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Review reveals Schlumberger project comes with environmental risks

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HORSEHEADS -- Village officials acknowledged Wednesday what Horseheads residents have suspected all along -- that a proposed Schlumberger Technology Corp. project has the potential for adverse environmental impact.

The Board of Trustees conducted the first phase of a long-anticipated State Environmental Quality Review process Wednesday afternoon on Schlumberger's proposal to locate a natural gas drilling services facility in The Center at Horseheads industrial park.

By going through a required checklist, trustees agreed there was the potential for major impact on surface water or ground water quality, drainage, air quality, non-threatened wildlife species and public health and safety.

Consultant Ron Sherman of MRB Group, who is working for the village, pointed out in each case there was only the potential for serious impact, particularly during the construction phase, and that solutions are available for each issue identified.

That will be the subject of the next phase of the review, which will involve a more specific discussion of each identified issue and possible remedies.

The board scheduled that meeting for Oct. 6, and the real work will take place at that time, said Mayor Don Zeigler.

"The next step will be to talk about mitigating response, whether it's wildlife habitat or water runoff. Is it a potential problem and how can they find ways to mitigate the problem," Zeigler said. "That's when we will talk about what we learned about traffic, and how many trucks are really coming in and out a day. We have details and we have facts.



JEFF RICHARDS / Staff Photo

Area residents attend the Horseheads Village meeting Wednesday where trustees discussed the possible environmental impact of the Schlumberger project.

"These are facts people want to hear, and it will all be on the table next Tuesday," Zeigler said. "We're constantly learning. Each board member has questions they will ask."

Residents who attended were not allowed to comment at Wednesday's meeting, but trustees will hold another public hearing on Schlumberger site plans Oct. 8. Officials will solicit comments from residents at that time.

Depending on the outcome of the Oct. 6 review, the village could require Schlumberger to prepare a more extensive environmental impact statement.

The main concern Zeigler said he has heard from residents involves drilling, which is not an issue because there will be no drilling on site.

But Zeigler said there are legitimate concerns and, even though the company promises 400 new jobs, the board will not just rubberstamp the Schlumberger project.

Schlumberger plans to store chemicals used in the natural gas drilling process on site, along with some explosives and small amounts of radioactive materials at the proposed location.

"My top concern is groundwater and runoff. I've done a ton of educating," Zeigler said. "There's also traffic and future expansion. What else is coming in? It's an old industrial site in an old village and they are trying to do a modern project. There are many things I'm looking at. If it does work out, a lot of good things can happen."



Walter Herbst, Horseheads Village trustee, discusses one of the questions on the State Environmental Quality Review sheet during the meeting Wednesday afternoon. Seated at left is Ron Sherman, the village's consultant.

WHAT'S NEXT

* Horseheads trustees will conduct the second phase of a state environmental quality review of the Schlumberger project at 5:30 p.m. Oct. 6 at the Horseheads Village Hall, 202 S. Main St.

* Trustees will hold a public hearing on Schlumberger's site plans at 7:05 p.m. Oct. 8, also at the Village Hall.

* For more information, call the village manager's office at (607) 739-5666.