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## **WVSA taps treatment applicant**

By Elizabeth Skraptis

HANOVER TWP. - Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority board members picked one of the applicants to design, build and operate a natural gas wastewater treatment facility, but aren't making a commitment until they do more homework.

The board voted on Tuesday to enter a non-binding agreement with Cate Street Capital/Red Desert Reclamation "to further study the feasibility and infrastructure necessary to clean and/or recycle wastewater from natural gas drilling activities."

The agreement gives the authority 120 days, which can be extended to 180 days, to do research and determine whether or not to move forward with the project.

It also gives Cate Street Capital time to take a look at the WVSA's Hanover Township site and determine whether it would be suitable, according to John Minora of Pennsylvania Northeast Aqua Resources, consultant to the authority.

Hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" involves blasting millions of gallons of chemical-treated water deep underground to force open cracks in the shale and release the natural gas. The water comes back up with more contamination including salts, heavy metals and naturally occurring radioactive materials.

Minora was present at Tuesday's board meeting to field questions from residents. One of their concerns was about radioactive material. The New York Times recently revealed lax regulations were allowing tainted water from natural gas drilling to get into rivers.

Resident David Thomas wanted to know why the authority didn't wait until the federal Environmental Protection Agency completes a study of hydraulic fracturing, including wastewater, in 2012, with a final version due in 2014.

Minora said the Pennsylvania and New York environmental protection departments did studies and said the levels were safe, and that the naturally occurring radioactive material is only a danger at high levels and if ingested.

Resident David Wasilewski said he hated to be a cynic about the state Department of Environmental Protection, but the agency "seems to have put the economy of Pennsylvania above residents' health."

Cate Street Capital Inc., a Portsmouth, New Hampshire-based investment company, finances projects like solar energy and biomass production. It owns the Red Desert Water Reclamation facility in Wamsutter, Wyoming, which can treat up to 20,000 barrels of drilling wastewater a day.

Cate Street would design, build and operate the treatment facility at the WWSA site and potentially use the authority's waste heat, tanks and treated wastewater.

The money the authority would receive would keep user fees down and help pay for the costly mandate to keep nitrogen and phosphate from getting into the Chesapeake Bay, Minora said.

Kim Krupsha pointed out the Red Desert facility is "in the middle of nowhere" but the WWSA is near a school. Minora said that would be studied. Traffic and safety issues will be taken into consideration, he said.

Minora said 80 to 85 percent of the wastewater would be treated, diluted and reused for drilling. The rest of the water would be cleaned through reverse osmosis, in which the water is forced through a membrane. This purified water would be released into the Susquehanna River, Minora said.

He said reverse osmosis would break the wastewater down to a distilled water byproduct that is "safer than drinking water." Part of the study would include ensuring the company can do what it claims, he said.

The radioactive material removed from the wastewater would be taken to a landfill and put back into the ground where it came from, Minora said.

Gas Drilling Awareness Coalition co-founder Dr. Thomas Giunta disagreed with Minora's assertion that Luzerne County was benefiting from natural gas drilling through more jobs such as trucking and hotel and restaurant patronage.

Giunta said people who are making money, like those who leased land to gas drillers, are taking the risks, but locally, people have to pay the infrastructure costs without the benefits.

"Will the plant really benefit the local residents or put us more at risk?" he asked.

Resident Nancy Dolan asked whether the authority would share its findings and information with residents.

"We're not going to try to sneak a vote in after 90 days without telling you," Minora said. "We're trying to be open."

He told Giunta he was willing to talk with coalition members and "find some common ground."

