

TOWN OF MEREDITH

GAS DRILLING SURVEY

Question 1: Are you in favor of gas drilling in the Town of Meredith?

	Respondents	Opposed	In Favor	Undecided
Grand Total	649	76.3	14.2%	9.5%
Residents	387	79.8%	11.6%	8.6%
Residents NYC Watershed	201	89.6%	4.5%	3.9%
Residents Outside Watershed	186	69.2%	19.5%	11.3%
Non-Resident Landowners	243	73.7%	16.5%	9.8%
Landowners NYC Watershed	122	70.5%	15.6%	13.9%
Landowners Outside Watershed	121	76.9%	17.4%	5.7%
Anonymous	19	36.8%	36.8%	26.4%

Question 2: Should the Town of Meredith have the power to ban gas drilling?

	Respondents	Yes	No	Undecided
Grand Total	649	77.2%	15.7%	7.1%
Residents	387	78.8%	14.5%	6.7%
Residents NYC Watershed	201	85.1%	9.0%	5.9%
Residents Outside Watershed	186	71.9%	20.5%	7.6%
Non-Resident Landowners	243	77.0%	16.0%	7.0%
Landowners NYC Watershed	122	77.9%	14.8%	7.3%
Landowners Outside Watershed	121	76.0%	17.4%	6.6%
Anonymous	19	47.4%	36.8%	15.8%

JAN 27, 2012

MEREDITH GAS DRILLING SURVEY: SUBMISSION TO THE TOWN BOARD

1. SURVEY, RESPONSE RATE, MARGIN OF ERROR

In early September, 2011, the Meredith Landowners Coalition (www.meredith-coalition.org) mailed a two-question survey to everyone in Meredith, a total of 838 addresses; 522 local residences, and 316 non-resident landowners.

401 of 825 surveys were returned – a response rate of 49%. 13 were returned as non-deliverable. 630 individual respondents signed the surveys. 19 anonymous surveys were also returned. All forms were sequentially numbered to prevent anonymous duplicates, but individual responses were not correlated with the numbers.

The statistical margin of error is +/- 5% with a 99% confidence level. (This can be verified online with any statistical survey calculator.)

(The MLC has submitted a CD to the Meredith Town Board with all postal addresses, along with a list of the signatures, grouped by household, but without indicating how individuals responded.)

2. THE TWO SURVEY QUESTIONS AND THE RESPONSE

The first question was: “**Are you are in favor of gas drilling in the Town of Meredith?**” 649 people responded. **14.2% said yes. 76.3% said no. 9.5% were undecided.**

The second question: “**Should the Town of Meredith have the power to ban gas drilling?**” 649 people responded. **77.2 said yes. 15.7 said no. 7.1 were undecided.**

3. MEREDITH GAS DRILLING SURVEY COMMENTS

In addition to the two questions a box was provided for comments, and 180 respondents (45%) had something to say.

(A 16-page transcript of all comments is on the CD submitted to the Board. Respondents were promised confidentiality, so comments are arranged in random order, identified only by the number that was on the bottom of each survey form.)

4. STATISTICAL METHOD

If people drink coffee in half the households in Meredith each morning, and there was a survey of 49% of 826 households (“Did anyone drink coffee this morning?”) and the same survey was sent out on 100 different days, 99% of the time the survey would find that between 45% and 55% of the people answered “Yes”.

The remaining 1% of the time, for 1 in 100 households that answer the survey, the response would be more than the margin of error away from the true answer.

When a sample of the total population is surveyed, there’s no way to know the correct answer for sure, but in this particular case, we do know that there’s a 99% chance that our survey results are within +/- 5 percent. It seems safe to conclude, for example, that among people who have expressed an opinion about gas drilling (not “undecided”), the actual number of those opposed is somewhere between 80 and 90 percent.

This assumes a uniformity of response within the overall survey population, which one would reasonably expect when asking people questions like “Did you drink coffee this morning?” But gas drilling is a volatile issue, so it is important to consider some of the possible ways the survey results could have been skewed by unusual factors.

The next section addresses these concerns.

5. SURVEY ANALYSIS

A SILENT MAJORITY?

