

Senator John Sapien Believes SandRidge Drilling Proposal a Wake-Up Call for Sandoval County

SANTA FE, NM -- Senator John Sapien (D-9, Bernalillo & Sandoval) on Wednesday recommended that the Sandoval County and Zoning Commission deny an application by the Oklahoma-based SunRidge Exploration and Production LLC to drill for oil in a private subdivision just west of Rio Rancho as well as declare a temporary moratorium on drilling for oil in general.

"The issue of oil and gas exploration in Sandoval County clearly goes beyond SunRidge and the recommendation to deny its application," states Senator Sapien. "I urge the Planning and Zoning Commission to include in its recommendation to the Sandoval County Commission a temporary moratorium so that in the future they can carefully develop, with public input, an ordinance and oversight that are needed before considering any new oil and gas development."

SandRidge has applied for a zone map amendment to begin exploratory oil drilling near a heavily populated area on the City of Rio Rancho's west side. The county zoning commission recommended that the application be denied. Numerous residents from Rio Rancho, Placitas, Bernalillo and Corrales have expressed serious concerns about this proposal to drill oil. Noise, traffic, water usage and other environmental issues have been raised both at a Sandoval County Planning and Zoning hearing in December and in the media. Also concerning is the current financial difficulties confronting SandRidge, which is no longer listed on the stock exchange.

Senator Sapien believes the county can effectively utilize the additional time to research and develop appropriate land use ordinances that will ensure a win-win situation with the public and oil and gas industry as future land use applications are considered.

"The public must be assured that a comprehensive oil-and-gas drilling ordinance is on the books that guarantees protections for the air, water and cultural resources of the county and its residents," Senator Sapien says. "The big question, however, that our county must face is whether we are prepared for oil and gas development. Do we have adequate ordinances in place? Do our ordinances give us sufficient land-use oversight authority? The SandRidge request is a wake-up call that clearly lets us know that we need to proceed carefully.

"The County should take the time to develop ordinances that conform to our overall County Comprehensive Plan – a plan that encourages economic development and seeks to preserve the rural character of our county, its environment and cultural resources."

The Sandoval Planning and Zoning Committee is holding its next public meeting on the SandRidge application at 6 p.m. on Thursday, January 28, 2016, in the Sandoval County Administration Building.

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