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In the News This Week -- July 6, 2007

As Monks Pray, Otsego 2000 Meets, Explores Legal Steps 5 Lined Up With Status To File Suit

As the Holy Trinity monks hold prayer services and mount a letter-writing campaign, Otsego 2000 is seeking out the most appropriate "petitioners" to file an Article 78 complaint against the 68-turbine Jordanville Wind Farm, a preliminary step to going to court to block the 400-foot-tall towers in view of James Fenimore Cooper's Glimmerglass.

The Otsego 2000 board of directors met for two hours Tuesday afternoon, July 3, but were not forthcoming after leaving the meeting on whether a firm decision was reached on a course of action. An announcement is planned early next week, according to Martha Frey, Otsego 2000 executive director.

Henry S. F. Cooper Jr., Otsego 2000 president and the only person authorized to speak for the board, could not be reached.

However, it was learned an extensive conference call was conducted at the meeting, with Otsego 2000's environmental lawyer, Drayton Grant of Rhinebeck and New York City, participating.

Polly Renckens, an Otsego 2000 board member, said "no decision has been made" one way or the other. "We are working very hard to make the right decision," she said.

"We're still deciding," echoed Kent Barwick, another board member who attended the meeting and was encountered at the Springfield Center Independence Day parade the following day.

Still another Otsego 2000 director, attorney Robert Poulson, was unable to attend the meeting, but said he supports a strong challenge if tenable. "Do I want to see windmills at the other end of the lake?" He answered his own question: "Of course not."

The first legal hurdle to get over is the question of "standing" – finding people with the most to lose from the wind farm, which is planned by Community Energy on both side of the ridge between Van Hornesville and Jordanville in the southern Herkimer County towns of Warren and Stark.

"The fact of the matter is people living 10 to 15 miles out will see it," said Sue Brander of Advocates for Stark. "But they won't hear it. It won't ruin their water supply. It won't give their children learning disabilities."

She added, however, "real estate values will affect us all."

At Otsego 2000's request, she agreed to be a petitioner, and lined up four other people who are in proximity to turbines and have spoken up at hearings and information meetings over the past year.

One, Denise Como, a one-time truck driver, has objected to the damage she perceives will be done by the large trucks that would be needed.

Another, Steve Reichenbach, has "a baby a week old and a turbine 1,200 feet from his home." The others are Yuri Zycoff and Diane Thomas.

Harry Levine, who heads Advocates for Springfield, said at mid-week if the Advocates and Otsego 2000 are in sync – as they well may be – they may file an appeal jointly; if there are profound differences, the Advocates may file their own appeal, Levine said.

After a year working through the State Environmental Quality Review Act process, the towns of Warren and Stark, on June 20 and 21 respectively, accepted the final Environmental Impact Statement on the project and approved special-use permits. That step started a 30-day clock running on the Article 78 proceeding.

The next step for Community Energy is to apply for a certificate of necessity from the state Public Service Commission, which would require a further public hearing before action could be taken. The towns must then issue building permits for each turbine and related building in their jurisdictions.

Meanwhile, the monks at Holy Trinity Monastery, the Russian Orthodox Church's spiritual headquarters overseas, have begun a cycle of "molebin," prayers of supplication somewhat like the Roman Catholic novena, and as many as a dozen people from the community have been attending. Father Luke Murianka, the deputy abbot, said all are welcome. But, since the services are not being held on a set schedule, prospective participants should call the monastery, (315) 858-0940.

"Certainly, we feel that prayer is one of the best methods," Father Luke said, but influential Russian Orthodox clerics are also weighing in, and their letters will be sent to Gov. Eliot Spitzer and others in state government.

Archbishop Hilarian Kapral of Australia, former abbot at Jordanville and metropolitan in Manhattan, had visited a wind farm in Tasmania and concluded "it would be terrible tragedy to have it here."

The archbishop in Manhattan, Gabriel Chemodakov, has also written a letter decrying "the desecration of the landscape."

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