Is it possible that among the 51% who did not respond that there is a “silent majority,” or even a substantial minority, who support gas drilling in Meredith but do not wish to be identified? If that were the case, then one would expect this to be reflected in the number of anonymous surveys we received. Such a group could have made their point to the board by sending in 50 or 100 pro-drilling responses. Yet only 19 anonymous surveys were returned, with 7 in favor of drilling, 7 opposed, and 5 undecided.

VOTER APATHY

As for general voter apathy on this particular issue, as opposed to the usual apathy that reduces any election turnout or survey response, compare the return rate (49% of delivered surveys) to voter turnout in this year’s town election – 43%.

DEMOCRATIC VS. REPUBLICAN VOTER RESPONSES

As for the possibility the overall anti-drilling sentiment could be skewed by an overly liberal response from environmentalists, a disproportionate showing from registered Democrats could be anticipated, along with a lower response from Republicans. The survey does show a

slight increase in the Democratic percentage, compared to the 2009 town election results, in which gas drilling was not an issue (42% instead of 39%), and a drop in the Republican response (38% from 45%), but this was balanced by an increase in the number of independent or third-party participants (21% from 15%). The survey appears to indicate a small but noticeable shift from right to left in the political spectrum on the issue, which is consistent with concern over possible environmental impacts

WATERSHED VS. NON-WATERSHED RESPONSES

The survey shows a significant difference between those within the NYC watershed (both resident and non-resident landowners), who are opposed to gas drilling by a 91-9% margin (among those who have taken sides), compared to a 79-21% margin in the northern part of Meredith where the DEC proposes to allow drilling. Although all groups in the survey show overwhelming opposition to drilling, this view is shared less among potential gas leaseholders.

LARGE VS. SMALL LANDOWNER RESPONSES

There is the question of whether the results reflect differences in land ownership, as those with larger parcels stand to benefit more from gas leasing than smaller landowners. As one survey comment put it, “most people against it are the ones having one or two acres.” The survey showed this not to be true: 91% of the surveys returned from landowners (both resident and non-resident) who oppose drilling own more than two acres. And among the 47 surveys returned from owners with more than 100 acres (105 in all), 70% were opposed, 18% in favor, 12% undecided. Though these are slightly below the overall survey figures (76-14-10%), it’s clear that even among the largest landowners, there is substantial opposition to drilling.

TOWN BOARD POWER

Regarding the second survey question, whether people believe it should be within the Town Board’s power, and not the state’s, to decide if gas drilling should be banned within all of the town’s 58 square miles, and not just the lower 32 where the DEC has proposed a ban, the results are very much the same as for Question #1, with 1 percent more saying yes (77%), about 2 percent more saying no (16%), and 7% undecided.

Clearly, people believe that the Town Board should be the ones to decide. Although the survey did not ask how the Board should decide the issue, of the 337 registered voters who participated in the survey, 265 (79%) indicated they are opposed to drilling, which is considerably more than the 64% majority who voted for a new town board in 2007, which resulted in enactment of a ban on industrial wind development in the town.

Whether the Town Board would be able to exercise similar authority with regard to industrial gas development is an open question that is not addressed by the survey, as it will depend on the outcome of lawsuits like those that have recently been filed against two of the municipalities in New York that have already passed such bans.

6. COMMENTS

There is no way to accurately classify the wide variety of the comments received, but general themes emerged, and we conclude by offering representative samples from more than a third of the comments, on both sides of the issues, for the public record, and because they add a human dimension to the survey of Meredith that is impossible to convey in dry statistics.

PRO-DRILLING

1. People complain about foreign energy, then balk if production comes to their community. Our state needs jobs, our economy needs influx and we need more abundant energy. [33]
2. I would agree to gas drilling in our town if it would benefit in any way the residents of the town of Meredith. [91]
3. Drill Baby Drill [262]
4. Back in the 1960's there was a gas well drilled between Meridale and North Franklin near Rte. 28. There is no trace of it seen now. There is a house on the site. So much for horrible environmental damage... [104]
5. We are not against drilling for gas but are against putting any chemicals into the ground... [227]
6. ...It certainly would put a lot of people back to work and help our economy. It would also keep us out of companies overseas that are ripping off the United States with such high prices... [732]
7. Any industry that can create jobs & add to the tax should be welcomed. [759]
8. There has been successful gas drilling in northern Pennsylvania and it has been very good for the local economy. In addition, the gas companies improved the roads in the area. [329]

