

THE DAILY NEWS

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Huntingdon County, PA

2018-05-01 / Front Page

Pig farm fight continues

Todd Twp. residents hold second community meeting

By Adam Watson

For The Daily News



Chad Nicholson, a community organizer with the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, addressed a group of 40 Todd Township residents at a meeting Monday evening. Those present are hoping to get the Todd Township Supervisors to pass an ordinance against allowing a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) to open in the township. Photo by ADAM WATSON

The Todd Township Supervisors will be asked at their Monday, May 14, meeting to consider adopting an ordinance that would stop a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) from being built in the township.

The ordinance was created by the Todd Township Community Action Group, a group opposed to the CAFO. The group held a meeting Monday evening in Broad Top City to present the ordinance and its possible repercussions.

Township resident Gary Rae opened the meeting held at the Broad Top City community building that was attended by about 40 other township residents. Monday evening's meeting, he said, was a follow-up to one held in March when the group discussed possible well water contamination from a CAFO operation.

The purpose of last night's meeting was to outline and explain the ordinance before it is finally "tweaked" and presented to the supervisors. Helping to explain the ordinance was Chad Nicholson, a community organizer with the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF).

Nicholson acknowledged the presence of Todd Township supervisors Bill Hall and chairman Denny Runk. He thanked them for their service and noted the difficult position they are in.

Nicholson gave a brief history of his company and what they do, which is protecting the health, safety and welfare of families and the community. While he works with many lawyers within his organization,

Nicholson himself is not one.

Nicholson was present to help group members know what they're really up against. The group, he continued, could face legal action from the state for continuing to pursue stopping of the CAFO, despite the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issuing permits to the proposed CAFO. While DEP was once regarded as a protection agency, Nicholson said it seems to now be everything but that.

The most logical thing the group could do is appeal the CAFO permits to try to prove to DEP the permits should never have been issued because the activity is going to harm the health and safety, the water, air and property values of people living in the community.

Many times when permits are revoked, Nicholson said the permit applicant is able to go back and "fix the flaws" and eventually receives approval anyway. At times, if things are all done right, DEP has no choice but to issue the permits.

It was then that citizens trying to "fight city hall" began to realize they would have to fight the system through their own municipalities. However, Nicholson said that did not come without a cost.

The state began to sue small communities they saw as "interfering" in their permitting business. This is a chance he said the group might face.

Nicholson said the group needs to look outside the box and to do just what is it is doing, fight for its rights. Many in similar situations believe it is better to suffer the risk of getting sued than give up their rights.

Following Nicholson's presentation, Rae read each point of the proposed ordinance and gave audience members an opportunity to comment about each. Nicholson and Rae addressed several questions asked by audience members.

Adam can be reached at dnews@huntingdondailynews.com.

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