

Controlling the wind, locally

April 5, 2010 | Daily Hampshire Gazette [30 Day Embargo] (Northampton, MA) Author: RICHIE DAVIS; Gazette Contributing Writer | Section: Business | 528 Words OpenURL Link

With prodding from groups like the Franklin Regional Planning Board, the state Senate has reworked its proposed wind farm siting law to provide for more home rule, according to a lawyer for the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

The proposed legislation allows one-stop permitting for wind farm developments of 2 megawatts, if they comply with statewide siting standards that have yet to be written. At a November meeting, state Sen. Benjamin Downing, D-Pittsfield, heard harsh criticism that the process could rob towns of local control and was too rushed for small towns with part-time government.

Kenneth Kimmell, Environmental Affairs' general counsel, told the regional planners last Thursday that the version of the bill adopted by the Senate removes provisions in the earlier bill that would have overriden local control. That change was the result of comments last fall by planners in Franklin and Berkshire counties, the Massachusetts Municipal Association and others.

"It provides a pretty good example of the democratic process in action," said Kimmell, and it should help the state move toward its goal of getting 15 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2015.

But some at the session said the latest proposal, which still can be changed when it comes before the House of Representatives - may still present problems.

The new proposal calls for towns in soon-to-be designated "high wind communities" to set up one-stop "wind-energy permitting boards" that would have five to eight months to approve siting proposals. Developers' appeals of decisions by those boards would have to go to court - a change from the original version.

Appeals by outside groups - such as Great Barrington-based Green Berkshires, which has been battling the proposal for the Monroe and Florida's 30 megawatt Hoosac Wind project for eight years - would go before a state siting board for appeals rather than the courts.

Rob Garrity, executive director of the Mass. Climate Action Network, said that this would greatly cut litigation costs for towns because they wouldn't have to defend all their decisions in court.

With predictable standards and with approval granted within 12 months, he said, the proposal would reduce permitting from five years or more to no more than a year and a half and cut the period of appeals from five years to one.

Planning Board Chairman Tom Miner said there's still concern in small towns, "where you've got volunteer boards, no municipal staff and no capability to deal with major decisions on technical issues within two months' time. We feel that's a significant issue for us because this area and Berkshire County as well have the uplands where we're going to see the wind projects proposed. Our communities really are not capable of dealing with those in the time frame that the bill requires."

Since many town boards meet only once a month, Miner said, they would have difficulty meeting the 30-day deadline under the proposal for ruling a developer's application is complete or for hiring a technical consultant at the developer's expense.

Kimmell said the state is willing to consider allowing more time to those communities.

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RICHIE DAVIS Recorder Staff *4/2/2010 With prodding from groups like the Franklin Regional Planning Board, the state Senate has reworked its proposed wind farm siting law to provide for more home rule, according to a lawyer for the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

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The proposed legislation allows one-stop permitting for wind farm developments of 2 megawatts if they comply with statewide siting standards that have yet to be written. At a November meeting state Sen. Benjamin Downing, D-Pittsfield, heard harsh criticism that the process could rob towns of local control and was too rushed for small towns with part-time government.

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Kimmell said the state is willing to consider allowing more time to those communities.

And despite assurances from Kimmell that towns could opt out of creating a new consolidated permitting board and instead assign the planning board to that function, regional board member David Roberson complained allowing

selectmen to appoint that special panel's members would be "a very clear infringement of home rule. Selectmen aren't involved in land use and zoning -- they shouldn't be involved in this."

Roberson and Lloyd Crawford of Hawley, the board members among the most vocal in objecting to the siting proposal, are both executive officers in National Wind Watch, an anti-wind-power organization.

Planning Director Margaret Sloan said she was concerned about the ability of an appointed local board to waive local zoning bylaws that had been adopted by town meeting.

Green Berkshires Executive Director Eleanor Tillinghast argued that the bill "takes away local control, and it takes away your right to go to court if the Energy Facilities Siting Board determines against your decision as a local board." After calling her reading of the measure incorrect, Kimmell pointed out that despite overwhelming votes in Monroe and Florida supporting Hoosac Wind, "Mrs. Tillinghast has bankrolled a legal appeal over an access road that's taken over five years and deprived those towns of their local control. Local control apparently means if a town says yes, an opponent group can fight it forever, and if a town says no, there's no local remedy. It's a curious definition of local control."

MMA, which had opposed the original measure, now supports it, along with six statewide environmental groups, he said.

The statewide standards, to be written within the next nine months, "need to be as protective as existing law," Kimmell said. Several members argued that those standards should be set before the legislation is approved.

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Watering down Wind Act

February 8, 2010 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Editorials | Section: Editorials | 261 Words OpenURL Link

Tuesday, Feb. 09

The amended Wind Siting Act passed by the state Senate attempts to correct a problem that doesn't exist -- an alleged lack of local input. If the House follows the Senate's lead, the process for approving wind energy projects in the state may end up being even more bogged down in red tape than it is already.

The word "local" is too widely open to interpretation in this instance. In the strictest sense, it should refer to locally elected bodies, like the ones in Florida and Monroe that have long supported the Hoosac Wind project. That project has been stalled for five years by appeals made not on their environmental merits but to exploit a bureaucratic process apparently designed to tie projects in knots indefinitely. An easily resolved issue concerning a culvert impinging upon a stream has been the source of endless appeals whose purpose is not to improve the wind project but to prevent it from happening. It shouldn't be easier to gain approval for a fossil-fuel burning power plant than a wind turbine project, but that is now the case in Massachusetts.

The whole point of the Wind Siting Act is to streamline this process, not further encumber it. If anti-wind groups gain more influence, the Patrick administration's ambitious and laudatory effort to put the state at the forefront of the green energy movement will suffer a considerable setback. The legislation takes legitimate environmental concerns seriously and gives local communities input into projects that must be sited carefully. Watering it down will compound the problems the Act is meant to address.

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Bill levels wind power playing field

January 27, 2010 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Letters | Section: Letters to the Editor | 333 Words OpenURL Link

Thursday, Jan. 28

Contrary to Tad Ames ("Wind Act threatens our legacy," op-ed, Jan. 25), the wind siting reform bill threatens neither our conservation legacy nor our environmental legacy. Rather, it preserves Massachusetts' high environmental standards and historic commitment to land conservation.

Governor Patrick has undertaken the largest land conservation initiative in the state's history, permanently protecting 54,000 acres of open space and park land over the past two years, at the same time that he backs reform of wind siting. Conservation land is protected under Article 97 of the state Constitution. It would take a two-thirds vote of the Legislature to use of any of that land for wind development, and the siting bill does not change that.

But when it comes to development on private land, it is currently harder to build a small wind farm -- even one supported by its host community -- in Massachusetts than a large power plant fueled by coal or natural gas. The siting reform bill levels the playing field for wind power.

Ames notes that "no wind project in the Berkshires has been denied a permit by local authorities." That's true, and that's the point. Hoosac Wind, for instance, is supported by the host communities of Florida and Monroe, but it has been held up by legal appeals contesting the design of a stream-crossing culvert for five years. Five years!

The bill establishes strict state-wide standards for protection of environmental, historical, and cultural resources; preserves the rights of local authorities to say yes or no to such facilities; and allows affected citizens or environmental groups to seek judicial review by the state's highest court. That should be enough for anybody who truly cares about local control and environmental protection. But it would also put to an end to the abuse of our nation-leading environmental laws by not-in-my-backyard wind opponents who seek to win by delay what they can't win on the merits.

KEN KIMMELL

Boston

The writer is general counsel, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

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Real concerns about wind power

January 1, 2010 \mid Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)

Section: Opinion | 1161 Words

OpenURL Link

PITTSFIELD

The Eagle's promulgation of the state's misleading representation of the obstacles to industrial/commercial wind generation in Berkshire County is really quite remarkable ("Exploiting Savoy's Wind," Dec. 22). The foremost of these misconceptions is the notion that "local defenders of the mountaintops" have delayed these projects. Secondly, The Eagle's support of the Comprehensive Wind Siting Reform Act is premature for it is still in draft form. For a bill revised three times since May 2009, any pledge of support is premature.

