

## City Council OKs drilling under four city parks

By SARAH BAHARI

STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

NORTH RICHLAND HILLS -- The drilling has begun.

Six months after the city approved a gas drilling ordinance, the first rig is up and running on Graham Ranch, at the corner of Rufe Snow and Hightower drives.

The rig -- across the street from Foster Village Elementary School -- began drilling early Monday morning.

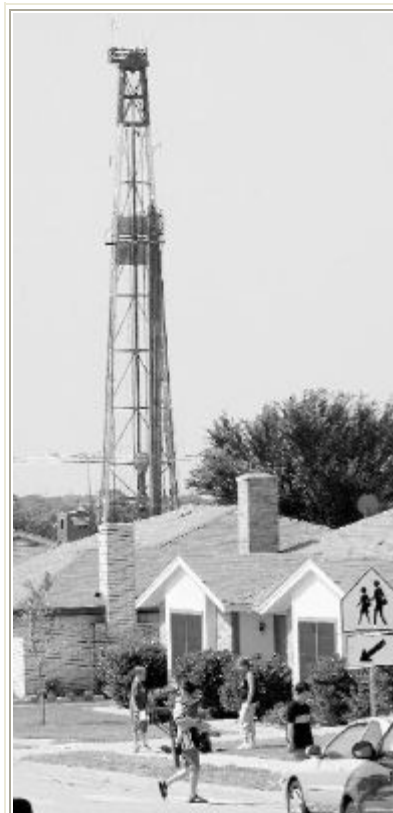
So far, no parents have complained to the school, said Mark Thomas, spokesman for Birdville school district. And much of the drilling will happen during the summer, he said, when school is out of session.

Only one resident has complained to city officials.

"It's an eyesore," said Jack Bailey, who lives about a quarter-mile from the site. "Why would they drill in the middle of the city?"

The well did not require additional City Council approval because it is more than 600 feet from any structure. It is more than 800 feet from the elementary school.

"We have very stringent protections," said Bo Bass, assistant city manager in North



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The rig in the background is at the corner of Rufe Snow and Hightower drives. The city approved drilling in the Barnett Shale in November.

Richland Hills.

In November, North Richland Hills approved drilling in the Barnett Shale -- the vast underground gas field beneath Tarrant and neighboring counties.

The regulations are aimed to allow drilling but also to protect residents from noise and eyesores.

City officials created a three-tiered system.

Under the ordinance, companies can obtain a permit to place wells farther than 600 feet from any residence.

Before allowing drilling 300 to 600 feet from a residence, the City Council must have a public hearing about whether to approve the request.

No well can be drilled 150 to 300 feet from a residence unless every affected resident agrees in writing.

More drilling may be in store.

This week, the City Council cleared the way for drilling under four city parks.

Only one park, Fossil Creek, would be allowed to have a rig on the property. Gas deposits under the other parks -- Northfield, Richfield and Linda Spurlock -- would be reached through horizontal drilling.

Two companies, Four Sevens and the Harding Co., will initially pay the city about \$363,409 for mineral rights.

After that, North Richland Hills will receive 25 percent of royalties. That money could take months or years to trickle in, Bass said, and the amount depends on the productivity of the wells.

City leaders have estimated that fewer than 10 active wells would be placed throughout the city.