

Wind draft fuels mixed reactions

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LAKE TWP — While some expressed support for the Lake Township Planning Board's wind ordinance draft discussed during a public hearing Wednesday, others felt the proposed regulations are too restrictive.

"It boils down to no turbines in Lake Township," said Lake Township resident Mark Krebs.

Many of those who opposed the draft because the proposed ordinance makes it impossible for any sort of wind development to be constructed in the township. These people favored a less-restrictive ordinance that would allow wind developments while at the same time protecting area residents from problems caused by turbine noise or shadow flicker.

Others supported the draft because it is so restrictive.

"Lake Township needs to be protected," said Lake Township resident Charlie Henry. "... I'm in favor of the ordinance ... and I would like to see it supported."

Numerous public comment was given during the planning board's more than three-hour long public hearing.

The board, however, would not let anyone give comment in regard to the economic impacts the turbines will have for Lake Township, including local farmers and other landowners who have land easements with DTE Energy for a potential wind park.

DTE: Draft is unreasonable

Representatives from DTE Energy had asked to give a presentation regarding their take on the proposed ordinance, but that request was denied. Instead, company officials were given five minutes to speak, just like any one else who wanted to speak during Wednesday's public hearing.

In their brief addresses, representatives noted the draft ordinance has many unreasonable provisions within it, and wind developers will not want to be subject to the unreasonable provisions.

Some of the provisions DTE Energy took exception to include the ordinance's complaint provisions, which allow not just residents of Lake Township to complain, but anybody within the country, and the ordinance states it is the township's presumption that a claim is valid.

Also, the ordinance states fines are doubled each day, so after 12 days, a fine could be as much as \$3 million. The problem with this provision is some problems cannot be fixed immediately because it's virtually impossible to mobilize and erect a crane to make major repairs in less than three weeks, according to a document outlining DTE Energy's concerns, which was distributed to the board and then those in attendance following the meeting's adjournment.

DTE Energy also was concerned that agricultural zoned land in six different sections in the township are excluded from being able to host wind turbines, even if they meet the eventual setback criteria of the final ordinance and have concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

"To summarily prohibit the landowners in sections 33, 32 and 31 from making their own decisions on hosting or building wind turbines is unfair, and will put them at an economic disadvantage compared to farmers elsewhere in Lake Township and Huron County," DTE Energy's documents state, particularly in comparing the restrictions the draft imposes in Lake Township, compared to restrictions in neighboring Chandler Township.

Regarding the ordinance's reliance on the 2003 USFWS interim guidelines, DTE Energy reported there are new guidelines currently being drafted, and the 2003 guidelines state conducting appropriate wildlife surveys is the best way to determine where, what and how wind turbines can be built and operated.

Also, the ordinance states turbines will not be allowed within 5 miles of bald eagle nests, of which there are two in Lake Township. But an expert who has been studying area wildlife for the past two years reported Wednesday there is no evidence of bald eagle nests in Lake Township. He said he contacted USFWS to get the location of the two the agency previously reported to Lake Township, and USFWS had nothing to verify the existence of two bald eagles nests in Lake Township.

Regarding the ordinance's noise requirements, an acoustics engineer contracted by Lake Township reported the draft ordinance's noise regulations are not based on science, and will not address the issue of low frequency problems caused by turbines that the draft was intended to avoid.

The ordinance's height restrictions for turbines also is too restrictive, DTE Energy stated. That is because a 175 foot turbine will have a capacity of about 0.1 megawatts (MW), which is 5 percent of that of a 2 MW commercial turbine. Because shorter turbines have less wind speed and smaller blades, its energy output is only 3 percent of the taller 2 MW turbine. It takes 33 175-foot turbines to generate the energy produced by one commercial sized turbines.

"It would require over 1,100 175-foot turbines to get the same energy as a 35 commercial turbine wind farm," DTE Energy reported.

DTE Energy asked the township board to establish a wind task force, with balanced representation of the shoreline and agricultural interests, including those interested in wind energy development, to formulate a new ordinance that balances the shoreline and agricultural heritages, while allowing for responsible, commercial wind development.

Key reasons to rewrite the draft, which were cited in DTE Energy's written comments distributed Wednesday, include:

- Prohibiting commercial wind development in Lake Township eliminates a tremendous opportunity to generate taxes and revenues that can benefit Lake Township.

- The current draft has unreasonable financial and operating requirements that would prevent a potential wind developer from getting funding.
- The language in the draft is confusing, with requirements that are difficult or impossible to enforce.
- The restrictions are arbitrary and lack scientific basis.
- The draft ignores the legitimate interests of the agricultural sector of Lake Township, as wind energy is very compatible with agricultural use, and 64 percent of the land in Lake Township is zoned agricultural.

Visitors urge caution

Some of those who spoke during Wednesday's public hearing included three different residents from the Michigan Wind 1 development near Ubly, and one resident from the Harvest Wind Farm near Elkton, who reported experiencing problems following the erection of wind turbines near their homes.

Those residents reported sleep deprivations, heart palpitations, headaches, nausea and other symptoms.

"It's not an isolated issue," said Bingham Township resident Curt Watchowski. " ... Study the birds all you want — we're the ones that pay."

Frank Peplinski, a resident who lives roughly 1,300 feet away from one of the turbines in Ubly, gave a brief outline of experiences he and his wife have documented. In one instance, he said he was woken up in the middle of the night with steady pounding in his head and chest.

As for his wife, she was cleaning out a closet once recent June day and was suddenly struck with an intense pressure in her head, and felt shaky. She left the area of the home where she was working, and the feelings went away after a few hours when the wind direction outside had changed.

But there were reports from the other side of the aisle from residents who haven't experienced any problems from turbines on land they own elsewhere in the county.

Planning board members noted they wanted the draft to protect the minority.

Draft will be reviewed

Many residents expressed issues with the fact that they weren't able to give input about the ordinance till after it was unveiled in May. While there were opportunities to give public comment during board meetings prior to its unveiling, residents and DTE Energy said they couldn't specifically give comment about the ordinance because its language was not drafted in public sessions.

Lake Township resident Neil Rohner said it appears the past two years the planning board have spent creating the ordinance have been a waste of time and money, because it bans any type of wind development.

"Don't make it so exclusive so no one can build a wind farm," he said.

Prior to the meeting's adjournment, planning board members agreed to sit down with DTE Energy representatives and Lake Township board members to possibly reach some middle ground as to what restrictions would protect residents, while at the same time make development at least somewhat possible.

That meeting will be open to the public. It's set for 6:30 p.m. July 20, and more than likely will be hosted at the Sleeper State Park Outdoor Center, located at 6435 State Park Road in Caseville.

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