

LOCAL

OBSERVER-REPORTER WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2010

Finding a balance

Cecil first to OK comprehensive oil and gas drilling ordinance

BY BRAD HUNDT
Staff writer

bhundert@observer-reporter.com

CECIL – Cecil Township became the first municipality in Washington County to approve a comprehensive oil and gas drilling ordinance Monday night, ending eight months of deliberation and revisions.

Before approving the ordinance, supervisors went through it page by page, making changes in wording that reflected both their concerns and those of residents.

“We spent a lot of time and a lot of money trying to make a balance,” according to Supervisor Mike Debbis. The ordinance covers such issues as noise and the role of the community’s police and fire personnel in case of an accident at a drilling site.

The commonwealth’s Department of Environmental Protection “knows us personally,” Debbis added. “They appreciate what we’re trying to do here. This industry’s good for us.”

Washington County has become a hot spot for drillers in the last couple of years, as they tap the natural gas-rich Marcellus Shale. Other communities, including North Franklin and Mt. Pleasant townships, have similar ordinances in the works.

The ordinance allows drilling in all the township’s zoning districts. But it

“WE SPENT A LOT OF TIME AND A LOT OF MONEY TRYING TO MAKE A BALANCE. THEY APPRECIATE WHAT WE’RE TRYING TO DO HERE. THIS INDUSTRY’S GOOD FOR US.”

**MIKE DEBBIS,
CECIL TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR**

also asks drillers to put up safety fencing that’s at least six feet high at sites where they’re working, install warning signs, put sound walls in place to minimize noise for nearby residents, and provide security guards around-the-clock when hydraulic fracturing equipment or a drilling rig are at a well site, among other requirements.

In a lengthy public hearing that preceded the vote, some residents expressed concern about noise, truck traffic and possible water contamination.

“If you don’t want them to drill, this ordinance isn’t for you,” said John Smith, the township’s solicitor. “We’re trying to make both sides happy.”

Smith also noted that Pennsylvania already has regulations in place regarding oil and gas drilling, and “we’re trying to fill in the gaps.”