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## Plan for wind farm stirs debate



### Developers are in earliest stages in Hamlin

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Hamlin resident Renee Cliff is opposed to the possibility of wind turbines being installed in the field across from her Redman Road home. A test pole to gauge wind speed and direction has already been constructed in the field.

HAMLIN — When Kathy Habgood looks through her front window toward the rolling farmland just beyond Cook Road, she sees uncertainty.

An avid birdwatcher, Habgood enjoys the Canada geese, hummingbirds, turkey vultures, orioles and other songbirds that flock to her yard.

She's afraid the birds might stop coming if developers move forward with plans for a 50-turbine wind farm across from her home.

"This is such a rich area for birds, so near the shore," she said. "Anything that would deter them would be terrible."

The effect on migratory birds, noise and an altered landscape are worrying people who live in the northwest corner of Hamlin, where developers are in the earliest stages of planning a wind farm that could be the first in Monroe County.

In light of a drive to meet 25 percent of the state's need for electricity with alternative energy sources by 2013 — and a sweet pot of state and federal money to hurry things along — wind farms have sprouted all over New York during the past few years.

They're providing clean power and financial benefits to communities through rental payments to landowners and host community agreements with municipalities.

They're also controversial: Opponents claim they ruin scenic vistas, drive away wildlife, pose hazards to birds and bats and lower property values.

Still, turbines are already generating power or will be soon off Long Island and in Madison, Lewis, Wyoming, Erie and Genesee counties and elsewhere.

As developers gather data to see whether Hamlin really is a good place for a wind farm, the town joins others scrambling to write laws governing where the turbines can go. Without such laws, towns have little power to regulate their placement.

A committee formed late last year in Hamlin to write those regulations still has 10 months of work to do. To give the committee time to do its work, town leaders today will consider enacting a one-year moratorium on wind farms.

"There's the feeling that without a moratorium, we're unprotected," said Denny Roach, town supervisor. "If a developer came in tomorrow with a plan, we really don't have much to say they can't put one here."

### **Tough call**

Two 200-foot meteorological towers were erected in Hamlin's northwest quadrant last year. They'll keep a running record of wind speed and direction, temperature and barometric pressure, then transmit the data by cell phone to Competitive Power Ventures Inc., the Massachusetts company interested in the town's wind farm potential. Roughly 18 months of data will be collected so the company can see whether the area truly is right for wind development. Driving past rolling farm fields on Redman Road, Roach pokes a finger at his side window.

"You can see one of the met towers from here, and that's generally where the turbines would go," he says, motioning to where a skinny white pole reaches toward the sky. "There's no actual proposal yet, so it's all just hypothetical so far, but they are gathering data."

Officials from Competitive Power Ventures did not return calls seeking comment for this story, but according to town documents, CPV would eventually like to build 40 to 50 turbines nearly 400 feet tall in the area roughly bounded by Redman, Cook, Monroe-Orleans County Line and Morton roads.

Roach said it's tough to immediately say that wind towers would be wrong for Hamlin.

"On the surface, they look like a great thing for the landowners," he said. "And the town can earn significant revenue. But there's the other side of the coin, and problems that are particularly acute for neighboring landowners."

### **Lucrative proposal**

Horizon Wind Energy, which has wind farms in Iowa, Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York, is in the early stages of planning a 56-turbine farm in Alabama, Genesee County. When the Alabama Ledge Wind Farm goes online, each turbine could produce enough energy to meet the needs of 300 average homes, said P.J. Saliterman, the project's manager.

"The advantages of wind power are the economic benefit they bring to their communities and to upstate New York as well as the economic benefits they bring to the country as a whole as we move toward energy security," said Saliterman.

He noted that wind power is an inexhaustible, nonpolluting, free source of energy.

"In rural areas, where they take clean air more for granted, the green aspects of wind power are perhaps less obvious," he said. "But on a nationwide level, it's incredibly important that we start to do something about our emissions."

Horizon's proposal also could bring clean water to the 1,800 residents of Alabama.

In early negotiations, Horizon has offered a host community agreement that would net the town at least \$320,000 per year. That could cover the cost of running public water lines to nearly every home in Alabama, said Guy Hinkson, town supervisor. All Alabama homes are served by wells right now.

"There are situations here where people can't get good water and people don't have enough water," he said.

In addition, Horizon has offered:

- A tax agreement (called a payment in lieu of taxes, since green energy sources are exempt from property tax in New York) that could mean \$6,400 annually for every megawatt the farm produces, to be divided among the town, Genesee County and the Oakfield-Alabama school district.
- Rent paid to landowners of \$6,000 to \$8,000 per turbine.
- \$1,000 per year toward the electric bill of every household within 2,500 feet of a turbine.

Roach said if Hamlin can negotiate a similar deal, the new tax revenue could equal more than 15 percent of the town's entire budget.

### **Noise and shadows**

Although they don't pollute the air, wind turbines are not silent. They also cast odd, flickering shadows when the sun hits them just right. And at heights exceeding 400 feet, they loom over the landscape, dwarfing nearby natural structures. Troy Nesbitt of Cook Road is part of the Hamlin Preservation Group, a coalition of residents lobbying officials to ban wind towers from the town.

He and other group members say the town's scenery and rural character are worth more than money.

"I believe wind towers are wrong for all of Hamlin," he said. "We have a population here of close to 10,000, and other communities where they put these are 2,500 or smaller and don't have the tax base we have. They are poorer communities that need the money more than we do."

Renee Cliff of Redman Road worries about noise from a wind farm disturbing her sleep, a flashing strobe effect annoying her as sunlight shines through turbines at sunset, television reception being harmed and property values falling.

"I'm very much for green energy, but my feeling is there really needs to be more investigation on where they're looking to put it," she said.

"It's not just a matter of 'not in my front yard.' They have chosen an area that affects so many families, and nothing about it benefits us. We would have to pay for this energy just like anyone else who wants to use it, and yet we'll have the disadvantage of the noise and flicker and things like that."

Roach said the issues that concern Cliff, as well as whether sensitive bird migration routes could be harmed, will be investigated by the nine-member Wind Tower Committee.

"The committee has its work cut out for it," he said. "It seems like whatever side you want to take about wind farms, you can find all kinds of data to support your position."

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