

Schlumberger update:

No Public Comments Allowed at Planning Board Meeting

by Sue Heavenrich

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It was standing-room only at last Tuesday's Horseheads Village Planning Board meeting. Fifty citizens filled the chairs and another ten lined the wall, hoping for an opportunity to voice their environmental concerns about the Schlumberger project at Horseheads Center.

They never got a chance to speak. Instead, planning board chairman Raymond Fortier announced that there would be no public comments at the meeting.

"We're familiar with the term 'shut out' in baseball," said one Horseheads resident after the meeting. "Last night we found a new meaning for it. It's a sad day for democracy."

The environmental review process for the proposed Schlumberger facility has touched a nerve, inspiring many residents to attend meetings of the village board as well as the planning board. Many others are letting their elected representatives know what they think by submitting written comments. At last week's meeting, Steven Boisvert of Bergmann Associates gave a presentation outlining the reports that Schlumberger has already provided to the village. He also summarized about 30 comment letters that the village planning board had received and forwarded to Schlumberger.

At the previous meeting the planning board had asked Schlumberger to provide additional information, including a traffic study and other reports in time for the August 25 meeting. Schlumberger failed to do so and promised to have that information by early this week.

Although the Horseheads Village Board and Planning Board hoped to have a joint meeting to discuss the project, Ron Sherman, the village's environmental consultant, suggested they put that off until he had time to review the new studies. Sherman said that he would need at least ten days to review the "substantial amount" of information promised by Schlumberger.

Meanwhile, village officials have scheduled a second public hearing on the project. The hearing will be Wednesday, September 9 at 7pm in the Horseheads High School Auditorium.

Following that, on Tuesday, September 15, the Horseheads Village Board of Trustees and the Planning Board will meet jointly to review all information submitted regarding the application submitted by Schlumberger. That meeting will be at 5:30pm at the Horseheads Village Hall. While an open meeting, no public comments will be taken at that time as it is a work session.

In the end, it will be up to the village trustees to decide if a full State Environmental Quality Review is required.

Helen Slottje and other citizen reporters contributed to this article.