 16 and 17 (Pittsburgh): Triple Divide: A Pennsylvania Fracking Documentary. Screening at **The Big Idea Bookstore & Café**, Bloomfield (3pm on Feb. 16, 5pm on Feb. 17). See tripledividefilm.org.

February 17 (Washington, DC): Forward on Climate. President's Day rally on the National Mall, sponsored by **350.org**. 'Tell Barack Obama it's time to lead in the fight against climate change, beginning with the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline.'

Updated information on these topics (with links to original sources), along with our calendar of upcoming events, and other resources, can be found at www.marcellusprotest.org.