

Rosebud residents search

Patrick Kolafa
The Drumheller Mail

Residents of Rosebud and area are beginning to find common ground with each other, and the energy companies drilling in the region.

Recently, developments in coal bed methane exploration have raised the concerns of some residents in the hamlet. EnCana and Bounty Developments have been working in the area.

Earlier this fall Bounty began to drill near the hamlet. Protests from impacted residents stopped this particular well from being drilled.

Linde Turner was one of the affected residents. The drilling could have possibly affected her water well. Since then, efforts by the community and the company have resulted in progress for both parties.

Turner says that once Bounty identified a problem, the company was very accommodating. There was a public meeting on November 16 and since then an agreement has been reached.

EnCana has been exploring in the area for many years. Luigi Vescarelli, community relations for EnCana explained that the company has about 200 wells in the area. The company has had down spacing approval for much of the region. There was a

small portion that EnCana was planning to submit an application for. The company's plan was to drill into another (Belly River) gas zone through existing wells. During the public consultation residents reacted to EnCana.

He said that normally EnCana would have posted this type of announcement in the local papers to consult the public. Vescarelli said in order to expedite the process, and because of the small area involved, they opted to consult landowners on a one-on-one basis.

"Because of the concern there, we decided not to proceed with it," said Vescarelli. "That (the application) has not been proposed to the AEUB (Alberta Energy Utilities Board) yet, we may proceed with it down the road, but that application has not been submitted."

EnCana hosted an open house on October 21. Many residents expressed their concerns with the development.

One of the major concerns is safety. Turner said that a resident has been hit by one of the vehicles as it passed through the hamlet, and there have also been some near misses. The noise of the extra traffic is also a concern.

Vescarelli said to help deal with the traffic, the company has posted signage and moni-

tored traffic.

Another concern raised was the noise generated by the added compressor stations that are needed to extract the methane, and their impact on the esthetics of the valley.

"If the compressor stations are close to the valley wall here in Rosebud, then the whole valley acts as an amphitheatre and will echo those noises throughout the whole valley.

It is distracting for the tourists and the people living in the valley," said long time resident LaVerne Erickson.

"A number of people have moved here to get away from the noise of the city, and then they hear

industrial noise all of the time."

Vescarelli says that the company has retained a third party to monitor the noise levels, and to make sure they remain below EUB noise limits.

Resident Jessica Ernst knows the problems with noise. One of the reasons she settled in the Rosebud Area was the quiet. One of her neighbours has a compressor on their land that she would like to see something done with. She says she is seeing a little more cooperation in the community, but there is still a long way to go. The most agreeable parties in town are also the ones that are least affected by the development.

"I think a lot of people in the community would prefer to work with EnCana—I would prefer that too. They have a long way to go before I can trust them again," said Ernst.

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acting for residents and the living quality," said resident Erickson. Number of complaints have increased to get from the city, they hear

noise all of the time." Eli says that the companies have obtained a third party to monitor the noise levels, and to ensure they remain below the limits.

But Jessica Ernst knows firsthand the problems with noise. One of the reasons she settled in the Rosebud Area was the quiet. Her neighbours have a problem on their land that she would like to see something about. She says she is seeking more cooperation in the community, but there is still a way to go. The most vocal parties in town are the ones that are least affected by the development.

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the area feel that they have not been dealt with honestly. She said that in many of the meetings it was said that coal bed methane exploration was still coming, but in some instances exploration is already going on.

"Honesty is so important," she said.

Like in most of Alberta, water is a vital concern for communities. Chris Gerritsen of

Gerritsen Drilling, a company that drills water wells, is familiar with the Rosebud and Redland area. He says that residents do have a reason to be

concerned with their water.

"There have been some problems out there (in the Rosebud/Redland area) and they arose not from any activities that we have been doing, but from working with these methane coal beds, especially with the well stimulation process," said Gerritsen.

He explained that to facilitate the extraction of methane from coal beds, a process to fracture the seam to release gas takes place. The problem is that some of the aquifers used by farmers for water are in the coal seams.

"A lot of water comes from coal, and when they have been doing these shallow coal bed methane projects, there has been some fracturing in water producing zones."

He explained that high pressure nitrogen is used in the frac-

had increased sediment following the fracturing of the coal bed. He has also seen a rise in nitrogen levels.

"The people at Rosebud have gotten excited, and for a good reason too, because when they go to these meetings, they don't get all of the information," said Gerritsen.

"They are so close to the water that we all need, that's the problem—They're shooting bullets too close to our water tank."

He says that the people in Rosebud have begun to educate themselves on the issues, which is very important.

Some of the land owners in the area are put off, not by the developments that are coming, but with the delay. Terry Burke has land holdings in the area. He says that as a landowner, his voice has not been heard.

"No one has ever thought to ask what the local landowners want done. These people have aspirations that they want to protect the valley, but who do you think has been looking after the valley for the last 100 years?" he said.

He said that any concerns he has had, have been dealt with by the exploration companies.

"I feel very comfortable with what these companies are doing," said Burke, adding that the delay may end up costing

contractors' jobs.

Erickson says there is a way to balance the concerns of the residents of Rosebud, the landowners and the exploration companies, and this process is already happening. A group called the Rosebud Community Enhancement Society has been working in the background to strike a balance.

"Instead of being confrontational with EnCana, the board of that society has sat down with EnCana to see how we can bridge that gap," he said.

He says while there are many concerns in the community that have concerns, it is not the majority.

"People have specific concerns and there will always be those, but it is not a community wide problem by any means," said Erickson.

The Wheatland Surface Rights Surface Action Group (WSRAG) is seeing more membership due to the concerns of the hamlet.

"It's had a positive effect, in that landowners are starting to realize they had better be educated," said Norma Lafonte of WSRAG. "Our hope is that this will happen because it will benefit the community, the landowners and the energy companies if there is a more level playing field, and education does that."

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