

Learning from Aliquippa

Hopewell officials took that decision as a gag order. From then on, township residents started showing up at meetings in Aliquippa, trying to learn about Seitel's operations and plans for the region.

Aliquippa was spared a lawsuit because it chose to work with Seitel, Mr. Gallagher said. In fact, many of the municipalities involved in the current survey had ordinances similar to those in Hopewell, Potter and Aliquippa. But Seitel was able to work with all but five to limit some restrictions while abiding by others.

Mr. Walker saw it as a way to remain in control.

"We fought them," the Aliquippa mayor said. "We argued, disagreed. They could have easily added us to the lawsuit and we would have had no recourse. They would have had carte blanche in the city. But [instead] they walked step by step with us."

The township stipulated that no vibrational testing can take place above its pipelines and in areas with particularly sensitive structures. The parties whittled down a list of 500 possible locations by half. Seitel added Aliquippa to its bond, increasing its insurance coverage.

When the time came to send out the trucks, a code enforcement officer and a police officer — paid for by Seitel — traveled along with the trucks as they went through Aliquippa and Center, to monitor and catalogue any potential damage.

"They've come through and we don't have any problems," said Terrance McConnell, general manager of the Aliquippa water authority.

But both Mr. McConnell and Mr. Walker are already dreading what will come next.

"Drilling — that's the big fight," Mr. Walker said. "That's going to come."