

Concerned citizens discuss possible wind farm

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Northern Henry County residents gathered in the Sulphur Springs Community Building Tuesday evening to talk about a proposed wind farm that may be coming to the area. The Big Blue River Wind Farm is the third project of its type to eye the county.

More than 150 people filled the community building. The parking lot was full 10 minutes before the meeting started and people were still pulling in, hunting for a space. The mood throughout the evening seemed civil, with a few random comments from the audience. On the whole, the folks who turned out did not seem eager to see a wind farm come to town.

"It's not that any of us are against 'green energy.' We're not. We think it's fantastic. It just doesn't belong where people are," said Eric Painter, one of the meeting organizers.

Painter and his family grew up in the area and still own the farm that their great-grandfather established years ago. A representative from Calpine Corporation approached the family a month ago about leasing some of their land for the wind farm.

Calpine is looking to eventually place 80 to 100 wind turbines in Fall Creek, Harrison, Jefferson and Prairie townships. Wind farm project manager Derek Rieman previously said the turbines could be 400 to 499 feet tall from the ground to the fully-vertical blade tip and would produce 200 megawatts of electricity. This would be the first windfarm project for the energy company.

Painter and his sister, Susie Eichhorn, visited Headwaters Wind Farm in Winchester to learn more about the turbines before signing a contract.

"When I got out of the car, by one of the houses that was by the windmill, I was flabbergasted to be very honest," Painter said. "I could not believe the sound. Nobody had ever told me about the sound that they create."

Eichhorn shared her concerns at a county commissioners meeting last month.

"I think if you were a landowner and you put one of those on your land, you'd have people hating you," she told the commissioners.

During the meeting Tuesday, Painter showed a compilation video of several TV news reports and online videos that highlighted potential concerns with turbines. Winchester resident Linda Cox, who owns property adjacent to turbines on the Headwaters Wind Farm, spoke to the Henry County residents, as well.

Cox said she did not sign the 'Good Neighbor' contract from the Winchester wind farm that offered her \$1,000 per year.

"We're not vindictive people against anybody who put them up. But it's not benefiting anyone but the people who put them on their farm," Cox said. "It doesn't benefit us at all."

Other speakers at the meeting included attorney Stephen Snyder and Ball State University associate professor James Rybarczyk. Snyder recently represented opponents of a wind farm in Rush County. Rybarczyk was involved in a movement opposing wind farms in Delaware County.

Ryberczyk suggested that people who are opposed to wind turbines should begin organizing before the process moves forward. Snyder suggested that the Henry County Planning Commission may not have the authority to approve turbines on agricultural land in the first place.

The utilities section of the Henry County Development Code covers both meteorological towers and wind turbines, referred to as a Wind Energy Conversion System (WECS) in the code. The code outlines safety lighting and acceptable noise and vibration standards.

Henry County Planning Commission Zoning Administrator Rachel L. White said any turbine that is in violation of the sound ordinance would be shut off until the problem could be fixed.

"If the problem couldn't be remedied with a repair, the turbine would have to be decommissioned," White said.

Some Sulphur Springs residents raised concerns Tuesday about the turbines producing infrasound, a noise that is too low for most people to hear. There have been many studies about what effects, if any, infrasound can have on people living in close proximity to wind farms. To date, there is no conclusive, agreed-upon scientific stance on the issue.

Infrasound mapping isn't a requirement for a commission approved use (CAU) hearing or an Improvement Location Permit from the Henry County Planning Commission. White said they have not discussed adding infrasound requirements to the WECS ordinance at any planning commission meetings.

The planning commission is scheduled to consider a case at their next meeting about installing a meteorological tower in Sulphur Springs in relation to the wind farm.

The Henry County Planning Commission will meet at 6:30 p.m. April 21 in the county courthouse, 101 S. Main St., New Castle.

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