

Frostburg Vows to Advance Fracking Ban

Written by Kathy Powell

Monday, 24 October 2016 07:19 -

Frostburg Vows to Advance Fracking Ban After Citizens Deliver More than 600 Petitions, Rally Ahead of City Council Meeting

In response to broad public support, city leaders commit to holding a work session to review and move forward on ordinance proffered by Frack-Free Frostburg



FROSTBURG, Md. — More than 130 city residents, business owners, students, faith leaders and health professionals rallied this evening in Frostburg and testified before the City Council to show the broad citizen support for introducing and passing a city ordinance to ban fracking. In response, city leaders committed to moving forward on action.

The citizen-led group Frack-Free Frostburg delivered more than 600 petitions signed by residents and a letter signed by 24 local businesses at tonight's City Council meeting, urging councilmembers to "get on the ban wagon" with their constituents. Citizens rallied across the street ahead of the council meeting with an actual wagon and a 13-foot-long banner reading,

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"Frostburg: Get on the Ban Wagon." (View photos by [clicking here](#) .)

At the Council Meeting, which attracted nearly 200 people, Frostburg Mayor Robert Flanigan recommended a process of extensive review in order to move forward an ordinance to prohibit fracking. The Mayor then proposed a public session with the Council and a small group from Frack-Free Frostburg.

"The call to ban fracking has inspired a new level of citizen engagement in Frostburg," said Nina Forsythe, a city resident and founding member of Frack-Free Frostburg. "People from all walks of life and every political stripe, students and life-time residents alike, are coming together to protect our water, health and welfare. In fact, more people have signed petitions in support of banning fracking than voted in the last city election."

The current draft of the proposed city ordinance would prohibit exploration or drilling for gas, the storage and disposal of fracking waste products, and withdrawals of water for the purposes of fracking within the city of Frostburg and city-owned land. Frostburg residents began organizing for a fracking ban this past summer, with the aim of putting local protections in place well before Maryland's current two-year moratorium on drilling expires in October, 2017.

The city's current zoning laws do not explicitly protect residents from fracking, particularly in districts zoned for technology and light industrial activity. They also allow for special exemptions that could leave the door open to fracking in other districts.

After over an hour of public comment, Mayor Flanigan acknowledged the strong public sentiment, saying he wanted everyone to know that "we care too." He promised that the Council would make the necessary changes to the ordinance to make it right, because "we are a green community here."

Former Maryland Senator and past Mayor of Frostburg John Bambacus spoke at the rally, and again at the City Council meeting. He told the Mayor and City Council that the prospect of fracking was "absolutely the most important issue facing this city in the 50 years I've lived here. I think you're doing the right thing getting things started."

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“The time to protect our clean water and health is now, before any dangerous drilling is allowed anywhere near Frostburg,” said Ann Bristow, PhD, a retired FSU professor who served on the state’s Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission. “Dozens of peer-reviewed studies and the experience of our neighbors in Pennsylvania show that fracking is inherently risky, and that state regulations are not capable of preventing harm. The City of Frostburg must be proactive, as it has been in addressing other important issues, and ban fracking now.”

Fracking is a dangerous gas drilling practice known to pollute air and water, diminish property values, degrade rural landscapes, and cause serious health problems. Unless local and state leaders take action to ban fracking, industrial drilling operations could begin in Western Maryland soon after October 2017.

The Western Maryland towns of Friendsville and Mountain Lake Park have already passed laws to ban fracking — in 2016 and 2011 respectively. Several other Maryland counties — including highly-populated Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties — have also enacted bans against fracking or put forward resolutions in favor of a statewide ban.