



Big oil makes big push for compromise on man camps

By Melissa Krause | March 4, 2016

WILLISTON, N.D. — In efforts to encourage the Williston City Commission to reconsider the allowance of crew camps where they may still fit a viable niche in the community, 31 oil and energy related companies have banded together and formed an alliance.

The topic of crew camps has been polarizing, even amongst the Williston City commissioners, [who split the vote 3-2 in favor of passing an ordinance that would end them on July 1](#). In December of last year the City Commissioners opened conversation regarding their willingness to reconsider that fate, provided the number of beds were reduced and higher standards of operation be met.

Williston City Commissioner Deanette Piesik drafted Ordinance 1038 in efforts to give a fair and reasonable compromise to developers, hoteliers, oilfield companies, and temporary workforce housing operators.

That's where the alliance gets its name -- the "1038 Housing Compromise Alliance."

Piesik's ordinance would reduce the number of beds 25 percent per year for the next two years and would require fees to double to \$800 per bed.

With a common goal in sight, the rallying forces that make up the 1083 Housing Compromise Alliance is extensive and includes some big names in big oil. Among them are the North Dakota Petroleum Council, Greater North Dakota Chamber, Whiting Petroleum, Hess, Oasis Petroleum, Halliburton, and Nabors are just a few that have unified.

The alliance will be pushing for Ordinance 1038 and in anticipation for what could be a large turnout for the next Williston City Commission meeting on Tuesday when it will be presented to the commissioners; Mayor Howard Klug has moved the meeting to the Williston Area Recreation Center.

Oil is still a large driver in the local economy, and with oil comes many temporary workers that carve the path for permanent employment. Drilling for oil shifts throughout the Bakken and once the well is in place, the production side of the industry seeks out residents for the permanent positions.

“They want stability,” said alliance spokesman Rob Lindberg. “Producers look actively to find local people.”

Adequate housing has been an issue for many years and a reaction to the shortage caused what now appears to be an overproduction of apartment buildings and hotels.

Many facilities are trending at a 30 percent occupancy rate, which has forced many owners to rally to eliminate the crew camps in hopes it will drive the remaining workers into hotels or apartments.

A North Dakota State University study was conducted in which 80 percent of non-resident oilfield workers didn't want to put down roots in Williston, citing, “housing was too expensive.”

“Housing is the most difficult challenge for anyone living in the Bakken,” Lindberg said. “They want something that’s comparable with what they have now. Williston needs more single family homes if they want to recruit a permanent workforce.”

Lindberg believes having a crew of oilfield workers living alongside families would make for unpleasant neighborhoods, due to workers’ multiple trucks and industrial equipment.

“The use by a temporary workforce affects the character of neighborhoods, displaces families and the elderly, and encourages high prices and excess investment,” Lindberg said. “Likewise, hotels should be dedicated to travelers — conventions, meetings, business travelers, short-term workers, tourists and youth sports teams — not rotational work crews. Ordinance 1038 is a compromise where everyone wins.”

Lindberg said oil companies prefer crew camps where they can police their workers. The gated facilities operate under a strict “no drugs and no alcohol policy” on the premises.

Lindberg anticipates many of the oil companies will seek out the cheapest means to house their temporary workforce, even if that means moving them to surrounding counties where crew camps are still in operation.

“Piesik created a compromise that looks beyond the next 6 months — it’s level-headed and stable,” Lindberg said. “Policies made now affects whether the city will grow or not grow. We encourage that the government be friendly to growth and business instead of making year by year decisions.”

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/state-and-regional/big-oil-makes-big-push-for-man-camps-compromise/article_34b999ac-d433-50de-b56c-ee9a4b1f8f8a.html