

Town passes moratorium on renewable natural gas systems

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MALONE — Town council voted to pass a local law imposing a moratorium on the installation of renewable natural gas systems during a meeting Wednesday evening.

Town Supervisor Andrea M. Stewart said the town code enforcement officer has been dealing with a proposed installation for this type of project on County Route 51.

“It is something that there are no town codes for at this point in time,” Stewart said. “We have been discussing it with our code and legal teams trying to figure out what is pertinent in both the state and fire safety codes, as well as what we need to come up with to fit our community. It is going to require a little bit more research than we currently have time for.”

Stewart said the moratorium will give the town time to amend the current zoning ordinance to allow for these types of projects while meeting the objectives of town code.

“To give us enough time, the discussion, centered on a moratorium on that type of project, in order to give us time to research and draft local regulations,” she said, “The only way to have a moratorium is to have a local law.”

During the moratorium the town will establish a plan for well-sited renewable natural gas projects, according to Stewart.

“We have a company in Malone that is looking to tap into the Liberty Gas utility line, with a methane producing digester,” she said. “We want to make sure it is safe, whether it is that or another, it’s a commercial venture and we have to treat it as such, but we don’t have any regulations in place to do that.”

The local law establishes a 12-month moratorium on the acceptance of applications for building permits for renewable natural gas systems, amending the town code to provide for such a moratorium, according to town documents.

The town board may, by way of an additional local law, extend the moratorium for a period not to exceed six months, according to town documents.

Councilman Terrence C. Maguire said that by passing the moratorium the board wasn’t opposing renewable natural gas systems.

“We aren’t against this we just need some more time to make sure we do it and do it right,” Maguire said.

Town council also voted on a resolution to refer the proposed local law to the planning board for its report and recommendation.

Councilman Brian Taylor asked if other municipalities had passed similar moratoriums that the town could use as a model for their own moving forward.

According to Mike McMahon, town code enforcement officer, the Lewis County town of Lowville has passed a similar moratorium.

“It all depends on the community, whether they have zoning laws or not,” Stewart said. “We have zoning in place so we have to add this to that.”

An additional resolution passed by the town board determined the proposed local law is subject to the State Environmental Quality Review Act and is classified as a type one action under SEQRA, with the town to act as lead agency during this review.

Through this resolution a public hearing will be held on the proposed local law and the hearing is scheduled for 6 p.m. April 19.

Stewart said the town will prepare a full environmental assessment form.

A final resolution related to the proposed local law was passed by the town board directing the proposed moratorium to the Franklin County Planning Agency, for a report and recommendation on the proposal.