AGAINST DRILLING

1. KEEP MY WATER CLEAN!!! [28]
2. Drilling is no different than wind towers. It will benefit a few and cause numerous problems and expense for everyone else. If the state thinks it is a good thing, then let it be done on state land not private property... [55]
3. Duke University study - fact not fiction. "Gasland" exposé - fact not fiction. Numerous gas drilling catastrophes - fact not fiction. Corporate greed, to hell with humanity - fact not fiction... [54]
4. ...Meredith has long been a farming community and our water feeds those farms and those farms feed us and many more. We need to protect both our water and farms. [81]

5. ...The gas is not going to disappear so I would prefer to have Meredith wait until after at least ten years of data from PA is gathered and analyzed... [119]
6. Just the very threat that this region will be fracked will lower our property values if drilling starts in Meredith and no one will be able to sell his/her property... [125]
7. I am worried about what fracking would do to our water supply, which would affect every home and business, from farmers and their crop and livestock, to families with young children, and the schools kids attend, to seasonal visitors like hunters. [128]
8. ...is the state going to buy my house/property because without water there is no home or survival on my property?... [226]
9. ...Don't let the \$ ruin our town. I don't believe a word the profit driven gas companies say as far as safety is concerned. [228]
10. ...conserve our natural bounty instead of squandering it for hopes of a quick dollar and a few jobs (which will more than likely not be given to any Meredith resident). Let's talk wind turbines again. Clean energy now!... [422]
11. Once gas drilling is allowed and perhaps, it poisons all our water, there is no turning back!! The damage is done forever and we'll be shafted... [239]
12. ...I'm sure I could never sell my house with a gas drilling site nearby... [243]
13. ...we need energy, but need to consider and use safer alternatives. [328]
14. Why destroy the environment, as well as the land value, to benefit only a few of our landowners? [339]
15. ...It cannot be done safely. At stake is our water supply. If we don't have gas, we will still live. If we don't have water we will die. [350]
16. ...Gas drilling will benefit the gas companies 1st and foremost. It will be a short term boost to the folks who sell out. It will be nothing but bad for those of us that want to grow old here and that depend on our food... [374]
17. ...It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that putting toxic chemicals into the ground through our water table is not a benefit to anyone. Furthermore no gas company can guarantee containment of spills and even the cleanup is never 100%... [376]
18. The disastrous practice of high-volume hydraulic fracturing presents toxic conditions on so many fronts: air, water, roads, noise, real estate value, health, community character and relationships, etc. No amount of money could possibly mitigate these consequences. [391]

19. Until the extraction method is safe (if ever) I do not want my water well or property value compromised by gas drilling. We in this area have only everything to lose and nothing to gain... [446]
20. Gas drilling where people live is unacceptable, shortsighted, and diabolical. [463]
21. ...As a nation, state, county and town, we need to invest in economic development that is sustainable, environmentally friendly, and is consistent with the idea of renewable energy replacing fossil fuels. [513]
22. ...We moved to this area and provide jobs to locals because we like and support rural, clean, quiet life and community. It is not fair that some neighbors should profit at the expense of our drinking water and quality of life. The profits will go to big oil companies in Texas only benefiting a few landowners in the town... [530]
23. ...This resource has been there for millions of years, why not leave it for our children when future technology is sound? [389]
24. Our drinking water is just as entitled to environmental protection as the water that is consumed by the people of New York City. Fracking waste water will make our wells unfit to drink as has happened in PA. [564]
25. ...It appears that the DEC has come up with a double standard. Why is it OK to pollute my water supply but not NYC's water supply?... [575]
26. Real estate is bad now. If we start drilling we'd have little or no chance of selling if necessity came. Please help keep drilling out. Everything would change for the worse. [576]
27. We should fight drilling tooth and nail! [672]
28. One of the reasons I own property is to get away from the pollution & garbage. Let them drill in the gas company CEO's backyard... [735]
29. ...A beautiful rural area does not need to risk its beauty, good water, small roads, etc. for large industrial projects, such as gas drilling. Enough tragedy has been wrought in rural PA... [689]
30. ...Gas drilling will not help us either in the long or short term. A major concern is the effect fracking will have on present and future generations - our health and well-being must be a primary consideration... [828]

