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West Bay to shut down Shelby oil well

By Frank DeFrank

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Unlike Jed Clampett, West Bay Exploration found no "bubbling crude" beneath Shelby Township.

Not enough to matter, anyway.

The Traverse City-based energy company, at odds with township officials and residents over oil drilling in a residential neighborhood, abruptly halted its operation this week, apparently for good.

"West Bay has decided to plug the well," William Horn, an attorney for West Bay wrote to township attorney Robert Huth in an email. "Let me know if you have any further questions."

Township Supervisor Rick Stathakis announced the news at Tuesday's Board of Trustees meeting.

"We got the news just before the meeting (Tuesday night) that they are going to plug the well and get out of town," Stathakis said.

Added Huth, who served as the township's point man on the issue: "Absolutely fabulous news."

"We had a good effort," Huth continued. "But we

had a little luck on our side ... The well is not economically viable."

The controversy dates back to last summer. West Bay, which has operated in Shelby Township for more than a quarter century, began to drill for oil in a residential area near Dequindre Road between 25 and 26 Mile roads.

Homeowners near the area complained that the operation was inappropriate for a residential neighborhood, with the well sitting only 500 feet from homes, and contacted their located elected officials for help in shutting down the operation. One public meeting held in Shelby Township drew an estimated 700 persons.

Shelby Township officials adopted a moratorium late last summer and West Bay halted its operation. But recently, the company started again and the issue threatened to be revisited again this summer.

But that prospect ended this week when West Bay announced it would cease drilling, cap the well and restore the property.

"We (the township) main-

Drilling

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tained an open dialogue, which was very beneficial throughout this situation," said Shelby Township Fire Chief Jim

Swinkowski, who dealt with West Bay to ensure public safety was not at stake because the drilling. "My most-recent communication with West Bay was there was not enough product in the well to make it viable for production, so West Bay

will be leaving the site." Despite West Bay's declaration, the Shelby Township Board of Trustees this week acted on a recommendation by Huth to extend the moratorium 90 days, until Aug. 19.

Although he anticipates no additional attempts by

West Bay to explore for energy sources in the township, Huth said the additional three months will buy the township time to examine ordinances and ensure "we have some better tools in place in case we don't have luck on our side the next time."