

Shelby Township residents who live near the West Bay oil well protest the company's return to the site to test the well for oil earlier this month. On May 19, the company said that the well was not commercially viable and that the company would return the land to its former state and vacate the site.

Photo courtesy of Dave Sutton



Controversial oil well in Shelby turns up dry

Township extends moratorium on hydrocarbon exploration

BY SARAH WOJCIK
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SHELBY TOWNSHIP — Township officials and residents breathed a collective sigh of relief when West Bay Exploration Co. gave word that the controversial well site near 25 Mile and Dequindre roads

proved to be not commercially viable.

Since last July, the oil and gas company's presence near a residential neighborhood caused widespread contention. After two weeks of testing the well, West Bay planned to plug the well, return the site to its former state and vacate the area.

See OIL on page 18A



ABOVE: The Russell family fishing. Being hunting with his wife, J...

"Mother Nature bailed us out this time. I'm really happy about the prayers being answered," Township Supervisor Rick Stathakis said. "I just hope they don't decide to come back, because it would be an uphill fight until state law gets changed."

West Bay Vice President Patrick Gibson said results of the testing showed just a glimmer of oil in test swabs — teaspoons instead of what his company hoped would be barrels. He said he was disappointed because West Bay spent a large amount of money on the project.

"That gives us a lot of information about anything that would be going on in the Trenton-Black River Formation in a wide area," Gibson said. "We don't have immediate plans (to drill) in Macomb County or in eastern Oakland County."

Shelby Township Fire Chief

Jim Swinkowski said he had been in contact with West Bay multiple times a day during the two-week completion process.

In order to plug the well, Swinkowski said, West Bay will place two mechanical plugs near the bottom of the approximately 5,200-foot well.

The next step will be to fill the approximately 2 3/4-inch diameter shaft with a cement-like mixture, remove the wellhead and restore the grounds.

"They have to get the ground pads out, remove the fence, restore the berm and get the soil back to its original grade and location," Swinkowski said May 20. "Weather permitting, they should be done early to mid next week."

At its May 19 meeting, the Board of Trustees unanimously approved a resolution, which Township Attorney Rob Huth requested, to extend the township's moratorium on hydrocarbon exploration and extraction for another 90 days to Aug. 19.

Huth said the township needs some better tools in place in case it doesn't have luck on its side the next time. The moratorium, which was placed into effect last August and was amended in September and February, will give the township enough time to make sure it includes everything possible in an ordinance to protect against drilling.

Despite having a moratorium in effect, Huth said he advised the board in closed session to allow West Bay to test the well to discover what it was dealing with before spending money on litigation, as well as to avoid a judge possibly challenging the moratorium's validity.

Denise Demak, a resident who lives near the site and who is part of the grass-roots effort Citizens Against Residential Drilling, recommended that the township's legal team look at ordinances that neighboring communities passed regarding drilling and stay updated on West Bay's land leases.

"Other drillers that could potentially come into Shelby Township are a lot worse than what we

just deal with," Demak said.

Call Staff Writer Sarah Wojcik at (586) 498-1029.

NOTICE OF INTRODUCTION AND FIRST PUBLICATION OF MAP AMENDMENT TO THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SHELBY ZONING ORDINANCE

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the Board of Trustees of the Charter Township of Shelby has introduced the following map amendment to its Zoning Ordinance at its meeting on May 19, 2015:

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SHELBY
COUNTY OF MACOMB, MICHIGAN
ORDINANCE NO. 242-100

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE ZONING MAP OF THE
CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SHELBY, MACOMB COUNTY, MICHIGAN

THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SHELBY ORDAINS:

Section 1. That the following property located in the Charter Township of Shelby, Macomb County, Michigan and described as follows:

LEGAL DESCRIPTION

23-07-29-476-068
L 127, 128, 129, 130, 131 & 132 V 88 COMBINATION AUBURNDALE SUB LOTS 127, 128, 129, 130, 131 & 132 LIBER 20 PAGE 46

COMMON DESCRIPTION: 5227 Auburn Road (north of Auburn Road, east of Woodall)

To be rezoned from C-1 (Retail Business, Local) to R-2 (Two Family Residential) in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance of the Charter Township of Shelby and that the Zoning Ordinance be amended in accordance herewith.

Section 2. That all other provisions of the Charter Township of Shelby Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map, except as amended by this ordinance, shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 3. This amendment shall become effective and the above described property shall be rezoned as provided in Section 1 upon the expiration of seven (7) days after publication of a notice of adoption.