Let me begin with the false perception that concerned environmentalists have stymied efforts towards commercial wind generation on Berkshire County's ridgelines. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), and its Clearinghouse Review Committee whose charge it is to review projects in the county requiring state, or federal environmental permits, local land use actions, found no evidence of local opposition obstructing permitting when reviewing proposals for industrial/commercial wind development in Berkshire County.

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Both the Brodie Mountain pro-ject, as well as the Hoosac project, were granted permits within months of filing applications. In fact, once Brodie had been permitted, the BRPC found the developer to be the biggest impediment to the progression of the project. The developers delayed the success of their project through a series of inefficient decisions detailed below: * Some of the sites were in Chapter status in Hancock and they hadn't planned on needing to get a release. I don't know how much say the town has in releasing lands from Chapter status but they obviously have some because that was dragged out for a while but the developer should have realized that the lands were in chapter status and that entailed a release process. I count that delay as being primarily the developers fault. They could have requested the release from chapter status ahead of time and avoided the delay which was entirely legal. * In building the access road, the developer actually cleared land that didn't belong to them and the trespassed upon property owner sued and got the work stopped. * Silverleaf Resorts, the timeshare developer that bought Brodie Mountain, sued the proponents of the wind project, I do not know on what grounds. That was settled out of court and I do not know any of the details. But what is now apparent is that the wind project was delayed and the developers didn't get anything in the settlement which precluded future suits. * Once the project was under construction and at least one wind turbine had been erected, Silverleaf sued again because the special permit for the access road coming from Lanesborough had lapsed, yet another delay. This was a preventable oversight.

The Hoosac project was also granted a permit in a timely sequence. The delay has been litigious, involving interpretation of the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act. The case now resides with the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court; the SJC does not adjudicate frivolous cases. It is important to note that by allowing industrial/commercial wind development on Berkshire ridgelines, we are creating new industrial zones in sensitive ecosystems. As such, it is important to have processes holding these projects to the highest standards.

The Minuteman project has never been permitted. The first permit application to Savoy was withdrawn without prejudice by the proponent. The second is being reviewed by the Savoy Special Permit Granting Authority. The project permitting has not been affected by any opposition. The BRPC has recently reviewed the Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) for this project and found it comprehensively lacking the appropriate information. The public cannot comment in a meaningful way when the details of a project's anticipated environmental impacts are omitted or promised at a later date. A project application that does so circumvents a complete and adequate MEPA review. The BRPC has asked the secretary of environment and energy affairs to require an Environmental Impact Report for both the Hoosac and Minuteman projects.

The BRPC would like to voice its concern about an emerging and troubling pattern of MEPA filings for wind energy projects in Berkshire County, concerning project segmentation. For example, the land disturbance calculations for Berkshire Wind and Hoosac Wind have increased substantially since their first ENF (Environmental Notification Form) filings. As a project develops and evolves, land disturbance and other calculations may vary. However, projects submitted for MEPA review should be at a sufficient level of design to provide an accurate and realistic snapshot of the anticipated environmental impacts and proposed mitigation measures. Proposed wind farms, such as the Minuteman Savoy Wind Project, are enormous projects and should be thoroughly scrutinized. A thorough MEPA review is best accomplished when all environmental impacts, both on-site and off-site, and proposed mitigation measures are fully documented, understood and considered at one time.

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My second concern regards the Comprehensive Wind Siting Reform Act that The Eagle endorses. The Regional Issues Committee (RIC) of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission has expended considerable time and resources reviewing this bill from its first iteration in May 2009. The arcane wording and length of this bill makes it extremely difficult to interpret. However, through multiple meetings and great effort the RIC recommended and the full Commission approved, opposition against this bill for the following reasons: * The local permitting sections are not necessary since the local permitting process has not been an impediment to the siting of wind energy facilities. * We believe that removing any acknowledgment of the potential siting of commercial wind projects on state lands protected under Article 97 actually weakens the bill. * We believe the bill gives disproportionate deference and favoritism to wind energy through exemption of a single industry (wind) from local and state environmental controls; Public Service Corporation status given to "any person or entity to transmit electricity derived from wind; and lowering the threshold to 2 megawatts at the expense of other energy forms, including other renewable forms. * We are opposed to the inequity in the bill for the appeal rights and process between parties of interest (abutters, etc.) and project developers. * We are opposed to the non-adjudicatory process before the Energy Facilities Siting Board which are embedded in the legislation. * We believe strongly that the state should develop wind energy siting standards prior to enactment of this legislation. The lack of confidence in the state's ability to fashion appropriate and fair standards, regardless of the composition of the advisory group, is a major impediment. * The bill lacks a sensible time table for becoming fully effective.

We believe the standards and regulations will be difficult to develop. Even after they are approved by the EFSB, a period of several months is necessary to fully inform the community. We continue to have a significant number of other timing issues with various aspects of the bill as drafted and do not believe it is workable from that standpoint.

The BRPC remains committed to supporting the adoption of wind and other forms of renewable energy and is actively working with its member communities in facilitating such enactment. The Comprehensive Wind Siting Reform Act, however, is deeply flawed and unacceptable as written, and does not appear to be necessary.

James Mullen is chair of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

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Exploiting Savoy's wind

December 21, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Editorials | Section: Editorials | 379 Words OpenURL Link

Tuesday, Dec. 22

It is revealing that even though Savoy's Minuteman Wind project has been in development since 2004, its president is resigned to the fact that even more time will be wasted in appeals before the 2.5 megawatt wind turbines are finally up and running. This kind of needless delay is the main reason why passage of the wind siting reform act must be a legislative priority when state lawmakers return to Beacon Hill next month.

Minuteman Wind is one of two wind projects under way in Savoy, with Patriot Renewables in the midst of a permitting process to build two wind measurement towers on land straddling the town and neighboring Adams. If wind is adequate, this could lead to the construction of as many as 16 wind turbines generating as much as 40 megawatts of electricity.

Berkshire wind power opponents define themselves as local defenders of the mountaintops against greedy industrial interests, but the Minuteman Wind project, as well as the Hoosac Wind project a little north in Florida and Monroe, are supported by local residents and elected officials. Nearly two years ago, Savoy voters handily approved a zoning bylaw that would allow the Minuteman project to be built. There are economic advantages to the project but residents and officials would never sign off on any project that would jeopardize their town's hills and woodlands regardless of whatever financial advantages accompany it.

Massachusetts is taking a leadership role in developing green energy sources, and by serving as many as 20,000 homes, the two Savoy wind projects would reduce the need for the equivalent amount of power generated by polluting energy sources like oil and coal. Being green carries with it the responsibility to go beyond saying no to all energy proposals and advocating those that accomplish the most with the least amount of harm to the environment.

The wind siting reform act would eliminate the bureaucratic obstacles to projects that opponents use to trump the wishes of local advocates of beneficial wind projects. Use of these tactical roadblocks is the equivalent of the filibusters in Congress designed to stall proposals like health care reform that foes cannot defeat on their merits. We hope Berkshire legislators will push for passage of the wind siting reform act in the approaching legislative cossion.

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MONROE *12/9/2009 The Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a public hearing tonight at 6 to hear a request from New England Wind LLC, to extend a special permit for the development of the Hoosac Wind Project, a 20-turbine wind farm that is to span the Monroe-Florida town border.

December 9, 2009 | Recorder, The [30 Day Embargo] (Greenfield, MA) 108 Words
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The meeting will be held in Town Hall at 3C School St.

The Hoosac Wind Project, originally presented to the towns in April 2003, is to include nine 1.5-megawatt turbines on Crum Hill in Monroe and 11 more on Bakke Mountain in Florida.

