

How to Work With Local Government to Protect Your Community from Fracking

Several local governments in North Carolina have chosen to pass ordinances or resolutions that either prohibit fracking or place a moratorium or just express their opposition. Though the state legislature limited the power of local ordinances in Senate Bill 786, the passing of resolutions and especially enforceable ordinances sends a strong message about how a local jurisdiction will respond to fracking. With a thoughtful right approach, the process of approaching local officials can be quite empowering.

- Know what you're talking about. You don't need to know "everything", but you do need to hone in on what you think will be the most important consequences of fracking and explain them to your elected officials. Topics to pay particular attention to are infrastructure (roads, water supplies, etc) and county services such as emergency response. The more you can tailor your argument to specific local needs and concerns, the better response you'll get.
- Do your homework and figure out which of your board members are most likely to be sympathetic and make an appointment to meet with them. Elected officials are required to abide by open meeting laws, so they are often most open to discussing things "off line" in ones or twos (the "quorum" number varies depending on the size of the board). Offer the officials confidentiality as your contact with them begins, so that they have political "cover" while they consider whether or not to act and talk to their peers.
- Encourage the elected officials to invite along key staff members who they know to be sympathetic. These are professionals whose job it is to know how policy choices would affect the local government. This will help you get a deeper understanding of the potential consequences of passing an ordinance for your community and local government.
- These initial meetings will help you gauge your likelihood of success in a public vote on an ordinance. This usually requires more than one meeting-- one to give them background and make your case, then another after they've had a chance to think about it more and ask other council member or staff to join the discussion. Be patient.
- Tap in to what makes your town/county unique. Most local elected officials are there because they have a genuine interest in serving their community and a desire to make their town/county a better place to live. It is typically easier to find common ground in discussions about local issues than state policies, because things are rarely framed in ideological terms for local policies.
- Talk about fairness. Local officials want to avoid appearing to favor one group or part of the community over another. Fracking and similar heavy industries most frequently have negative impacts on rural areas, low income communities, and communities of color. Get your elected officials to think about whether it is fair that these groups suffer the ill effects of an industry that will primarily serve to make wealthy landowners, contractors and out of state corporations even richer. Fracking in North Carolina would also infringe on landowner rights through "forced pooling" which should be emphasized as a fairness issue.

- It's critical to think about infrastructure and county social and emergency services. Some of the primary responsibilities of local government include public safety, building and maintaining local roads and often, providing water. Fracking has big implications for each of these areas, so they are more likely to catch the attention of local government elected officials and staff than simple environmental arguments. [SEE TEXT BOX BELOW]
- Understand the culture of your area. Who lives there? How will your proposal look to them? How will different reactions affect officials you are asking to help pass a proposed ordinance?
- What is the "mission" of your town/county? Not every town or county has a written mission, but many do. Talk about how fracking support or violates that mission.
- Don't just show up at a public meeting and spring a proposal for a resolution or ordinance that the board and staff haven't heard about. This could greatly reduce your chances of success. Officials feel more secure and cooperative if they're informed BEFORE a controversial issue comes up.
- There is strength in numbers! Alert other concerned community members, form a local group if there isn't one already, ask them to attend meetings with you.
- Educate yourself about rules and process. Staff and elected officials are generally happy to help you understand how things work – that is part of their job! Having that knowledge will demystify the process for you, and increase your credibility with public officials.
- A simple majority is all that's required to pass an ordinance. There was a period when a unanimous vote was required, but that expired long ago. Obviously, the stronger your vote, the greater support your ordinance will have to be enforced.
- Contact FrackFreeNC, an alliance of more than 30 groups working to prevent fracking in NC, to get contact info for a group close to your area. Email info@cwfn.org.

Fracking: Water Use and Infrastructure Impacts Cost Local Governments a LOT

California has been mired in a historic drought, with surface reservoirs and underground aquifers reaching historic lows. As if that were not bad enough, it was discovered last October that 3 billion gallons of fracking wastewater have contaminated Central California aquifers through "injection wells" used for waste. (San Diego Free Press, October 15, 2014)

Pro-fracking advocates frequently cite "severance" taxes as a boon to local economies and a way to pay for infrastructure wear and tear. Unfortunately, extraction taxes are far from enough to cover the damage. "In 2012, the State of Texas took in approximately \$3.6B in severance taxes from all oil and gas produced in the state....TxDOT estimated that the damage to Texas roads from drilling operations now totals \$4B" (Deborah Rogers, "Externalities of Shale: Road Damage"). **Local governments in NC are prohibited from taxing fracking companies, and there is no provision in state law to set aside funds from state severance taxes to help localities pay for infrastructure costs.**