



Pinellas County

Staff Report

File #: 16-742A, Version: 1

Subject:

Authority to advertise a public hearing to be held on June 7, 2016, regarding a proposed ordinance amending County Code Chapter 58 (Environment) by adding Article XIV (Oil and Gas Well Stimulation), which provides for a countywide ban on oil and gas well stimulation, including but not limited to acid fracturing, hydraulic fracturing, and matrix acidizing.

Recommended Action:

Authorize a public hearing to be held on June 7, 2016, regarding a proposed ordinance amending Pinellas County Code Chapter 58 ("Environment") by adding Article XIV ("Oil and Gas Well Stimulation"), which provides for a countywide ban on Oil and Gas Well Stimulation, including but not limited to Acid Fracturing, Hydraulic Fracturing, and Matrix Acidizing.

Strategic Plan:

Ensure Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

2.1 Provide planning, coordination, prevention, and protective services to ensure a safe and secure community

Practice Superior Environmental Stewardship

3.3 Protect and improve the quality of our water, air, and other natural resources

Deliver First Class Services to the Public and Our Customers

5.2 Be responsible stewards of the public's resources

Summary:

In February 2016, the Board of County Commissioners directed the County Attorney's Office to draft an ordinance banning oil and gas production activities commonly referred to as "fracking." Fracking, or "well stimulation" as referred to in the proposed ordinance, is a method of resource extraction by which fluid is injected into an oil or gas well to fracture the subsurface rock. Another form of well stimulation whereby acid dissolves the rock, known as "matrix acidizing," is also banned under the proposed ordinance.

Fracking can adversely impact the environment in numerous ways, including but not limited to, ground and surface water contamination, hazardous substance release, and air pollution. It can also create a social nuisance in the surrounding community (e.g., noise, traffic concerns).

Background Information:

Despite its growing popularity across the Country, fracking is not common in Florida. It caught the public's attention after a highly-publicized 2014 incident where the local residents and State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) discovered a fracking operation in Collier County. The Florida Legislature responded by proposing a series of bills seeking to regulate the activity. A 2016 bill that would have preempted local governments from regulating fracking with narrow exceptions passed the Florida House, but did not make it through the committee process in the Senate. Wary of state preemption, Brevard, Broward, Volusia, Seminole, and Wakulla counties all adopted ordinances banning fracking. Moreover, approximately 75 Florida counties and cities combined have passed resolutions generally opposing the activity.

DEP records indicate that four oil and gas well sites were permitted in upland Pinellas County between 1948 and 1958. No oil or gas was found at any of the four sites, however, and apparently no oil or gas well sites have been permitted in the County since that time. Accordingly, the County possesses no records suggesting that any oil or gas extraction, including fracking, has ever occurred in Pinellas County.

Fiscal Impact:

N/A

Staff Member Responsible:

James L. Bennett, County Attorney

Brendan P. Mackesey, Assistant County Attorney

Partners:

N/A

Attachments:

Proposed ordinance.