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County Dems call for ban on fracking waste

Officials await DEC decision on gas drilling

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Democrats in the Monroe County Legislature unveiled a resolution Friday that would temporarily ban the county from accepting and treating wastewater from natural gas hydraulic fracturing, more commonly known as hydrofracking.

A spokesman for the administration of County Executive Maggie Brooks told the news media in July that the county would not rule out the possibility of treating gas-drilling wastewater at its sewage plants without first considering any proposals that may be forthcoming. The spokesman, Justin Feasel, confirmed the policy on Friday and said that the county has not been approached to treat wastewater.

The resolution comes at a politically sensitive time for Brooks, who is running for Congress, and

when anything related to gas drilling is assuming a sense of urgency in New York. State officials are weighing whether a wave of new wells will be drilled in the gas-rich Marcellus Shale, a prospect that has been welcomed by some as a potential economic boon and derided by others as a recipe for an environmental disaster.

Opponents have pressed local governments across the state to ban hydrofracking and related activities, including disposal of the wastewater, which has been found to be tainted with chemicals and very salty.

Several municipalities, including Onondaga County and the cities of Niagara Falls and Albany, have resolved to not treat wastewater from the industry.

In announcing the resolution, Legislator Justin Wilcox, D-Brighton, complained that he had yet to receive a response to a letter he

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wrote the Brooks administration six months ago asking for clarification on its policy for accepting and treating wastewater.

Wilcox said placing a

moratorium on treating the wastewater was necessary because "the public health risks remain unclear."

Responding to the call for a ban, Feasel suggested talk about treatment was premature.

"It is important to note that the county cannot ac-

tively engage in discussions to treat wastewater until Gov. (Andrew) Cuomo and the (state) Department of Environmental Conservation set the state's regulations," Feasel said. "Monroe County is following the lead of Gov. Cuomo as he and his staff exercise due dili-

gence by studying the impact of hydrofracking in New York state."

The resolution has been submitted to Legislature President Jeff Adair for assignment to committee.

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