

December 3, 2013

**Testimony for S.1591, H.2980 "An Act relative to comprehensive siting reform for land based wind projects" before the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy.
Testimony by Dale LaBonte, 1023 Dunhamtown-Brimfield Road, Brimfield MA 01010**

The continued efforts to pass a wind siting law are as misguided as they were five years ago when the first siting bill was promoted. The language of these bills eliminates the strong and effective practices in our cities and towns to ensure that projects fit the needs and interests of communities. They violate the principle of local control.

In those towns where wind plants have been erected, there is growing disarray.

- In Falmouth, a court case has exposed the trade-off between "easy" money (more turbine capacity than was needed for the purpose), and human lives. The judge's injunction order found the residents' claims of irreparable harm to have merit.
- In Princeton, costs of repairs have piled on top of lowered production to cause electricity rates to soar.
- In Fairhaven and Kingston, scores of complaints go unheard as town boards are brushed off by state agencies.

The situation is bad enough in communities that thought they wanted wind development. Now they are learning the hard way the true impacts on health, property value, and actual (versus promised) production levels. How much worse off would communities identified as having a "wind resource" be if decision-making is placed in the hands of a state administration which refuses to accept reality.

These bills give a state agency, appointed by the governor, the authority to permit wind turbines whether or not the host town wants the project--and the state decides which towns have significant wind resources.

Once a developer files an application with one of those towns, that town must establish a wind siting review board. Once appointed, that board has no oversight by local elected officials, and can waive local bylaws in order to approve a project.

Once the town board issues a decision--whether an approval or a denial--the developer may take the project to the state Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB) for an expedited comprehensive state permit. The EFSB has no mandate to listen to neighbor complaints. It exists to smooth the way for energy production.

Regardless of the local decision, the EFSB must approve the project if it meets standards adopted under these bills, and it may approve the project even if those standards are not met. Regardless of the local decision, the state permit prevails.

With its current initiative, part of the Community Wind Outreach Initiative, the Department of Public Utilities and the EFSB have signaled their intention to proceed with siting regardless of whether the legislature acts on wind siting or not. Their comment period is to solicit "Best Practices," not to evaluate the appropriateness of fast-track approvals for a technology that cannot dispatch electricity when it is needed.

These bills would set a dangerous precedent in eliminating boards and processes in place to protect the public to allow a few companies to reap tax and other incentives for an untested technology.