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Village decides not to sell water to gas driller

By JIM AUSTIN

Cooperstown Crier

The board of trustees decided Monday night it would not sell 300,000 gallons of water to be used in exploratory gas well drilling. The water board last week recommended the trustee go ahead with the sale of water after the village was approached by a company subcontracted by Covalent Energy to provide the water for wells it plans to drill in the towns of Cherry Valley and Maryland.

Covalent now plans to get its water from the city of Cortland. ``It's really about our role as stewards of the lake," said Trustee Neil Weiller. ``My big problem is if we start selling water how you say no."

Deputy Mayor Jeff Katz said that the issue is not just the sale of the water.

“How it is used is a legitimate reason to deny,” he said.

“Whether we do it or not, they’re going to do it,” Trustee Grace Kull commented. “As a steward of the lake, I’d rather not see the water used that way.”

“Personally,” said Trustee Lynne Mebust, “I don’t see an upside for the village.”

But Trustee Eric Hage was in favor of making the sale.

“I believe we should make the sale. I don’t believe in symbolic votes,” he said, adding that it would require thousands of miles of trucking to get the water from another source. “I don’t think it enables them or sets a precedent.”

Hage and Mayor Carol Waller were the only two to vote in favor of selling the water.

Prior to taking the vote, the board listened to comments from the public, which were largely against the sale of water.

Martha Clarvoe, President of the Otsego County Conservation Association, said her organization believes there is sufficient reason for concern about the long-term consequences of gas drilling and urged the board to take a precautionary role and not approve the sale.

Bowerstown resident Paula Di Perna said there are too many uncertainties with gas drilling and the risks are not worth the costs.

Groundwater, she said, can't be cleaned up once it is contaminated.

“If gas was ever found under Otsego Lake, I would put myself in front of the drill,” Di Perna told the trustees.

Fly Creek resident Adrian Kuzminski, representing Sustainable Otsego, said the situation doesn't seem to offer many benefits and called the village the only line of defense.

“Say no to what seems to be a very marginal offer,” he

said.

Former Mayor Wendell Tripp told the board the village is not in the water business and that the water department is a public utility.

“This is not a retail business,”

he said. “I emphasize that you are not retailers, you are public officials.”

Village resident and Water Quality Coordinating

Committee member Carl

Good said he was concerned about the impact of additional truck traffic on village streets, which are already not in great shape.

Long-time Water Board

member Dr. Theordore Peters

said that gas drilling is not the issue. “This is not going to stop gas drilling. I

would let them get their initial water here. I feel we can address the traffic,” he said.

Following their decision, the trustees also voted

against a proposed water
sale policy from the Water
Board.

Weiller, a member of the
water board, said he now recognizes
there is more that
needs to be considered in formulating
a policy governing
the sale of water.

“It’s more than just rates,”
he said.