At the time, proponents predicted that the 30-megawatt system would in operation by 2005.

Monroe ZBA Chairman Russell Oakes said the wind project already has a special permit, and has obtained 2-year permit extensions at least once before this.

Earlier this week, the Florida town zoning board approved a 2-year special permit extension for the portion of the Hoosac wind farm to be located there.

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RICHIE DAVIS Recorder Staff *12/5/2009 A west wind is blowing against proposed state laws that would govern siting of windmills -- at least gauging from the reaction of a packed Franklin Regional Planning Board meeting this week.

December 5, 2009 \mid Recorder, The [30 Day Embargo] (Greenfield, MA) 778 Words OpenURL Link

If home rule was the battle cry heard from planning board members and other town officials from around the region Thursday night as they reviewed a proposal to speed up wind turbines development, there were also concerns that the process outlined in the bill is also flawed.

Sen. Benjamin Downing, D-Pittsfield, who has worked with the Legislature's Joint Committee on Telecommunication, Utilities and Energy to revise the bill it approved Nov. 17, said he neither proposed nor opposed the measure, which he believes will be acted on early next year. Downing's district includes Berkshire County towns and those in Franklin County -- Ashfield, Charlemont, Conway, Hawley, Heath, Monroe and Rowe -- where many of the state's best land-based wind-power generation sites have been identified.

In many ways, the revised bill is a vast improvement over the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act first proposed by the Patrick administration, he said. Gone from the latest version is any mention of putting wind turbines in state forests and other public conservation lands. Also gone are provisions for local permit denials to be appealed to the state Energy Facilities Siting Board rather than the courts, Downing said. The bill, as now worded, applies only to wind projects of 2 megawatts or more.

Downing said he thinks now "we have much more public involvement."

The senator said he was able to convince committee members that the panel should include regional planning boards from Berkshire County, three from Cape Cod and islands and a regional planning board member representing either Franklin or Hampshire counties.

Franklin Regional Planning Director Margaret Sloan told Downing it would make sense to assure that Franklin County has a seat at the table when wind-siting standards are written. Several planners questioned why legislation should be adopted before the siting standards it would impose, and the Pittsfield senator insists on removing a section that would allow siting even when those standards aren't met.

The Franklin County board plans to comment on the proposal laying out its concerns. The Heath, Rowe and Hawley planning boards have submitted comments of their own.

Downing, who strongly favors legislation to simplify creation of municipally owned utilities that can take advantage of lower cost, locally generated electricity, said he is working to add provisions to the legislation that would allow towns to benefit from locally sited wind turbines.

Some of the local officials expressed concern about perceived loss of home-rule control over wind farms.

Charlemont Selectman Winston Healy said of the proposal as written: "It overrules home rule with a special board you're creating it's a bill designed to avoid, evade, any kind of local input into the process."

Downing and Berkshire Regional Planning Director Nathaniel Karns both said they were as concerned about the planning process prescribed by the legislation as they were about the inroads it makes in home-rule authority.

Karns said that wind projects like the 19-turbine Hoosac Wind project in Florida and Monroe has been stalled for more than five years in the courts, not because of local permitting. He argued against a provision allowing the state

energy board to override conditions agreed to between wind developers and the local board, and questioned how the 120-day decision-making timeline called for in the legislation makes sense.

The chairman of a newly created local composite board, operating without any existing procedures in place, would have 30 days to decide whether the application is complete, leaving only 90 days to decide on whether the project meets the state standards, conduct a hearing and render a decision.

"I don't see that there's any way on God's green earth that a virgin board can be in a position on something of this complexity to render a decision given that time line," said Karns, whose Berkshire County commission has come out against the bill. "This is not a workable timeline."

Rowe Planning Board member Danett Reynolds-Gallaghar, (cq) asked for a rationale for the state trying to enact an expedited permitting process. "I feel like it's just a way of forcing a facility on a community that doesn't want it."

When Downing said the state was trying to "level the playing field" for a renewable energy source with fossil-fuel plants, which can already bypass local siting authority, Reynolds-Gallaghar asked, "Why not level the playing field in the other direction?"

"The other impetus for the proposed legislation is global warming," said Downing. "Whether you think it's (wind turbines) a small chunk or a big chunk I think the governor is right in saying we have a responsibility to do everything we can. I don't know if this is part of the solution or not, but I don't think we can walk out of this room and say, We're not going to do anything."

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Time is now for wind act

November 6, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Editorials | Section: Editorials | 440 Words

OpenURL Link

Friday, Nov. 06 While the Patrick administration's goals for the introduction of wind generating projects are admirable, the reality on the ground - perhaps in the air would be a better phrase - is discouraging. The main problem is a cumbersome permitting process that gives all the advantages to opponents, a situation that could change as a bill creating a level playing field works its way through the Legislature.

According to The Boston Globe, more than one-third of the major wind-energy projects in Massachusetts are currently stalled by either lawsuits and/or permit appeals. Three of the biggest projects in the state are in the Berkshires, where the Hoosac Wind, Berkshire Wind and Savoy Wind projects have all confronted a variety of hurdles. The state currently produces an embarrassingly low 9 megawatts of energy through wind power, and if these Berkshire projects could get under way they would give a jump-start to Governor Deval Patrick's ambitious plan to produce 2,000 megawatts of power, enough to provide energy for 800,000 homes, by 2020.

The environmental groups that have hamstrung these projects, in some cases for several years, offer a variety of objections to them without acknowledging that every energy source has drawbacks. To urge "conservation" of energy as an alternative to pursuing new energy sources is a false choice as that strategy alone, while admirable, cannot realistically address energy needs. Wind has none of the negatives of polluting sources like oil and coal, and the addition of even a small amount of wind power to the energy grid is worth it if that means a little less reliance on polluting energy sources that leave America at the mercy of oil barons both domestic and foreign.

Wind opponents claim that the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act on Beacon Hill will take away local control of wind power projects, which is patently false. What it will do in clarifying and simplifying the bewildering bureaucratic mess that is the permitting process is take stalling tactics away from the environmental groups that stand in kneejerk opposition to any wind project that emerges. The Act guarantees the protection of environmentally sensitive, scenic and recreational areas and allows the imposition of local conditions - assuming they have real merit and are not simply designed to stop the project.

The Hoosac Wind project in Florida and Monroe is currently being held up by wetlands objections that could safely be resolved by contractors. Silverleaf Resorts, a Dallasbased developer of a proposed condo complex on Brodie Mountain that apparently knows what is best for the Berkshires, is holding up Berkshire Wind. The Reform Act won't free all of these projects but it will constitute real progress, and we urge the Berkshire delegation to advocate its passage.

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What if ... turbines sparked state's power

October 27, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Scott Stafford, Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: News | 1014 Words OpenURL Link

Wednesday, Oct. 28 Two utility-scale wind projects on hold in Berkshire County, with a combined 45 megawatts of capacity, would expand wind generated electricity in the state by about 500 percent and power the equivalent of 15,000 homes, according to local and state officials.

But both are tied up in litigation filed by local property owners, and one of the projects has been delayed for more than five years.

A bill pending in the Legislature might cut the time needed for permitting, eliminating much of the litigationgenerated delays and result in more wind energy development in Western Massachusetts, according to the state secretary of energy and environmental affairs.

"The Wind Energy Siting Reform bill will make utility-scale wind projects easier," Ian A. Bowles said. "It would maintain the right to appeal projects, but any appeals would be limited to one judicial level. It would be a very significant difference."

The permitting process would also be expedited by requiring local towns to issue all permits from one combined panel, with a similar process at the state level, reducing the permitting period by two to three years, Bowles said. Local control would remain because towns and municipalities would have the first shot at turning down any proposed project.

According to a report issued Oct. 20 by the American Wind Energy Association, Massachusetts has a total of nine megawatts of installed wind power capacity, compared to the national capacity of 31,100 megawatts. Texas ranked highest in the nation with 8,797 megawatts of installed wind capacity.

