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Homer rejects selling non-potable water to mine

Mon, 04/08/2013 - 9:11pm | [Nora Maberry-Daniels](#) [1]

HOMER — The Homer Village board voted unanimously Monday to deny a request by Sunrise Coal for up to 540,000 gallons of non-potable water.

The move came less than a month after the same board voted 4-3 to provide treated water and sewer services to the coal company.

During the meeting, trustee Ray Cunningham first made a motion asking for the request to be tabled until July. No one seconded the motion.

Trustee Guy James then made a motion to deny the request.

The request was for 325,000 gallons a day initially and would increase to 540,000 gallons a day as the mine ramps up production. The raw water is used to wash the coal.

The Terre Haute, Ind., company wants to develop an underground coal mine in western Vermilion County, about 5 miles from Homer. Sunrise has been actively planning the coal mine for two years and has been courting the village for water services for about a year.

In February, the board voted down the request for treated water but reversed itself in March, voting to sell the mine up to 20,000 gallons of treated water and provide sewer services.

Trustee Mike Johnson said he knew a lot of residents were angry with him for voting yes at the March meeting after originally voting no in February.

Johnson said he would not support selling non-potable water to the mine.

"I do not know what that would do to our wells," he said.



[2]

Photo by: John Dixon/The News-Gazette
Charles Goodall, of Sidell, a member of 'Stand up to Coal,' asks questions of the Homer village trustees at their meeting at the village office on Monday April 8, 2013. At the meeting, the trustees voted to deny the request of Sunrise Coal to purchase raw water from the village.

Johnson also said he did not support pulling the water from the Salt Fork River.

Cunningham said the village never discussed pulling the water from the river, and that the media made up that scenario.

The audience reacted loudly to that statement.

Village employees and elected officials have brought up the Salt Fork as a possible source for the water.

In March 2012, village water supervisor Rob Boyer told the board that the village could dig a reservoir near its sewage plant and install an intake pipe into the Salt Fork River to collect untreated water, according to a story about the meeting in The Leader.

"Sunrise Coal would then be responsible for pumping the water from the reservoir to its mining operations," the story said. "Boyer said until the reservoir is in place, the village could meet the water needs of the mining company with clean runoff from the sewage plant combined with the village's surplus well water."

And in a July 29, 2012, News-Gazette article, Mayor David Lucas said the village would look at all water sources available, including the Salt Fork.

"It needs research. We have several options of drawing water from the Salt Fork. Some are good, some are not, and I already believe that some are not feasible," Lucas said then. "There are things that need to be researched, and it may come down to it not being worth it."

Cunningham argued that selling the water to the mine would help relieve the sewer deficit that the village is facing.

Johnson said that if the motion to deny the request was approved, he wanted the village to send a letter to Sunrise Coal stating the matter was closed and to not request non-potable water again.

The board unanimously approved denying the request to Sunrise Coal. Lucas said a letter would be sent to the company.

Before the vote residents spoke out against the request.

Herb Lacy said he was concerned with issues of eminent domain. He was concerned that the village agreeing to the request would give the coal mine more ability to take the land it needs to operate.

"I would prefer that my village board not have any more discussions with any entity that would use this process," he said.

Crystal Allen also said she was opposed to the request, asking the board to look at the big picture and not focus on the immediate future.

Kent Dunn said he was concerned about water tables decreasing.

"When the tables get low, who is going to supply my water?" he asked. "Who will have priority?"

Marilyn Lee reminded the board that environmental pollution was not easily fixable.

"If you ruin the water, you cannot repair it," she said. "If you ruin the soil, you cannot repair it."

Traci Barkley from the Prairie Rivers Network spoke before the board and said the Salt Fork River was a treasure. She reminded the board that villages downstream, including Oakwood, get their drinking water from the river.

"I think it is asinine to suggest something that would further jeopardize something the majority of people in this room view as a treasure," Barkley said.

Barkley told the board she hoped that the issue was only being brought up to be defeated and would not be addressed again by the Homer Village Board.

#1 ^[3]

billbtri5 ^[4] wrote on April 09, 2013 at 8:04 am

i am all for private enterprise however the basic and only function of government is to be of service to the people from which it's power and authority comes from. i do not see that misson here in this instance.

#2 ^[5]

cretis16 ^[6] wrote on April 09, 2013 at 2:04 pm

It's a moot point anyway...Coal mine already contacting drillers for drilling well on premise.

#3 ^[7]

SaintClarence27 ^[8] wrote on April 10, 2013 at 8:04 am

It sounds like that's exactly what's happening - they're going by public opinion.

#4 ^[9]

naturallypatty ^[10] wrote on April 09, 2013 at 1:04 pm

Thank you Homer trustees for doing the right thing. And doing the right thing is often difficult. But looking after the people of your community and providing a safe and clean water supply should take top priority. Congratulations on a job well done.

#5 ^[11]

lexdvdt ^[12] wrote on April 09, 2013 at 7:04 pm

It's NOT a moot point. Sunrise can contact all the drillers they want, there almost certainly is not more than 100,000-150,000 gallons per day available "on premise." And taking anywhere near that much would likely directly impact neighboring residential and agricultural wells. This local limited water availability problem led Sunrise to specify in their applications for state operating permits last summer that Homer would supply the needed 500,000+ gallons per day of coal-washing water. Those permit applications are not yet complete, Homer is no longer an option, and there is still a long road ahead for Sunrise to try to obtain those permits (not to

mention the water).

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