

Experts: Wind power needs may outweigh aesthetics

By Ashley Saari

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For five years now, wind power has been the subject of contention in Antrim, with the proposal of a ten-turbine project that would span the Tuttle Hill and Willard Mountain ridgeline garnering supporters and detractors. The project came to a head in 2013 when the state's Site Evaluation Committee heard the project proposal and gave their ultimate decision: The aesthetic impact of ten wind turbines would be too disruptive to Antrim. The project was denied.

That was not the end for the Antrim Wind project, however, and Antrim Wind has come back to the Site Evaluation Committee with another proposal, for the same stretch of land. This project is slightly smaller in scale, including nine turbines instead of 10. The turbine removed was the one to be located on Willard Mountain and would have been the most visible from Willard Pond, a conservation area of high interest to the town. It also includes additional conservation easements on the ridgeline.

Residents in Antrim are split on the project, with advocates for both sides being vocal on their perspectives. As the Site Evaluation Committee again prepares to take up the conversation, let's see what some local energy experts have to say on the prospective wind farm.

What are the pros of this project?

Margaret Dillon: It would

add 27 megawatts of clean, carbon neutral, renewable energy to the New England electric grid, with relatively minimal impact to ecosystems and wildlife.

The approval process helps state and develop community awareness over resolving siting issues and accepting local responsibility for meeting energy needs. The project generates local tax revenue and has minimal maintenance requirements.

Jim Callihan: I see some immediate tax benefit to the town of Antrim, which I can see is very enviable. I also think that like solar, wind power creates very little if any environmental pollution other than noise. And, I think that we need to use as many renewable sources as

possible to help build for our future energy needs.

What are the cons of this project?

MD: An intermittent electric supply, though generally reliable. Building access roads into pristine natural areas is a most unfortunate, but lesser consequence to our extremely wasteful use of energy. Any impact on wildlife, including birds and bats, is also most unfortunate but a far lesser impact than impacts from extracting and burning fossil fuels. There's visual impact on the landscape —

again, the least of our worries ahead. No one loves a pristine natural ridge more than I do. At the same time, objections to wind, when they're based only on aesthetics is a luxury I fear we can no longer afford.

JC: I think the cons on a technology basis are the intermittency of wind. However, intermittency not just due to lack of wind at a certain point in time, but intermittency based on the fact that its a mechanical device that's been proven to have significant downtime over the life of the system. And while I'm not sure of the size of the current towers proposed, my understanding is that because wind turbines are getting taller and taller, by the time this project could come about, the wind tower height could be significantly higher. A con for both for region and state is that where the project is proposed, it's my understanding that the access roads would have a significant impact, and I'm not so certain that that's necessary.

Key issues to watch?

JC: I think the key issues to watch is how the SEC chooses to view the adjusted project, although it seems very similar to the first project. Additionally, it'll be interesting to see how town activists, both pro and con, lobby the state to have their perspective understood.

MD: Follow the regulatory approval process to make



Courtesy image

A rendering of the previously proposed 10-turbine wind farm in Antrim. The newest proposal only calls for nine turbines.

sure community's interests are protected. There will need to be ongoing monitoring and stewardship of the land which would be exposed to easier access, and oversight of the construction and maintenance at the site.

What will this do for energy needs in the state?

JC: Like solar, wind is renewable energy that can help provide energy from non-fossil sources that is competitively priced.

MD: It's a drop in the bucket, but we need a lot of drops in the bucket, so every drop counts. We can stop adding fossil fuels into the mix if we choose to do so.

Why should we care?

JC: [Residents] should care because it's in their backyard. It will visually impact their local views for 50 years. And negatively impact their local terrain.

MD: Individual small scale, community scale and regional renewable supply options are absolutely critical, and making those possible should be a common goal for all of us. Our climate and a livable planet is at stake. It's an opportunity. New Hampshire has great wind resources, and they're all on the ridges. We still need to address proper siting to reduce impact to natural biomes, as well as large populations of wildlife.

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Margaret Dillon, Energy consultant

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