

Prattsburgh wind farm stalls

By Mary Perham, Staff writer

Prattsburgh, NY - Construction of energy-producing wind turbines in the town of Prattsburgh is on hold for at least a year.

Prattsburgh officials were notified late last week of the delay by the wind farm developer – First Wind.

“While we remain committed to wind development in the Northeast, we’ve made a strategic decision to postpone construction on the Prattsburgh wind project,” said Chris Swartley, the company’s vice president of development.

Swartley said the company appreciates “the strong community partnership” and will continue to maintain its Prattsburgh office, existing towers and the existing leases now in place with landowners.

The announcement caps a year of trouble for the energy company, which announced last spring construction of 36 turbines in Prattsburgh would begin in the fall.

Since then, a flurry of lawsuits have been filed regarding the project, with the first legal action this year brought in January by the Naples and Prattsburgh central school districts. The districts charged they didn’t receive a fair share of money from a tax relief agreement between First Wind and the Steuben County Industrial Development Agency.

Another lawsuit included challenges to eminent domain proceedings brought by the Prattsburgh Town Board to help First Wind lay underground transmission cables. Also, there have been charges of improper and unethical action by town Supervisor Harold McConnell.

First Wind also is one of two wind farm developers under investigation by the state Attorney General’s office.

Steuben County Industrial Development Agency Executive Director James Sherron said Monday he believes a court ruling on eminent domain proceedings will ultimately decide if the company pursues the Prattsburgh development.

“That’s my understanding, anyway,” Sherron said.



This wind mill is part of the Dutch Hill wind farm in Cohocton. Plans to open a wind farm in Prattsburgh have been put on hold, developer First Wind announced Monday.

In the past, First Wind officials have said the land targeted for underground cables are essential to the project.

First Wind also faced financial issues this summer, when one of its backers, Lehman Brothers, filed for bankruptcy and was subsequently acquired by Barclays.

John Lamontagne, communications director for First Wind, said financing the wind projects is challenging, given the current economy.

The developer is currently reviewing all its projects across North America, he said.

“(Prattsburgh) is not the only project in our pipeline that has been impacted, but in some cases other projects are moving forward as scheduled,” he said.

The company is in the midst of building 51 turbines in the town of Cohocton that expected to become operational within the next few weeks, according to Lamontagne. The original start-up date for the projects on Dutch and Lent hills was October.

McConnell said he is concerned First Wind will eventually scrap plans to build in Prattsburgh. He said the town's 2009 budget does not contain special tax revenues from the wind farm development.

Prattsburgh is also the site of another wind farm proposed by developer EcoGen. EcoGen is awaiting final approval by SCIDA of its plan, which is slated for a vote within the next few weeks, Sherron said.