

Vantage to get back to fracking - Denton Record-Chronicle (TX) - May 22, 2015 - page NEWS_A01

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A Colorado energy company told city officials it plans to frack gas wells on Denton's west side in a notice that came only one day after the governor signed House Bill 40 into law.

A Vantage Energy employee notified the city's gas well inspector early Tuesday morning that they were preparing for "frac work" starting May 27, according to documents obtained in an open records request.

Gov. Greg Abbott signed HB 40 on Monday afternoon, a sweeping new law that limits the ability of Texas cities and local governments in writing local rules for oil and gas operators. The legislation came after Denton voters overwhelmingly approved a ban on hydraulic fracturing in November.

A second Vantage employee said in another notice Thursday that "completion activities" would begin June 1. Neighbors reported seeing production equipment being moved to the company's well site near U.S. Highway 380 and Nail Road this week.

Vantage Energy did not return multiple calls and messages for comment.

Denton Mayor Chris Watts said HB 40 likely prevents the city from blocking Vantage's plans to finish the gas wells.

"It's my understanding we don't plan on seeking an injunction," Watts said.

Technically, the hard-fought citizen's initiative is still on the books. But effectively, it lasted a little more than 200 days.

Both the state and the oil and gas industry filed to block Denton's ban the day after the election.

Watts said he expected city leaders will soon be discussing those lawsuits, too.

"Where we go from here hasn't been determined," Watts said.

While HB 40 laid out sweeping restrictions on local rules for oil and gas operators, it left some authority with local governments. Watts said he expected the city staff to monitor the company for compliance to the rest of the city's rules.

"That's the whole fun part of HB 40 - figuring out what it is and what it isn't," Watts said.

For example, the well site at U.S. 380 and Nail Road doesn't violate the city's current requirement

for a greater distance between gas wells and homes or other protected land uses, Watts said.

The **Denton** City Council put a moratorium on new gas well drilling permits in May 2014 and has continued that moratorium for more than a year. Vantage claimed the moratorium caused a hardship. The company asked for and received a waiver to drill some gas wells last summer, even as the citizen's drive to ban fracking loomed. The company told city leaders they understood the moratorium's purpose was to stop non-compliant gas well development and they were willing to work with the city.

Adam Briggie, president of **Frack Free Denton**, which campaigned for the ban, said the group has watched the state's politicians and the oil and gas industry work for the past six months to undo the ban. But he expected **Denton** residents to continue to fight.

"We cannot say how this story will unfold, but we do know this dark chapter shall not be the last one written," Briggie said in a prepared statement on behalf of **Frack Free Denton**.

In an interview, Briggie said he couldn't confirm whether people would stage protests at the site.

"But it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine it," Briggie said.

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