

Group critical of wind farms Coalition would keep watch on state energy policy issues

By **Matt Surtel**

msurtel@batavianews.com

Jim Hall has a philosophy. The 60-year-old Steuben County resident is part of Cohocton Wind Watch – one of numerous small-town groups opposing wind farms proposed in their communities.

Each group is up against the same cookie cutter” approach when a wind energy developer enters their town with a potential project, Hall says. And they’re often re-inventing the wheel in their efforts.

Hall is among those organizing the Citizen Power Alliance. The coalition of groups and activists aims to address the bigger, state issues involved in energy projects and policy.

The CPA will conduct an organizational meeting the morning of May 18 at Letchworth State Park.

“We’re not limited to strictly wind issues,” Hall said Wednesday. “We’re an environmental and energy alternative group that encompasses energy and environmental policy – primarily in New York State but we have members outside the state as well.”

The CPA includes 14 member groups so far, including Citizens for a Healthy Rural Neighborhood of Perry. They’re primarily based in Western New York, though the CPA is a statewide group, with other members in New Hampshire and Ohio.

“The alliance coalition has been organizing over the past several months,” Hall said. The Letchworth gathering is more a get-together because we don’t have a tremendous amount of opportunity where people can see each other face-to-face.”

Members will discuss which directions they’d like to pursue, along with organizing leadership and committees.

Eminent domain and the state’s proposed Article X legislation are among the CPA’s biggest concerns. Hall said.

The former has traditionally been used by the government to seize land for public developments such as highways and hospitals. But it’s more recently been used for commercial development, and CPA members fear eminent domain could be used for projects benefiting private companies, and which are not in the public interest.

Article X was developed to speed up the review process for determining the locations of new power plants, but expired in 2003. Proposals to renew the law are under way at the state level, and opponents have often cited fears it would take away local control over wind farms and other projects.

“Were really concerned home rule will be thrown aside and New York state will allow siting of all kinds of power projects, without taking into consideration the local economics and environmental policy like (the State Environmental Quality Review process).”

State officials have denied Article X would allow indiscriminate siting of power projects.

Hall said the state’s pursuing the “fast track” for such projects, which would override local laws and ordinances passed by towns.

We’re looking for a sound environmental and energy policy on the state level,” he said. “We feel the current direction does not work.”

The state is pursuing policies which ignore all the implications of subsidies given to corporations, that won’t really produce the desired energy, he said. He cited energy credit trading and problems with turbine gearboxes at the Steel Winds project in Lackawanna.

The CPA members feel that’s fraud, he said.

Besides the existing member groups, the CPA has another 15 to 20 partner links on its Web Site, Hall said. He believes the group represents several thousand members cumulatively.

Those interested in working with the group will be able to attend the gathering, 9 am to 10 pm May 18 at the Middle Falls pavilion. It’s asked that those attending be constructive, and the CPA reserves the right ask disruptive people to leave.

“We’re quite interested to invite anyone who has interest in sound and community-based environmental interests and energy policy in New York State to attend,” Hall said. “We don’t keep secrets. Were very open.”

Visit www.citizenpoweralliance.com for information.