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Prattsburgh residents get warning on wind turbines

By Mary Perham, Gatehouse News Service

PRATTSBURGH — Wind turbines will disturb your peace and quiet, neighboring town residents warned the Prattsburgh town board last week.

"It's like a jet engine landing right behind you," Hal Graham, of Cohocton, said. "It's constant noise."

Graham leased land to First Wind for its 50-turbine wind farm in the town of Cohocton. Tuesday, he spoke during the Prattsburgh board's public hearing on a wind energy facilities permit there. The permit will stipulate certain terms and charge a building permit fee for any wind facilities in the town.



Pictured above, one of numerous wind turbines erected in Cohocton by First Wind. One Cohocton resident likened noise from the turbine to a jet engine.

The only wind project currently being considered in Prattsburgh is EcoGen, an East Aurora-based developer. In December, First Wind announced a year's hiatus in its plan to put up a 36-turbine wind farm in Prattsburgh and recently closed its office.

However, First Wind did complete its larger project in Cohocton, beginning operations there earlier this year.

Graham said he was a strong supporter of wind energy and studied any potential noise problems extensively by observing other wind farms in the state and asking questions.

Both he and a neighbor each have a turbine on their properties, he said.

"When I signed the contract, I was assured there was no noise," he said. "Well, people can't sleep at night, in the winter, with the windows closed. As the wind speed increases, the noise level rises. It rattles our windows ... It's like a jet engine going full blast."

The noise can be heard in neighboring hamlets of Ingleside, Atlanta and North Cohocton, according to Graham and other Cohocton residents at the meeting. Other residents complained about a lack of sleep and disturbed animals.

Steve Trude, president of the project's opponents, Cohocton Wind Watch, said a turbine located within the established setback can be easily heard in his home.

"In the middle of the night, I can hear the blade wash," he said. "We've lost the gift we had, and it was the silence in the night."

Residents said they've been told the reason the turbines are louder than expected is they are larger than originally planned.

Contacted after the meeting, First Wind Corporate Communications Director John Lamontagne said the firm is aware of the noise problem and urged residents to call the hotline number already set up to log any complaints about the project.

"First Wind takes complaints about sound or other issues seriously," Lamontagne said. "First Wind senior managers have met one-on-one with many of the individual households involved to better understand their concerns.

"We're also working closely with town officials to keep them apprised of the progress."

Lamontagne said the town has hired a sound consultant paid by First Wind to conduct sound monitoring. The monitoring could take several months, he said.

But one Cohocton resident warned the tests so far have been when the turbines were turning more slowly.

Cohocton residents said they spoke out in Prattsburgh because the EcoGen project also includes the larger turbines, reducing its original plan of 50 turbines to 16 in Prattsburgh and 18 in the town of Italy.

Other county residents attended the meeting, including Hartsville Town Supervisor Steven Dombertz. Hartsville is one of four towns in the county currently involved in wind negotiations. In addition to Cohocton and Prattsburgh, the town of Howard is also working with wind farm developers.

Prattsburgh Town Supervisor Harold McConnell told residents before the public hearing the board would delay a final vote on the permit due to changes requested by EcoGen and town attorney John Leyden.

The board has scheduled another meeting to discuss the changes and will hold a second public hearing on the permit, he said. McConnell said he and other board members will visit the problem areas.

"Come when there's a wind," Graham said. "Don't let them buffalo you. You know, I wanted to do something for the ecology. And now I can't sleep at night."