



*Mel LeBlanc, Arlington, Texas City Councilman, District 1*

October 27, 2011

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to stand before you to provide input on the issue of urban natural gas drilling. I applaud your efforts at approaching this important topic thoughtfully and with detailed analysis of the ramifications of urban drilling. Drilling in an urban environment creates challenges not experienced in rural settings, and thus drillers, elected officials, community leaders, and other interested citizens are wise to take notice and scrutinize every step of this process, to include exploration, drilling, production, storage, and distribution. At the same time, urban drilling has created opportunities for municipalities heretofore unheard of, opportunities that I would like to articulate this evening as they seem to get overlooked at community meetings such as this one.

I stand before you in several capacities: as a City Councilman in Arlington, Texas, where we have already drilled over 110 wells, and are heading towards a complete drill-out of over 300 wells; as the past, charter Treasurer of the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation, the 501(c)(3) organization established by the City of Arlington to manage the endowment that is the repository of the natural gas wealth we have thus far accumulated; and as the Managing Partner of Shale Play Advisors, LLC, a consulting firm that specializes in urban drilling.

I have studied this issue for approximately 5 years with an open mind, cynically and skeptically attempting to discover what is wrong with urban drilling. I have read most of the studies, listened to the proponents and the naysayers, attended many of the public meetings, gone to the seminars and symposia, read the books, etc. My conclusion is as follows: urban drilling can be an inconvenience, sometimes an aggravation, certainly a temporary light-industrial operation within the midst of residential housing and other protected use structures and environments, but it is not deleterious to human health, safety, or welfare. To be sure, the opportunities presented by urban drilling far outweigh the inconveniences, and offer municipalities and other entities a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to acquire wealth and to achieve financial stability.

Due to my limited time allotment, permit me to present you with some facts: the City of Arlington has deposited \$70 million in our foundation in recent years, and this amount will grow to approximately \$250 million within a relatively short period of time strictly through lease and royalty payments from drilling. That's the sort of wealth we are talking about here. The investment proceeds of this endowment fund many of the arts and other non-profit organizations within my City that many would rather tax dollars not be spent on. We have already preserved in our Arlington Tomorrow Fund more money than all 33 years of lease payments to be eventually made by Cowboys Stadium.

Over 1.2 million wells have been fracked in the United States since the first hydraulic fracturing operation in 1949, and not one municipal water table has been contaminated by this process. This is a proven fact.

I encourage you to consider “context.” I wrote an editorial published by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram on October 13 of this year that compared the impact of urban drilling in Arlington on air emission values. I discovered that a single manufacturing plant in my city emits over 200 tons of Volatile Organic Compounds into our atmosphere, which is ten times as much as all gas wells combined, assuming a complete build-out of drilling throughout our entire 99 square miles. A printing company emits twice as much, and a manufacturing of acrylic bath products emits about an equal amount as does all drilling. I’m sure if you did such a comparison in Dallas, similar results would emerge. I caution you to place this task force’s investigation into context to ensure that you are examining the right industry. You may be quite surprised by the results.

Some proclaim: “it’s not about the money.” Oh? I submit to you that it is about the money, and there’s nothing wrong with that. One invests in the stock market, to cite but one example, for one reason: to make money. Such actions function to more efficiently allocate resources throughout our economy, but at the individual level, we do this to increase our wealth. On a macro level, urban drilling is admittedly much more than the money: the possibility of energy independence from foreign oil is within our reach if we can muster the political will to hold the course, certainly a significant geopolitical benefit of urban drilling. However, at the local level, it is about the money.

Having said this, if at any point during my five years of study I had discovered any legitimate, empirical evidence that urban drilling is deleterious to human health, I would immediately change my current perspective. I have yet to discover such evidence.

Thank you for the time you have afforded me this evening.

**Mel LeBlanc, PhD**, represents District 1 on the Arlington, Texas City Council and can be reached at [melleb@sbccglobal.net](mailto:melleb@sbccglobal.net).