

Auburn gas well water debate continues

[Christopher Caskey The Citizen](#) | Posted: Friday, June 10, 2011 3:05 am

AUBURN – The debate over natural gas well water at the city sewage plant continued as residents, city officials and the natural gas industry sounded off on the issue.

Multiple industry professionals discussed the drilling, permitting and testing process during Thursday’s city council meeting, asking councilors to consider what they said is all the data before deciding whether to stop processing well water at the plant.

At the same meeting, area residents continued asking the city to stop taking the water, which they say is an environmental hazard.

Industry representatives included Richard Nyahay and Chris Rowe, of gas firms Gastem and Anschutz, and Ben Haith, of consultant Palmerton Group.

All three answered questions from members of the city council about the contents of the water and the plant’s ability to process it, and Nyahay gave a lengthy presentation on the testing carried out by gas firms.

The discussion covered a lot of ground, but their overall message was that while the water does contain contaminants, high salt levels and some carcinogens, the federal regulators deemed the Auburn plant capable of removing many of the substances while safely diluting the rest.

Rowe said he believes the industry needs to do more vigorous studies on gas exploration and its effects. But Haith said he believes there are numbers and facts that are currently missing from the debate.

“What I urge you to do is don’t rush into making a decision on emotion,” Haith said.

More than a dozen members of the public implored the council not to take the word of the industry and continued to call for a halt to accepting the water.

Walter Hang, an Ithaca resident who runs a website that identifies environmental hazards, told council members the water is “highly contaminated” with salts, hydrocarbons and radioactive materials.

In many cases, especially with the chlorides, they go right through the plant and into the Owasco River, he said.

“You’re simply exacerbating the long-standing water quality issues in the Owasco Outlet,” he said.

Auburn’s Terry Cuddy, of the Cayuga Anti-Fracking Alliance, said he believes residents against the current policy have not been given a formal platform to voice concerns.

“We still feel we are falling on deaf ears,” Cuddy said.

The city allows up to 80,000 gallons of natural gas well water a day at the plant, which process an average of 8 million gallons of water a day.

A rally at city hall last week protested the policy, as participants said the water poses an environmental hazard.