In January, Gov. Deval L. Patrick set a goal of 2,000 megawatts of wind-power capacity by 2020, enough to supply electricity to 800,000 homes.

But the Hoosac Wind Project, a 20-turbine, 30-megawatt venture planned for Bakke Mountain in Florida and Crum Hill in Monroe, was begun in 2004 and had its original permit withdrawn in February 2005 when two groups appealed the Department of Environmental Protection's wetlands permit to an administrative magistrate.

The project is estimated to cost more than \$50 million.

Since then, one ruling has gone in favor of the plaintiffs, and two have favored the wind project with the latest ruling being appealed to the state appeals court.

On Oct. 21, the state's highest court, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, announced it would bypass the state appeals court and pick up the appeal directly. A ruling on the case is expected to take at least another six months.

"The Wind Energy Siting Reform Act will not affect the ongoing development of the Hoosac wind project," said Paul Copleman, spokesman for Hoosac Wind project developer Iberdrola Renewables. "We believe the Hoosac site remains an excellent site for development, and we are pleased that the [Supreme Judicial Court] has agreed to hear the appeal. We are confident that the state's decision to grant the permit is correct and that the court will once again uphold the permit, allowing us to finally move forward on a project that enjoys overwhelming local support."

Meanwhile, the \$46 million Berkshire Wind project, a 15-megawatt wind farm on the ridgeline of Brodie Mountain in Hancock, was halted by court order earlier this month over a suit filed by adjacent property owner Silverleaf Resorts concerning a special permit for the access road. It has been in various stages of development since 1998.

To date, four of the 10, 1.5-megawatt turbines have been completed, three more under construction, and three sites are ready for the rest. The turbines rise about 385 feet above the ridge line.

According to state Sen. Michael W. Morrissey, chairman of the state senate's Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy, it is possible the Wind Energy Siting Reform bill could make it out of the Senate within a month.

"We have made some changes and we are now seeking public input," Morrissey said. "So we're still working on it but we don't have a final draft yet. We'd like to get it out of the Senate this month."

Bowles hopes to see the bill passed by both houses by the time this legislative session ends.

Tad Ames, president of Berkshire Natural Resources, said in its present form, the bill does little to protect local control of scenic ridgelines.

"We're discouraged by the bill in its current form," Ames said. "We do believe good siting standards are needed to encourage good wind development, but we feel short shrift has been given to local input and control."

Ames said there is also great concern that state-owned conservation lands would be applicable to the expedited process of the bill.

Morrissey said the bill does protect state-owned conservancy lands from the expedited wind siting process as proposed.

"[State conservancy lands] are exempted from the expedited process," Morrissey said.

State Rep. Daniel E. Bosley, D-North Adams, said he is watching the bill as it proceeds through committee.

"I think the goal is to eliminate from the process those who want to stop these projects at all cost in the courts by running the clock," he said. "But at the same time, if there is a bad project, we need to be able to say no. I'm sure there is a good compromise out there and I'm anxious to see what comes out of committee."

State Sen. Ben Downing said he has been working with committee members to be sure local needs are addressed by the bill.

"I would like to see a requirement that any project going through the expedited process should be required to provide a local benefit," he said. "At least 10 percent of the energy generated should be made available for purchase by the local municipality or their designee. If we in the Berkshires are asked to make some of the sacrifice, we should be able to get some benefits."

There is an overall need for a "more rational" approach, Downing said.

"Developers need a more predictable and repeatable process, and I think an expedited process that still retains environmental protections and local control is desirable."

Downing said the bill in its present form isn't quite where it needs to be.

"I have some proposals that could get it there, and we're still working on it," he said.

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Massachusetts blown away in wind power development race

October 21, 2009 | Burlington Union (MA) Author: Michael Norton; State House News Service | Section: homepage | 1232 Words OpenURL Link

Wind energy projects across the country raced ahead in the third quarter, but Massachusetts is barely registering among states competing for the electricity, jobs and environmental benefits available through the industry and the state's top energy official is calling for passage of a siting reform bill in the Legislature.

Nationally, Texas is the runaway leader with nearly 8,800 megawatts of wind energy installed, according to a report released Tuesday afternoon. The other top states, as measured by installed capacity, are lowa (3,053), California (2,787), Minnesota (1,805) and Oregon (1,659). Those states are outpacing Massachusetts, which Gov. Deval Patrick envisions as a leader in wind power, but which has only 9 megawatts of wind energy in operation, largely through small, single turbine wind facilities.

"Massachusetts has very big wind power plans and ambitions but there's very little actually installed in the ground today," said Mark Rodgers, a spokesman for Cape Wind, a 420-megawatt, 130-turbine offshore wind farm that's received state and local permitting but has become bogged down this year in the federal approval process.

Within New England, Massachusetts has more wind energy capacity installed than Rhode Island, Vermont and Connecticut but trails Maine (104 megawatts) and New Hampshire (25), according to the new American Wind Energy Association report. New York has 1,274 megawatts of installed capacity, and was joined in the third quarter by Illinois among 10 states in the "gigawatt club," the association said in its third quarter market report.

Project "siting difficulties" are an issue for the industry in Massachusetts, said Elizabeth Salerno, the association's director of industry data and analysis. "There's definitely potential in the state," said Salerno. "There's definitely developer interest in the state to build projects."

According to the report, the states that showed the fastest growth in wind power installations in the third quarter were Arizona, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wyoming and New Mexico. In all, 1,600 megawatts of wind energy came online in the third quarter and 5,800 megawatts were added so far this year.

In January, Patrick, saying "now is the time to turn to wind power," set a state goal of establishing 2,000 megawatts of wind power by 2020. Patrick cited growing interest in wind projects and abundant Bay State wind resources, and said wind power would be "a centerpiece of the clean energy economy we are creating for Massachusetts."

According to the numbers, there's a long way to go.

State Energy and Environment Secretary Ian Bowles said the Patrick administration's goal is to have 11 megawatts of wind power installed by the end of 2009 and more than 40 by the end of 2010, but Bowles said growth in wind power in Massachusetts is dependent on passage of a siting reform bill pending before the Legislature.

That bill (H 3065/S 1504), he said, would maintain local control over projects but kick project appeals up to a state board when projects have received local approval. Bowles said bigger wind energy developers "don't tend to focus on Massachusetts" currently and the siting reforms would "dramatically" speed up permitting.

"It would fast-track consideration of people who want to challenge a town's decision in favor of wind," he said, adding that projects under the legislation would still need to meet environmental protection and setback requirements. "I think there's a real consensus forming around the bill," Bowles said.

He called the bill "the main piece of unfinished business from last year's very sweeping session on greenhouse

gases and clean energy."

The siting reform bills remains before the Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy Committee, which held a public hearing on the legislation in May.

Federal stimulus law funds are a factor behind the uptick in wind energy installations nationally, the report said, along with expected action on climate change legislation, state policies and "attractive wind project economics."

Bowles said Massachusetts was missing an opportunity to benefit from wind power stimulus law opportunities.

The association report lists two small wind power projects as under construction in Massachusetts, a single-turbine project in Newburyport sponsored by Mark Richey Woodworking and a double-turbine project at the Mount Wachusett Wind Farm.

In January, the Patrick administration said more than 300 wind turbines, representing generating capacity of 800 megawatts, were in the planning and permitting processes. A study commissioned by a state advisory commission and released in April concluded that wind power developers "perceived Massachusetts as a difficult state in which to pursue development" and that other states had procedures in place "that they felt made development more consistent, certain and predictable."

The report noted that the 30 megawatt Hoosac Wind project has been in the permitting process for seven years and said case studies of projects in Massachusetts showed that appeals of local and state permits had a "profound effect" on project schedules and that "Massachusetts stood out from other states in the number of times that the same issues can be argued, simply because there is opportunity for so many levels of appeal."

