



NEWS > LOCAL NEWS

Solutions sought for turbine noise

[Print Page](#)

By **Kate Hessling**, Tribune Staff Writer

Published: Thursday, June 4, 2009 11:04 AM EDT

BAD AXE — There was standing room only at Wednesday's Huron County Planning Commission meeting, where officials discussed plans to address a series of noise complaints the county has received in recent months regarding the Michigan Wind 1 development in Ubly.

Huron County Building and Zoning Director Russ Lundberg said the county has received a total of four complaints that cite problems residents have experienced as a result of the Michigan Wind 1 development in Ubly. Rather than turn the session into a public hearing, he said the goal of Wednesday's discussion was to hash out the initial steps that need to be taken to address the four complaints.

He told those in attendance that the park still is under warranty with the turbine manufacture, GE. GE has personnel in the area to deal with any problems or tweak equipment as it's needed, he added.

Also, Lundberg said, John Deere Wind Energy is aware of the complaints and the company is reviewing the situation.

John Deere Wind Energy also is going to provide some post-construction analysis on the park, and there should be something about that study within the near future, Lundberg said. That study is necessary, per language in the county's wind zoning ordinance, to prove the project is in compliance with the county's ordinance.

He also asked those in attendance to keep in mind the fact that a noise study was completed prior to the project's construction. Data from that study indicated the project would be in compliance with the county's zoning ordinance.

And every day, Lundberg added, GE is in the field adjusting and tweaking equipment so everything works properly.

A game plan identified

Also at Wednesday's meeting were Huron County Commissioners Dave Peruski and Kurt Damrow.

Damrow said the plan to move forward will include forming a subcommittee comprised of representatives from the Huron County Board of Commissioners' Legislative Committee, the board's corporation counsel, Lundberg and three members of the Huron County Planning Commission. Also, the subcommittee could include a representative from John Deere Wind Energy, the Ubyly project's developer.

Damrow said he's already begun a fact-finding process and identified tasks that subcommittee will have to address. First, Damrow said, there has to be a step-by-step procedure as to how to make a complaint.

Second, there has to be a definition for what is considered a legitimate complaint, he said.

Third, the subcommittee has to work with developers to ensure the equipment complies with the county's ordinance, Damrow said.

He noted, once formed, this subcommittee should be able to move fairly quickly to create something for the planning board and county board of commissioners' approval.

Possibly more action needed

Peruski said he agrees with the creation of the subcommittee, however, he felt there also

needs to be a section added to the county's ordinance dealing with complaint resolution.

Also, he said, that section has to be put together in a meaningful way, and include an enforcement mechanism to ensure wind developments are in compliance with the county's zoning ordinance.

Bingham Township was used as a test ground in many ways, Peruski noted.

It's important that the county looks at the current zoning ordinance and do what can be done to prevent these problems from affecting other residents in the future.

Peruski said on several occasions, he's pulled over to listen to the sound being emitted from turbines in Michigan Wind 1.

"I hear them and I know it's a thing that changes from time to time, but I can't tell you what these people are going through," he said.

Any kind of study and amendment to the zoning ordinance won't hurt landowners who currently have turbines on their property. Nor should this situation become an "us versus them" situation between those property owners and residents who aren't participating in the development, Peruski said.

Also, the county needs to address the health effects the turbines are having on surrounding residents. He said that needs to be done by a third party specialist that is mutually agreed upon by the county and wind park developer.

The county also has to consider property rights when it comes to this issue, and look at whether there is going to be a problem of diminished property values as a result of this development, Peruski said.

He stressed it's important to have the cooperation of everyone, including residents, land owners, the project's owner and county officials.

Lundberg said John Deere Wind Energy has been very cooperative in this process. He said a representative from John Deere will be at the next Huron County Planning Commission to update county officials on the status of the company's review of the problem.

The biggest thing that has to be addressed at this time, Lundberg said, is to determine whether the park is in compliance.

Some favor a moratorium on new projects

Frank Peplinski, a resident who lives roughly 1,300 feet away from one of the turbines in Ubyly, said he and his family have been experiencing health problems as a result of lack of sleep because of the turbines. He was concerned that there is a lot of money and review put into studying the affects a turbine will have on birds, but not so much on how a wind farm will affect nearby residents.

Peplinski's son, David Peplinski, also lives roughly 1,300 feet away from a turbine that's part of Michigan Wind 1. In an interview Tuesday, he compared living next to a turbine like living next to a clothes dryer that's running 24 hours a day.

Bingham Township resident Curt Watchowski is another resident who has reported being negatively affected by the wind park. Like the other residents, he said it's not so much loud noise that's a problem. Rather, it's the vibrations caused by low frequency. It's something he said can't be avoided by wearing ear plugs because it's something that's felt, more so than that's heard.

"That's what's keeping us up at night," Watchowski said during Wednesday's county planning commission meeting.

In addition to the sleeping problems he and his family have been experiencing, Watchowski suspects the development has even had an impact on some of his animals. For example, Watchowski said his horses lay on their sides on the ground during the daytime, which they've never done in the past and is uncommon for any horse to do.

Watchowski asked the planning board whether any additional wind projects should be allowed to proceed when it's unknown what kinds of effects the wind developments will have on area homes.

Planning board members said there are no immediate plans for the construction of a third wind project in Huron County for at least 12 to 14 months. As a result, it was felt imposing a moratorium on new wind developments is unnecessary.

Watchowski stressed he's not opposed to wind energy projects.

"I don't have a problem with them — I think they're engineering marvels ... but we don't know what it's doing," he said. " ... I would really hope we can learn everything we can before we let more come in."

Other residents being silent?

It's not just a few residents who are having problems, Watchowski told planning commissioners. He said while the county has only received four complaints, there are others who don't want to publicly talk about the problems they're experiencing.

"Just because there are only four written complaints doesn't mean there isn't 400 more out there," he said, adding some residents had to sign confidentiality agreements and, as a result, can't voice complaints to local officials. "So consider there are people who are having problems, but aren't the kind to step forward."

Planning Commission Chairman Ted Sheldon said that following the release of the Michigan Wind Zone Board's report that was issued Tuesday and found the Thumb has the highest capacity of wind generation, there's going to be a lot of pressure from wind developers to erect as many turbines as possible in the local area.

Everyone wants wind energy, from the president and governor to state and congressional legislators, he added.

"But we will do all we can to give these complaints consideration," Sheldon said.

Once it is proven the wind farm is in compliance with the county's ordinance, it is the intent of the ordinance that the park remain in compliance, Lundberg said, noting developers pay an annual per-turbine fee to set aside funds to be used in the event it's needed to prove a project is in compliance.

But, identifying ways to use that funding is not something the board could do Wednesday, he said. That is something that will happen sometime down the road, particularly once the subcommittee meets and has a chance to work with John Deere Wind Energy.

Copyright © 2009 - Huron Publishing Company, LLC

[\[x\] Close Window](#)