

## **DTE tower variance is denied**

*After a lengthy debate, the Lake Township Zoning Board of Appeals on Tuesday denied a variance request submitted by DTE Energy to install a 197 foot meteorological tower on vacant property on the south side of Etzler Road just over a quarter mile west of State Park Road in Caseville. DTE officials at Tuesday evening's meeting said they will have to wait and see what the company's next move may be. ...The variance requested was to allow a meteorological tower with a height of 197 feet to be installed in Lake Township. DTE needed the variance because Lake Township's ordinance does not allow special structures (such as chimneys or smoke stacks, radio or television transmitting towers or antennas, wireless communication towers, microwave, relay towers or power generation towers) to exceed 175 feet in the agricultural district.*

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LAKE TOWNSHIP - After a lengthy debate, the Lake Township Zoning Board of Appeals on Tuesday denied a variance request submitted by DTE Energy to install a 197 foot meteorological tower on vacant property on the south side of Etzler Road just over a quarter mile west of State Park Road in Caseville.

DTE officials at Tuesday evening's meeting said they will have to wait and see what the company's next move may be.

"We were hopeful it wouldn't come to this," said DTE Energy Environmental Supervisor Matthew J. Wagner. "... but we were aware they might turn it down."

Just shortly after the meeting began, Lake Township Zoning Board of Appeals Chairman Lou Bushey, along with member Robert Hyzer, disqualified themselves from the meeting, after others expressed concerns the pair would have a conflict of interest since both signed lease agreements with DTE Energy.

Lake Township Zoning Board of Appeals member Paul Golsch ended up chairing the meeting. He was the only member besides Willard Cregeur, who was serving as an alternate, to vote against the motion denying DTE's variance request. Three members voted in favor of the motion.

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DTE needed the variance because Lake Township's ordinance does not allow special structures (such as chimneys or smoke stacks, radio or television transmitting towers or antennas, wireless communication towers, microwave, relay towers or power generation towers) to exceed 175 feet in the agricultural district.

DTE officials, including Regional Manager Ronald E. Chriss, explained they should be given a variance to install the tower because it would only be up for a maximum of two years, and it would help them study the area's wind patterns.

They emphasized numerous times that they were not proposing building any kind of wind turbines in the area, rather, they only wanted to study the area's wind.

Some zoning board of appeals members, however, were concerned that if they were to give DTE the variance, the company would install numerous met towers all over the township.

"How do we know you won't put one in every ag parcel?" asked Zoning Board of Appeals member Jeanne Henry.

Wagner said it's not economically feasible to put that many met towers in one area.

Also attending Tuesday's meeting was Huron County Director of Building and Zoning Russ Lundberg, who has worked with a total of four wind project developers. He told the board he understood where they were coming from, as far as not understanding the process these companies go through before developing wind

projects.

The beginning of the process - which is very lengthy, he added - includes signing leases with land owners and setting up met towers to study wind patterns, Lundberg said.

Wagner agreed, saying DTE is in the early stages of evaluation.

In addition to spending about two years gathering data from met towers on the area's wind patterns, DTE also has to research the effects a wind project would have on local wild life, he said. There's also renewable energy portfolio issues to look at, and siting issues with local property lines.

DTE also would have to determine how the power could be transmitted from the wind park, and where it would be transmitted to, Wagner said.

Having a 197-foot met tower is an important piece of the puzzle in terms of characterizing the county's wind patterns, he said.

Wagner said the higher the met tower is - i.e. the closest in height it is to a would-be turbine - the more accurate it is. In fact, the industry's standard for a met tower's height is becoming 60 meters, not 50 meters as in years past.

Basically, what it boils down to is a 175-foot met tower wouldn't be as effective as a 197-foot met tower would be in determining how a 200-foot turbine would work.

Many of the roughly 20 people in attendance, including Golsch, repeatedly noted that there already are towers higher than 175 feet in Lake Township - like a 300 foot cell phone tower, for example.

Lake Township Clerk/Planning Commission member Valerie McCallum said those towers were erected prior to the time that the township adopted its 175-foot height ordinance.

Others asked why DTE couldn't just put its equipment on existing towers and conduct the wind study that way.

Wagner said it's not possible because the equipment would interfere with cell phone reception. Also, the cell phone towers are much larger than the met towers.

That heavy base and tower wouldn't allow the instruments to record wind as accurately, he said.

Lundberg, in addition to Wagner and the other DTE representatives at Tuesday's meeting, tried to stress to the board that they were voting only on granting an additional 22 feet for the height of the met tower to study wind - not on a wind park.

"We're only looking for a variance to erect a tower to study wind," Chriss said. "We're not asking permission to build wind mills."

They argued that if DTE were to find Lake Township to be a suitable area for a wind park, they would have to get additional approval from the zoning board of appeals. They stressed last night wasn't the time to vote in favor or opposition of a wind park - it was strictly to allow them to erect a temporary structure that would aid them in studying the area's wind patterns.

In order to study wind patterns, DTE has erected a few met towers around the county, specifically in Chandler, Meade and Rubicon townships.

Wagner said they try to put a few all around the county in areas that have as few obstacles - both up-wind and down-wind - as possible.

That's why it's so important they have one in Lake Township, he said.

When all was said and done, however, Zoning Board of Appeals Member Tim Lalley made a motion to deny the variance, saying there are no special circumstances that would warrant a variance request. He said granting variances erodes the power of the ordinance and variances should only be granted in very specific, exceptional circumstances.

His motion was supported by Ric Geilhart, who was acting as an alternate. Geilhart said he voted in favor of the motion because the height requirements are there for a reason.

Henry also supported Lalley's motion, saying she would like to wait and see how the Harvest Wind Farm recently built in the Elkton area will affect the environment.

"I'm not sure we want to open the door - even for testing - that could be a real problem to wild life," she said.

Wagner said DTE is very concerned about the wildlife, and biologists already have been in the area studying the effects a potential wind project could have. That study has only begun, and will continue for about two years, he said.

DTE Energy Spokesman Len Singer told the Huron Daily Tribune earlier this month the biological study is only one of the steps the company has taken in its early stages of developing a wind project.

He said the company has acquired the rights to more than 25,000 acres of land, and has erected met towers around the county to study wind patterns.

But that does not mean the company will be putting up turbines any time soon - or ever.

"We're only in the early stages," Singer said in an Oct. 17 article.

Wagner said reports that DTE was looking to develop more than 200 turbines were false.

**Web link:** [http://www.michigansthumb.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=18950994&BRD=2292&PAG=461&dept\\_id=571474&rfi=6](http://www.michigansthumb.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=18950994&BRD=2292&PAG=461&dept_id=571474&rfi=6)