Said Bowles: "Massachusetts has a reputation that is deserved of being one of the hardest states in the country to build wind. We have a lot of local control and complex permitting processes."

In July, the administration moved to block a wind farm in Buzzards Bay designed to generate 300 megawatts of energy, ruling under a new offshore development management plan that the South Coast Wind Project at the mouth of the bay was in an area too environmentally valuable and navigationally narrow.

That management plan permitted about two percent of state waters for commercial wind development, capable of supporting about 600 total megawatts, enough to power up to 200,000 homes, according to the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

Renewable energy supporters assert a state law passed last year, the Green Communities Act, will accelerate the increase of renewable energy required of all electricity suppliers, boosting requirements from 4 percent of sales to 15 percent by 2020, and setting a goal of 20 percent of all electricity from renewables by 2020. The law requires utilities to enter into long-term contracts with the developers of renewable projects, in order to help them obtain financing. The act also created the commission that reviewed state laws to identify potential obstacles to renewable projects. State officials are also zeroing in on land-based and offshore sites for renewable energy installations.

Rodgers said wind power development worldwide has shown a "snowballing effect," with wind projects becoming more acceptable once one or two projects are built and citizens become familiar with wind farms. "I think that when there aren't that many wind turbines around, there can be a kind of fear of the unknown," Rodgers said. As projects are built on land and offshore in Massachusetts, he said, "it's going to help projects down the road."

While projects like Cape Wind and other smaller wind installations have sparked fierce local opposition, there's a "real eagerness" among many in Massachusetts to embark on more wind projects, Rodgers said, while acknowledging that "it's just inherently more challenging to permit projects here." Rodgers said the bulk of the state's wind power potential is offshore and along mountainous ridge lines.

According to Salerno, the states with the largest amounts of wind power benefit from a "convergence of factors,"

including strong wind resources, political leadership and public opinion favoring wind power, and transmission planning and policies that make wind power more attractive to developers.

Massachusetts is becoming a hub for wind power research and development and testing, Salerno said, and could become home to a strong offshore wind industry. "Once hopefully you get over that first project, the rest will follow," she said.

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Extending a hand

August 12, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Benning W. De La Mater, Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: Top Story News | 737 Words OpenURL Link

Wednesday, Aug. 12 PITTSFIELD -- The topics stretched from the economy to wind turbines.

Introductions were made between government officials and environmentalists.

And the gestures ranged from handshakes to hugs.

Gov. Deval L. Patrick offered up a full serving of civic service Tuesday evening at a town hall meeting at Controy Pavilion on OnotaLake. The meeting drew more than 200 citizens who spoke their minds to the commonwealth's commander-in-chief.

In the first Berkshires stop of 17 town hall events planned across the state this summer, Patrick fielded questions from concerned citizens on issues ranging from zebra mussels to health insurance reform to the economy.

He told the crowd that the numbers are starting to show that the current economic slide may be leveling off, but tough decisions lie ahead.

"We could lay every state employee off and still have a \$1 billion-plus deficit," Patrick said. "There are a lot of hard choices to make. The question is how do we come out of it strong ... and power out of the other side?"

Patrick fielded several questions pertaining to wind turbines, including proposed farms in Berkshire County and Nantucket Sound. Several residents voiced concerns on both sides of the issue.

Patrick told the crowd he supports "smart" wind turbine projects, including Cape Wind.

"It would be a large symbol to have the first major wind farm in the nation," he said.

Patrick asked for a show of hands on who supported the local proposal, called Hoosac Wind. About one-third of the crowd supported it, one-third opposed it, and one-third had never heard of it.

Mount Washington resident Bobbi Hallig told the governor: "There's plenty of things to do rather than put turbines across the landscape."

"There are thoughtful views on both sides," Patrick said. "I don't think wind turbines are always right or always wrong. There have to be multiple strategies, conservation, solar ... I think we can fuel our future growth with conservation."

Bob Race, president of the Lake Onota Preservation Association, and several Richmond Pond supporters told the governor they were unhappy with the state's response to the threat of zebra mussels in area lakes.

"We have a real crisis now," Race said. "And it may be too little too late."

Race urged Patrick to allow towns to close boat ramps when state or volunteer monitors aren't available. Patrick introduced Race to Mary Griffin, commissioner of the state's Department of Fish and Game, and urged that the two speak on the issue after the meeting.

From Dennis to Lynn to Chicopee to Pittsfield, the governor has held 16 town hall meetings "to encourage civic

engagement." Dressed in light brown slacks, a dark brown tie and white dress shirt -- the cuffs rolled up -- Patrick walked through the crowd with a microphone in hand as jet skis bounced across the water.

When Chris Collins, of Lee, asked Patrick how to get funding for the development of a cultural committee in his town, Patrick solicited advice from the crowd and then introduced Collins to a woman who knew of some options.

Local radio host Sherman Baldwin asked Patrick when citizens -- other than road repair contractors -- would see benefits of stimulus funds.

"Most of the money hasn't been spent," Patrick said. "Broadband money will be released late this summer and fall. And some of that money retained our teachers ... but I understand, we need jobs now."

When Marie Cowell, a Pittsfield resident, began to tell Patrick that her two children who have developmental disabilities lost several hours of state-funded services, Cowell became emotional and then apologized.

"Don't apologize for emotions -- you're living it," said Patrick, who gathered Cowell in his arms and hugged her.

"Can you say today that there will not be any more cuts to the line items for disabled people and the services?" Cowell said, breaking down.

Patrick said he couldn't promise anything when it came to budget cuts.

"I know there's a face behind those cuts," he said. "But I want you to know I get it. Everything in this budget has taken a hit. We're having to make terrible choices among miserable options."

The last of the 17 town hall meeting will take place Thursday at 5:30 p.m. at the Berkshires Visitors Center in Adams.

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Yes in my back yard

July 26, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Section: Editorials | 858 Words OpenURL Link

PITTSFIELD

Here is the big problem; everybody likes wind energy, just "Not in My Back Yard." Those who feel that way are commonly called NIMBYs. Who is a NIMBY? Well, "green" folks like Ted Kennedy and Robert Kennedy Jr. who support wind power except off the shores of Cape Cod where the senator lives. They really do want wind energy but want it in "suitable" places that are "appropriate." In other words, not in their backyards.

Green Berkshires is one of these NIMBY groups. "GREEN" in "Green Berkshires" seems to stand more properly for the acronym, "G etting R id of E nvironmental E fforts N earby," not being green.

I do not agree with the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, the moneyed gentry who want to keep wind turbines off the shores of Cape Cod so as not to spoil the view from their yachts or hundred million dollar mansions, but I cannot complain about their name. That said, I highly recommend the five-minute John Stossel piece on "ABC Dateline" (put "NIMBY" and "Wind Power" in the YouTube search engine) that gave a scathing review of these spoiled patricians.

NIMBY is by no means unique to wind turbines. Everyone wants affordable housing -- just not in their backyards. Before you know it, the same Volvo liberal who supports affordable housing also supports local land use laws that maintain the "character of the community," i.e., land use laws that make affordable housing virtually impossible.

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That is why Massachusetts passed anti-snob laws in 1969 in an effort to promote the development of affordable housing. Anti-snob laws limit the ability of local government to use its power over land use and development to effectively exclude housing that lower-income households can afford.

Just as those advocating for affordable housing need anti-snob laws to combat NIMBYism, those that advocate green energy from renewable resources need the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act. The act is needed so that those who would like to turn to wind energy can realistically hope to find a site for their wind turbines without encountering years of NIMBY resistance before local boards and in the courts.

It is the aim of the act to mandate clear and predictable siting standards for wind facilities, and to provide one-stop permitting at the local level, with any appeal to go before the siting board -- not a court. Also, the siting board would issue a one-stop permit for all state permits that are needed. The act aims to create procedures to decrease the amount of permitting time from the current eight to 10 years to nine to 18 months.