SHOULD THE TOWN HAVE THE POWER TO BAN DRILLING: NO

1. Why does any town have the right to ban drilling? [25]
2. ...A town ban on drilling should be labeled an “Act for Enrichment of the Legal Profession” since the lawsuits will be endless. [104]
3. We do NOT need more regulations about anything! There are enough FEDERAL and STATE laws and regulations to choke a hippo!... [144]
4. I feel we have way too much government telling landowners what they can and cannot do with their land. It seems like my neighbor has more say on my property that I do. [154]
5. As an individual landowner and taxpayer it should be my decision to decide what is best for me and my family on my property, not the Town. Just as the wind power should have been an individual right... [454]
6. ...To deny landowners of any of [their] rights without just compensation is unconstitutional in my opinion. [233]
7. ...I don't think you or the state should decide. I believe it's time for individuals to decide by voting on the issue directly... [497]
8. As much as I think that gas drilling would be horrible for our town, I also think landowners should not be banned from specific uses... [417]
9. ...Who am I to say what somebody else should, or should not, be allowed to do with their own property? It's a tough call. I can definitely say though that I DO NOT WANT DRILLING! [217]
10. I would rather have windmills and cell towers in the town. Please let something into the town!... [445]
11. I believe that individual property owners should be able to make decisions on how they use their property - whether they put it in trust, use it for farming or for mineral rights. The one exception I see is that the NYC watershed should be protected. [681]
12. All taxpayers should have a right to vote on this issue. [218]
13. The area needs the revenue that gas drilling would bring in. I wish the watershed would release its ban. [comment #2] I agree with my husband – the jobs, revenue, etc. would be wonderful, but not at the expense of our water, and environment & safety. I think a ban should be in place until it's proven safe. [635]

SHOULD THE TOWN HAVE THE POWER TO BAN DRILLING: YES

1. Other towns have passed regulations banning gas drilling so I would like to know why we have not done so too? This is our home and it is beautiful and we want to keep it that way... [192]
2. If fracking is so safe why prohibit it in the watershed? [315]
3. Meredith is a perfect example of the inequality inherent in this regulation. Dividing a small community, saying one half will have protected drinking water and one half won't is insane... [725]
4. Water will soon be the most valuable commodity in the entire country. I am confused as to why lawmakers are so short-sighted and do not understand this. Home rule is imperative... [206]
5. Not only should we ban gas drillers, all political representatives should be educating themselves and their constituents of the details - why are they silent on a matter which threatens to destroy our source of life?... [521]
6. Ban fracking - it will ruin our rural way of life... [703]
7. Any town should have the power to set zoning requirements. Just consider what may have happened with "used frack holding ponds," post 20 inches of flooding rains that just occurred. Who would pay for this clean up?... [609]
8. We would like to see a pro-active stance against gas drilling similar to action taken in Otsego County. In our lifetime I can't recall anything as dangerous as hydrofracking for natural gas. Our area will never be the same again... [519]
9. This is a no brainer. Nobody but the people who live in an area should have the power to make such important decisions regarding the quality of life where they live. [665]
10. ...Clearly it is up to the local government to determine if exploiting vast natural gas reserves are in the best interest of the town... [664]
11. The state officials have proven time and again that they are not working in the interest of the health or quality of life for NY residents, but were interested in \$\$\$... [753]
12. ...If drilling isn't safe for the watershed, then it can't be safe for anyone, anywhere. I hope the town will ban drilling in all of Meredith. [496]
13. ...please ban hydrofracking in Meredith. If fracking comes to Meredith, we will move our farm elsewhere. [75]

14. ...Why should the state have the final say? We are seniors and want to continue living in our town where we can drink the water and enjoy the rest of our life in our home. [183]
15. ...It is inappropriate and unsafe to allow gas drilling in any part of the town before the long-term impacts of the extraction process are documented. [544]
16. ...The risks are proven. Look at PA. and the number of incidents of pollution. Our town should have the right to decide on this matter as it will affect our livelihoods, health and the ability to sell our houses. [624]
17. Fracking is not safe for our area plain and simple! Ban it NOW! [379]