

Horseheads Holds Second Public Hearing on Schlumberger Project

by Sue Smith-Heavenrich

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More than 100 people showed up at the Horseheads High School on Wednesday, September 9 to comment on the Schlumberger project at Horseheads Center. The public hearing lasted nearly three hours. Construction workers, Schlumberger employees and Chamber of Commerce members indicated a desire to get the project moving. Others, including parents, teachers, health professionals and scientists suggested caution, requesting that the village require a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Kevin Keeley, from the Chemung Chamber of Commerce, said that he “embraces Schlumberger” and looks forward to the “world class jobs” the company will bring to the area. However, one local farmer asked how the \$12 - \$14/hour jobs could generate the \$50,000 incomes under discussion. She noted that the jobs required long hours under dangerous conditions.

Several contractors expressed their hopes for receiving construction contracts to build the facility. Mike Hosey, president of Elmira Savings Bank, said that Horseheads needed to welcome Schlumberger and move the project forward with all speed. Local car dealer Don Ferrario agreed that the Center at Horseheads was the right location for the facility.

One resident expressed concern that Schlumberger was a short-term opportunity, limited to the time natural gas reserves are being extracted, and asked why the board was not taking a hard look at the project. She had heard from village officials that the building proposal was “already a done deal.”

Many people said they wanted Horseheads Village to require a full EIS. A review is not a vote against the project, they explained, but simply recognition of the large scale of the project and the potential for long-lasting environmental damage.

A nurse from Spencer asked the board to consider the long-term health effects that breathing diesel fumes would have on the children at the elementary school located across the street from the site. She warned that many environmental health effects take decades to appear. Her concerns were echoed by a mother who explained that the prevailing winds blow from the site towards her child’s school. She added that children use the recreation fields located adjacent to the Schlumberger site.

Three people who grew up in the Love Canal community agreed, adding their warnings about long-term dangers of chemical exposure. One resident suggested that some of the risks from chemical exposure could be limited if Schlumberger limited their storage and transport of chemicals to the “green” fracking chemicals they use in environmentally sensitive regions. Many people expressed concern over surface spills and potential contamination of the shallow aquifer that supplies drinking water to the area.

Schlumberger presented the village board with more than 1,000 pages of revised Environmental Assessment Report and a revised Stormwater Protection immediately prior to the public hearing. The documents are on file in the village hall, and are also on CD for those who would like to access them by computer. Residents may borrow a CD for 4-days but must leave a refundable deposit of \$50.

The next step for Horseheads Village is to meet with the Horseheads Planning Board; that meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 23 at 5:30 in the village hall. The meeting is open to the public but no comments will be taken at that time. Instead, people are asked to submit their comments no later noon on Monday, September 21. Mail comments to: Mayor Donald Zeigler and Board of Trustees, Village of Horseheads, 202 S. Main Street, Horseheads, NY 14845.

Helen Slottje, one of Broader View Weekly's citizen reporters, contributed to this article.