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Quite literally, local regulation and NIMBY groups such as "Green" Berkshires and the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound are making it nearly impossible to find suitable locations for wind turbines. Am I exaggerating? According to the state Energy and Environmental Affairs Web site:

"Hoosac Wind, a 30 MW wind farm in the Berkshires that is supported by the two host communities, has been in permitting since 2001, and has been delayed by successive appeals of a wetland permit for an access road. The wetland permit was issued in 2004 and is still on appeal to the Massachusetts Appeals Court, even though the local conservation commission, the regional staff and commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, and

the Berkshire Superior Court have all determined that the project met applicable wetland standards. * "Princeton Wind, a 3 MW municipal wind project, was delayed for 31/2 years because of appeals of zoning permits. The appeals caused the private developer that was partnering with the town to withdraw, requiring the town to assume the full cost of the project. * "Berkshire Wind, a 15 MW project in the Berkshires, has been in the development process for over 10 years due in part to efforts by anti-wind opponents to enact restrictive zoning bylaws, and by lawsuits from abutters."

The Wind Energy Siting Reform Act's assertion of state authority is a strength, not a weakness, as claimed by Green Berkshires. If everyone could ban wind turbines in their communities while arguing that they support wind turbines, but they do not "fit" their community, they all would. And we would have no wind turbines.

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Why the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act? So that the procedures for the siting of wind energy facilities result in timely and predictable permitting decisions making it an economically viable enterprise without all the NIMBYs getting in the way with endless local opposition, permit refusals, and lawsuits. The downside of the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act? It does nothing to reform the siting of wind turbines on our oceans, allowing for continued NIMBYism on Cape Cod.

Call me a YIMBY -- Yes In My Back Yard. I love looking out of my North Street office and watching the beautiful windmill on the mountains of Jiminy Peak.

According to one article in the Boston Globe, "For most Danes, these towering turbines are anything but an eyesore, and anything but a threat to the environment. In fact, they are featured on postcards and proclaimed attractions by tour guides on ferry boats."

Good for Berkshire tourism? Probably. I can picture the postcard now.

Rinaldo Del Gallo is a practicing attorney whose columns have appeared in newspapers across the nation.

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Hurting their own cause

July 19, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Lauren R. Stevens | Section: Opinion | 569 Words OpenURL Link

Monday, July 20

STAMFORD, VT.

What does the Massachusetts Wind Siting Reform Act have in common with the American Clean Energy and Security Act? Both are as recent as ripe strawberries, both are controversial and both are opposed by people who don't believe in global warming and, somewhat surprisingly, some who do.

The world, let alone this newspaper column, hardly has time or space to try to convert nonbelievers. I would suggest waterboarding, but that process is currently out of favor and deemed unproductive anyway. So I will concentrate on those who grasp that global climate change is real and significant.

That group certainly includes members of national environmental organizations who, nevertheless, after recent House passage of ACES/Waxman-Merkey by one vote were quick to fault the bill for gaping holes, called it potentially counterproductive and said it should be tossed unless improvements could be made on the way to the Senate. Given that Senate passage is likely to be a lot tougher than the House, with that kind of enthusiasm, what chance has it?

It would be the height of irony if organized environmentalists (is that an oxymoron?) worked against the nation's first piece of climate change legislation. By all means improve it but by all means work to pass it. Continued reliance on coal seems to be a particular sticking point. That happened because Republicans are opposed I suppose on principle, so all Democrats, even those from coal states, had to be enticed. Treat the problem of coal separately, I say.

Unlike some Republican congressmen who believe that climate change is a gigantic hoax perpetrated by a radical, socialist, bleeding heart, queer, heathen cabal, those who have been writing to The Eagle opposing the commonwealth's proposed wind siting act are not necessarily any of the above but intelligent people who seem to know that climate change is real and already with us.

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They argue that wind turbines, always modified by "industrial," won't generate much electricity and they favor conservation. Well, when I conserve electricity by turning out an unneeded light or hanging out the wash or driving a fuel efficient vehicle, I'm not saving much energy either. But I am doing my part and hoping others will do the same. So, put up a few turbines, doing Berkshire's part, and hope others will do the same. Aggregate.

To do that fairly, though, we need statewide siting standards. The legislation doesn't include the standards, a second step, and that may be scary to people. The crux of the argument against the statewide siting bill, however, seems to be that it would trespass on home rule. On the contrary, it states that local conditions can be imposed, but not arbitrarily, purely to delay. Consider what has happened to the Hoosac Wind project. Talk about home rule, shouldn't a private landowner and town also have rights?

But here's the odd thing. Green Berkshires and its ilk is saying no wind, no how, no place. Why not use wind? Certainly wind is a renewable way to generate power.

Why isn't the issue -- one all can agree on -- where wind? Is it because being against wind on certain ridges might

open them up to the dreaded charges of Not-In-My-Backyard-ism? So what. I hope the opposition hasn't ruled itself out of being part of a potentially productive debate about which Berkshire County sites are better than others.

At least that's how it looks from Stamford, Vermont.

A writer and environmentalist, Lauren R. Stevens is a regular Eagle contributor.

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Back Wind Siting Act

June 25, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Editorials | Section: Editorials | 603 Words OpenURL Link

Friday, June 26

Unless we plan on moving back into caves we will continue to need energy, and unless we are content to continue polluting the atmosphere and fueling the scourge of global warming, we will need alternative sources of energy. One of those sources is wind power, which the Berkshires have the potential to supply in considerable quantity. Wind energy developers, however, are hindered by the absence of statewide siting standards. Local communities should have input into these wind turbine siting decisions, and anti-wind zealots should not be allowed to gum up every project regardless of its merits. To address all of these concerns, the Legislature has produced the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act of 2009.

The state produces 7 milliwatts (MW) of energy through wind power, and Governor Patrick wants the state to produce 2,000 MW by 2020. Among the goals of the Green Communities Act passed last year is to clarify rules and regulations pertaining to renewable energy projects and to assure that there is local input and that needless red tape doesn't hinder good proposals. Hence, the reform act.

Wind turbine opponents bristle at being called NIMBYs, but their opposition to the 30 MW Hoosac Wind project in Florida and Monroe leaves them wide open to this charge. The success they have enjoyed in hamstringing the project since 2001 through a variety of appeals is a major reason why the Reform Act must be passed. This project will not violate any gorgeous vistas. Although opponents pay lip service to local input into these projects, town officials in Florida and Monroe support the project that the self-appointed defenders of the mountaintops oppose. The Department of Environmental Protection and Berkshire Superior Court have determined that the project meets wetland standards, yet foes continue to make cynical use of a well-meaning appeals process to stop a project they are against simply because it involves wind power.

The Reform Act requires that statewide wind siting standards be drawn up that will "protect residential neighborhoods, significant scenic and recreational resources, and environmentally sensitive areas." Local conditions can be imposed, but not if they are imposed without merit simply to restrict or stop the project. As such, the Act is not designed to restrict local control of wind projects, as foes claim, but to restrict the ability of opponents to tie these projects in knots for years. It was the unreasonably rabid opposition of foes of Hoosac Wind, and more infamously, the Cape Cod wind project, that led to the Reform Act.

No true environmentalist should be content with America's addiction to fossil fuels as an energy source, which not only pollutes the atmosphere but leaves the United States at the mercy of Middle Eastern potentates and greedy domestic oil producers. We must develop more alternative energy sources, and happily we have a governor and a president who support this effort. That means wind energy. That means solar energy. That means nuclear power and biomass. Every bit of energy produced by these alternatives, no matter how small, reduces our reliance on foreign oil. Every energy source has drawbacks, but none more severe than those of gas, oil and coal.

There are several wind turbine projects proposed for the Berkshires, and not every one of them should pass muster. With approval of the Reform Act, criteria will be established for developers to meet and local residents and officials will have a role in the development process. The Act threatens only the anti-wind ideologues who don't want to be deprived of monkey wrenches to toss into the works. We urge the Berkshire legislative delegation to advocate passage of the Wind Siting Reform Act.

