

13-G-18

Councilmember Wojahn

I move to approve the attached letter in favor in HB 337, a bill which would ban hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) in the State of Maryland, and a similar letter for the cross-filed bill, SB 514.

DISCUSSION:

The letter identifies the major issues with fracking and requests the Environmental Matters Committee to vote favorably upon HB 337. The major fracking issues identified in the letter include the following:

- Water contamination of both surface and below ground water supplies
- Air pollution which travels far beyond the initial drilling areas
- Use of millions of gallons of water and then difficulty with disposing of the wastewater
- Big oil and gas companies doing serious lobbying efforts to continue to keep fracking exempt from any regulation, thus banning the practice all together is the only way to protect our community and the state as a whole.
- The potential for all fracking problems to travel between Western Maryland and the rest of the State if a natural gas exporting facility is opened at Cove Point. This would also cause increased stress on our roadways with regular heavy truck traffic.

The House Environmental Matters Committee will hold a hearing on this bill on March 8, 2013 at 1PM in Annapolis. The Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs and Finance Committees will hold a hearing on this bill on February 26, 2013 at 1PM in Annapolis.

February 12, 2013

Senator Joan Carter Conway, Chair
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Building
1 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senator Thomas M. Middleton, Chair
Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Building
1 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 514 - Natural Gas - Hydraulic Fracturing - Prohibition

Dear Chairwoman Conway, Chairman Middleton and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs and Finance Committees:

The City of College Park requests your support of SB 514, legislation which would ban hydraulic fracturing in the State of Maryland.

Hydraulic fracturing, known as fracking, is the process of injecting fluid – typically a mixture of water, sand, and chemicals – under high pressure into rock formations to crack the rock and release natural gas. Fracking has been around for decades, but the fracking now being used to extract “unconventional” oil and gas reserves is much more intensive and risky than conventional oil and gas drilling. The rapid expansion of this new form of fracking has brought rampant environmental, public health, and economic problems to communities all over the country.

Accidents, spills, and leaks are polluting water supplies, both at the surface and below ground. So far, hundreds of cases of water contamination have been reported across the country. In December 2011, for instance, the EPA announced that water contamination near fracking sites in Wyoming was likely a result of fracking. The study found that benzene, a carcinogen, has contaminated an aquifer, likely having seeped from drilling and fracking waste pits. The risk of groundwater contamination from fracking continues years after the oil and gas industry has left town.

Regions peppered with drilling rigs have high levels of air pollution. Volatile organic compounds, including benzene and toluene, are harmful to human health and are emitted into the air during fracking operations. These compounds mix with emissions from heavy-duty truck traffic, large generators and compressors at well sites to form ground-level ozone,

which can travel up to 200 miles and combine with particulate matter to form smog. Exposure to smog has been linked to various cancers, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and premature deaths in adults and to asthma, premature birth, and cognitive deficits in children.

Each new fracked well needs millions of gallons of water to break rock formations that then resurfaces as wastewater with potentially extreme levels of harmful contaminants, including benzene, pesticides, radioactive material, and toxic metals. Disposing of this wastewater is becoming a big problem. Disposal by underground injection has led to numerous earthquakes in Ohio and Arkansas. Municipal and industrial treatment facilities are not equipped to treat the contaminants in fracking wastewater, so contaminants like salts and radioactive material are simply discharged into waterways. The Chesapeake Bay currently suffers from enough pollution; we should not add fracking wastewater to the mix.

Lastly, the impacts of fracking go beyond the initial fracking sites. Here in College Park, we could see water contamination, increased air pollution, and expansion of natural gas infrastructure. Our water comes from the Potomac and Patuxent rivers. The headwaters of the Potomac are in Western Maryland, where gas companies already have land leased for fracking. Fracking wastewater ponds have been known to leak or overflow into surface waters and truck spills of wastewater are very common. Air pollution from the fracking process and significant truck traffic could travel here from Western Maryland, just as coal pollution has traveled here from the west. We could expect to see increased natural gas infrastructure built in and around the area, especially if Cove Point becomes a liquefied natural gas export facility. If fracking expands to areas outside of the Marcellus Shale, fracking could hit even closer to home.

Since big oil and gas companies have collaborated to tear down environmental protections and push dirty fracking into communities across the country, hydraulic fracturing is exempt from the majority of Federal environmental regulations, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act (Toxic Releases Inventory), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act ("Superfund"). Fracking for shale gas is inherently unsafe. No amount of regulation can eliminate the serious risks and costs that accompany the practice. Thus, Maryland legislation to ban fracking is the only way to fully protect our communities and essential resources.

We ask for your favorable support of SB 514.

Sincerely,

Andrew M. Fellows, Mayor

cc: 21st Delegation
Senator Karen Montgomery, Sponsor