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Renewable Energy in the Berkshires Wind projects still in infancy

June 25, 2009 | North Adams Transcript (MA) Author: Dick Lindsay | Section: Local | 654 Words OpenURL Link

New England Newspapers

PITTSFIELD -- While the Berkshire hills are being eyed as the primary location for wind power projects on stateowned land, turbines aren't likely to start popping up anytime soon, state officials said Wednesday during a public input session at Berkshire Community College.

"We are extremely early in this process," said Commissioner Richard Sullivan of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. "There are no proposed sites and no proposed developments."

About 170 people gathered for last night's session in BCC's Boland Theatre to discuss Gov. Deval L. Patrick's vision to generate 2,000 megawatts of electricity -- enough to supply electricity to 800,000 homes -- by 2020. The session was conducted by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

State environmental agencies have identified 37 potential sites in the county out of 44 across Massachusetts that could harness wind energy. If all locations were used, they would yield 947 megawatts of electricity.

Both supporters and critics of wind power were concerned pending state legislation to reform how wind turbines are sited would override local review and permitting of such projects.

"Removing local control will show a willful disregard for local planning," said Holly Stover, chairwoman of the Richmond Conservation Commission, who supports wind power.

Stover added, "Projects proposed by state entities should be subjected to the same review as private citizens."

"If that [bill] is passed, whether we like wind energy or not will be a moot," said the executive director of Green Berkshires, Eleanor Tillinghast, who's been critical of the state's plan.

Tillinghast was one of several speakers who felt the "little electricity" generated by the wind turbines would be at the expense of the Berkshires' natural beauty.

"Mountains should be our first choice, not our last choice," she concluded, drawing loud applause from most of the audience.

Other opponents accused the state of being misguided into believing wind power will help the state meet future energy needs, citing countries like Germany that have constructed thousands of wind turbines and yet are increasing coal consumption to meet energy demands.

However, proponents of wind power see the renewable energy as one way the Berkshires can reduce its dependency on Western Massachusetts Electric Co. and National Grid, the two electricity providers that serve the county. They too want the projects carefully sited and don't want turbines on every ridgeline.

"The fear of having too many shouldn't be the basis to not have any," said Laura Dubester, the co-director of the Center for Ecological Technology in Pittsfield.

Brian Casey, who owns 115 acres in Peru, welcomes wind power to his town, which has some of the highest elevations in Massachusetts.

"Western Mass. and the hilltowns have never had such a plentiful resource -- a lot of wind," he noted.

Three sites in Peru are among the 37 listed for possible wind power development on state-owned land. The other locations are in the Mount Greylock Reservation, Pittsfield State Forest, Savoy, Florida, Mount Everett Reservation in Sheffield, October Mountain State Forest in Washington and six wildlife management areas.

While state-backed wind turbine projects would jump start the industry in the Berkshires, the only ones existing or yet to be built are on private property. Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort erected the first wind turbine in the county two years ago, followed by Williams Stone Co. in East Otis, which completed its wind project in May.

The Berkshire Wind Project on Brodie Mountain, Hoosac Wind Project in Florida and Monroe and the Minuteman Wind Project in Savoy, which have been in the planning stages for several years, are all awaiting construction.

While representatives of the Jiminy Peak and Brodie Mountain projects touted the advantages of wind power, one speaker who favors solar energy urged state officials to take the same approach to renewable energy as it did with health care coverage.

"If you can mandate everyone have health insurance," said the unidentified woman, "you can mandate a solar panel on every building."

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Locals air turbine fears, hopes

June 24, 2009 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA) Author: Dick Lindsay, Berkshire Eagle Staff| Section: News | 717 Words OpenURL Link

Thursday, June 25 PITTSFIELD -- While the Berkshire hills are being eyed as the primary location for wind power projects on state-owned land, turbines aren't likely to start popping up anytime soon, state officials said Wednesday during a public input session at Berkshire Community College.

"We are extremely early in this process," said Commissioner Richard Sullivan of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. "There are no proposed sites and no proposed developments."

About 170 people gathered for last night's session in BCC's Boland Theatre to discuss Gov. Deval L. Patrick's vision to generate 2,000 megawatts of electricity -- enough to supply electricity to 800,000 homes -- by 2020. The session was conducted by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

State environmental agencies have identified 37 potential sites in the county out of 44 across Massachusetts that could harness wind energy. If all locations were used, they would yield 947 megawatts of electricity.

Both supporters and critics of wind power were concerned pending state legislation to reform how wind turbines are sited would override local review and permitting of such projects.

"Removing local control will show a willful disregard for local planning," said Holly Stover, chairwoman of the Richmond Conservation Commission, who supports wind power.

Stover added, "Projects proposed by state entities should be subjected to the same review as private citizens."

"If that [bill] is passed, whether we like wind energy or not will be a moot," said the executive director of Green Berkshires, Eleanor Tillinghast, who's been critical of the state's plan.

Tillinghast was one of several speakers who felt the "little electricity" generated by the wind turbines would be at the expense of the Berkshires' natural beauty.

"Mountains should be our first choice, not our last choice," she concluded, drawing loud applause from most of the audience.

Other opponents accused the state of being misguided into believing wind power will help the state meet future energy needs, citing countries like Germany that have constructed thousands of wind turbines and yet are increasing coal consumption to meet energy demands.

However, proponents of wind power see the renewable energy as one way the Berkshires can reduce its dependency on Western Massachusetts Electric Co. and National Grid, the two electricity providers that serve the county. They too want the projects carefully sited and don't want turbines on every ridgeline.

"The fear of having too many shouldn't be the basis to not have any," said Laura Dubester, the co-director of the Center for Ecological Technology in Pittsfield.

Brian Casey, who owns 115 acres in Peru, welcomes wind power to his town, which has some of the highest elevations in Massachusetts.

"Western Mass. and the hilltowns have never had such a plentiful resource -- a lot of wind," he noted.

Three sites in Peru are among the 37 listed for possible wind power development on state-owned land. The other locations are in the Mount Greylock Reservation, Pittsfield State Forest, Savoy, Florida, Mount Everett Reservation in Sheffield, October Mountain State Forest in Washington and six wildlife management areas.

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DIANE BRONCACCIO Recorder Staff *6/17/2009 As the state moves forward with proposed legislation for siting wind turbines, planning board officials in some hilltowns want a public hearing in western Massachusetts, where the mountains, open space and vast areas of state-owned land could be prime locations for commercial windmills.

June 17, 2009 | Recorder, The [30 Day Embargo] (Greenfield, MA) 692 Words
OpenURL Link

Last month, the Rowe, Heath and Hawley planning boards all sent letters to legislative co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications expressing concerns that the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act would "significantly restrict Massachusetts communities' home rule authority by consolidating and expediting permitting" of large wind farms. They have also asked for public hearings on the proposal to take place west of the Connecticut River.

The siting reform bill would create a commission to set statewide siting standards for wind turbines and to streamline the permitting process, because state and local permit appeals can "take years to resolve, even when they lack merit," according to the state Energy and Environmental Affairs Web site.

That department points to the Hoosac Wind project in Monroe and Florida, a 30-megawatt wind farm that has been in the permit process since 2001, and Berkshire Wind project, now under construction on Brodie Mountain after a 10-year process, as examples of projects that have been delayed by permitting issues.

The Hoosac Wind project is to consist of 20 wind turbines, each rated at 1.5 megawatts, according to the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. The Berkshire Wind project includes 10 |340-foot tall, 1.5-megawatt wind turbines. The wind farm is designed to generate enough power for 5,000 households.

The Siting Reform bill would:* mandate clear and pre dictable siting standards for wind facilities.

- * provide one-stop permitting at the local level, for wind projects over 2 megawatts, with any appeal to go before the siting board not court. Also, the siting board would issue a one-stop permit for all state permits that are needed, according to the state.
- * create procedures to decrease the amount of permitting time from the current eight to 10 years to nine to 18 months.

Most people are unaware of the legislation," said Rowe Planning Board Chairman David Roberson. "I would like to see it get more publicity here, because I don't think people have any idea of what the state has in mind."

He said the tall multiple turbines stretched across a ridge line constitute "an enormous industrial infrastructure."

Roberson and Hawley Planning Board member Lloyd Crawford also serve on the Board of Directors of National Wind Watch, a nonprofit coalition for raising awareness of the shortcomings of industrial wind energy and its negative impacts on the environment.

Roberson said the Rowe Planning Board was concerned over three issues: that hearings are only planned in Boston; the state's plans for its holdings, including state forests; and that the legislation "will diminish the ability of towns to determine whether they want to have these enormous turbines put up on their land."

Crawford says the new law would disproportionately affect western Massachusetts, because offshore wind facilities are more expensive to build, and because most land in the eastern part of the state lacks the conditions for efficient wind-power. He also says most state land that is under consideration for industrial-scale wind projects are in

western Massachusetts.

State Sen. Benjamin B. Downing, whose district includes these and other hilltowns, said he has discussed this legislative proposal both with constituents who are in favor of the legislation and with those who oppose it.

"I, by no means, think it's a perfect proposal," he said of the bill, "but expediting technology for clean energy isn't necessarily a burden." He said it could be "a good opportunity" for many area communities. "There are a lot of things we're trying to balance here," he said. "It's a delicate process, one we're engaged in now."

Downing said the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and local legislators will host a public discussion session June 24 at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield at 6 p.m., to get public feedback on the potential for wind-power development on state-owned lands.

According to a recent state study, conditions on existing state lands could provide sufficient wind resources to develop an estimated 947 megawatts of wind power -- nearly half of Gov. Deval Patrick's stated goal to develop 2,000 MW of wind power by 2020.

State Commissioners Rick Sullivan and Philip Giudice will lead the sessions, which will include an overview of wind power and siting issues. It will also provide an opportunity for discussion for elected officials and members of the public.

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Greenfield biomass plant proposal triggers green in-fighting

June 15, 2009 | Daily Hampshire Gazette [30 Day Embargo] (Northampton, MA) Author: RICHIE DAVIS; Gazette Contributing Writer | Section: Local News | 1009 Words OpenURL Link

GREENFIELD - A "green-against-green" battle appears to be shaping up over a biomass plant proposed for the Greenfield Industrial Park.

As the state and region try to move toward their goals of developing renewable energy alternatives to replace fossil-fuel burning generators, they face some conflict over proposals like the 47-megawatt Pioneer Renewable Energy plant.

A groundswell of opposition has emerged during the past few months over plans by Cambridge-based Madera Energy LLC to build a wood-burning generator adjacent to the park.

"Welcome to Brownfield: Home of the Toxic Incinerator" states a banner - complete with a mock town boundary logo - at a protest rally on the Greenfield Town Common this month. Organized by opponents of the plant, which is designed to burn clean wood waste, primarily from wood lots within a 55-mile radius, the rally gave voice to concerns about air emissions, wood supply, trucks and a range of other issues.

The Greenfield Zoning Board of Appeals, which is preparing to consider applications for the project by holding a public hearing today at 7 p.m. in Greenfield Middle School, unwittingly fired up the opposition and sparked conspiracy theories by two last-minute postponements of its initial hearing - once because of a lack of space and then because its chairman had broken his pelvis.

Last-minute notices for the May 26 session were like red flags waved before the crowd of more than 150 opponents, who turned their presence in the middle school cafeteria into an impromptu, 45-minute rally against the proposal, using microphones to decry the plant.

Meanwhile, "Biomass? No Thanks" lawn signs have cropped up around the county, echoing a slogan popularized by the anti-nuclear movement a generation ago.

Each side in the current power struggle claims the high ground, labeling itself more environmentally sound over questions like whether biomass is truly a carbon-neutral technology needed to slow climate change and whether wood - a native, natural, renewable resource to fuel the biomass plant - would be harvested in a way that doesn't destroy the forests and hurt the ecosystem.

Policy's goals

The Pioneer Valley Sustainable Energy Policy, developed by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments and Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commission, calls for siting 100 megawatts of renewable power generation capacity in the three-county region by the end of this year and replacing 15 percent of total fossil and nuclear fuels used for lighting, heating and transportation with other sources by 2020, while also cutting emissions of greenhouse gases by 3 percent a year to meet a 30 percent reduction goal by 2020.

Some biomass opponents say goals can be met by energy conservation, while others favor a scaled-down wood-burning generator that would also produce heat for a district heating plant.

Environmentalists are also divided over whether a technology that produces steam from harvested trees - by chipping the "slash" left behind after cutting and burning it - does enough to slow the rate of carbon added to the atmosphere, as called for in state and regional plans.

"There are people hopping out of the woodwork," said Alexandra Dawson, a Hadley environmental lawyer who has been working on biomass issues for two years and has been involved over the years on other regional environmental battles.

"It's a genuine western Massachusetts movement, so it's highly unpredictable and totally disorganized. I discovered I couldn't even make a list of who the players are. That explains why you get some wild differences of opinion. The only thing they have in common is they have a problem with biomass."

Dawson, who opposes the biomass plants because of concerns that they may impact forests around the region, faults Gov. Deval Patrick and his administration for merging the state's environmental and energy secretariats and says the state is sacrificing careful environmental review to advance renewable energy projects.

"This administration is openly, with a huge amount of pressure, pushing renewable energy projects in western Massachusetts," she said. "It doesn't take much with western Massachusetts people: You say Boston, and they all take out their knives."

Headed for deadlock?

With a group called Concerned Citizens of Franklin County poised to sue the state, alleging that Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles violated the law by not requiring a complete assessment of the "environmental damage" from the plant, the battle seems headed for a deadlock that might grind the proposal to a halt.

That's what has happened to the 30-megawatt Hoosac Wind project proposal, first unveiled early in 2003, with hopes of siting 19 wind turbines in Florida and Monroe by the end of 2004. The case is still hung up in appeals, and ownership has changed several times along the way.

"You could potentially bleed an individual project dry through repeated legal challenges, especially these smaller projects," said Susan Reid, director of the Conservation Law Foundation's Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Change Initiative, which has raised concerns about the Russell biomass proposal but has not yet taken a position on the Greenfield project.

"These are not deep-pocket entities. You can fundamentally change the economics through filing lots of lawsuits and administrative law appeals." She added, "You can also in a much broader sense have a chilling effect," in conveying attitudes about whether renewable projects can be sited.

"We would still support a well-sited facility that makes a commitment to relying on sustainable fuel. But those boundaries, those protocols, haven't been well set."

The state has begun a "visioning process" to set the priorities for managing its 280,000 acres and is also updating the rules for how private woodlots around the state should be managed. Both would have a significant effect on the supply for biomass plants like Pioneer, which hopes to begin operation in 2013.

"We really need to grapple with this," Reid said of prioritizing what is the highest and best use of the wood supply.

"The sustainable fuel piece of the equation is huge. That hasn't been fully hammered out."

Although she said biomass advocates have oversold the "carbon neutral" advantage of the technology, Reid said some opponents are unrealistic about the need for renewable energy sources.

"Those electrons have to come from somewhere," she said. "If we're not pursuing wind, solar, biomass and even environmentally responsible hydro, we're going to continue to get those electrons from our fleet of really dirty coal-fired power plants and from nuclear energy facilities."

C itation (aglc Style) RICHIE DAVIS, Gazette Contributing Writer, 'Greenfield biomass plant proposal triggers green in-fighting', <i>Daily Hampshire G</i> online), 15 Jun 2009 <https: apps="" document-view?<="" infoweb.newsbank.com="" news="" th=""></https:>						
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