

TOWN OF TEMPLE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

PLANNING BOARD

NOVEMBER 30, 2011
FINAL MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING

Board members present: John Kieley, Randy Martin, Bruce Kullgren, Allan Pickman, Richard Whitcomb, and Rose Lowry

Call to order by Pickman at 7:20 p.m. after a slight delay in setting up the PowerPoint presentation.

Public forum on Large Wind Energy Systems: Lowry welcomed the audience of approximately 60 people and gave an overview of the meeting format. She asked that questions be held until after the initial presentation. Lowry then provided commentary to a PowerPoint display. She explained that Pioneer Green Energy has proposed a multi-tower wind farm project in the neighboring town of New Ipswich, and is also considering placement of 1 to 3 towers in Temple in the area of Kidder Mountain. She indicated planning is still in the preliminary stages. She said Temple is considered an abutter to the New Ipswich project due to regional impact. Even if no turbines are installed in Temple, all New Ipswich towers would be visible in Temple. Lowry stated New Ipswich already has a large wind energy zoning ordinance in place to regulate commercial wind, and now Temple is considering creation of such an ordinance. This would help maintain local control, protect the character of the town, safeguard public health and safety, preserve property values, and protect wildlife and the environment. She also said without any local control the state Site Evaluation Committee (SEC) could become involved, as well as the local Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA). Lowry next discussed turbine size and the amount of energy created. She then discussed tax implications for the town, including tax revenue, assessed value, depreciation, and cost of local services. She commented that the Planning Board (PB) does not yet have a firm grasp on actual numbers and is working to research and establish reliable figures. The next topic was bird kill numbers, and local concerns over raptor migration in the Wapack range area. Lowry then listed many of the components of a large wind energy system ordinance, saying while some were technical in nature, others would be specific to Temple. She stated the Planning Board's next steps include obtaining feedback from the townspeople, then working to draft an ordinance with the intent to establish some control and protect the town. The board would then hold two public hearings, and in March residents would be able to vote on accepting the ordinance.

The audience then was encouraged to offer comments and/or ask questions, including the following:

Q - Can the town of Temple offer any input on the New Ipswich project?

A – Pickman said the New Ipswich project is in the preliminary design stage, and no formal application has been made to the town. Kieley offered further information, saying in 2010 New Ipswich passed an ordinance for Large Wind Energy Systems (LWES), and the Pioneer Green project being proposed is grandfathered under that ordinance. So far Pioneer Green has erected a meteorological tower to obtain data. However, the town of New Ipswich is now considering changes to their LWES ordinance, specifically addressing noise issues. As abutters, Temple can make a statement on local impact, as part of perceived regional impact.

Q – Is the Planning Board aware of a documentary on the impact of wind energy on a small town in the state of New York?

A – No PB members have seen such a documentary.

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Q – Is the site of the proposed project near the Wapack trail?

A – Lowry reviewed the location of the preliminary tower placement in relation to the trail as illustrated on one of the presentation maps.

Q – Will the ordinance be ready in time for the town to vote in March?

A – Lowry said that Pioneer Green is willing to wait for Temple to produce an ordinance. Gathering of ongoing Information from Antrim and New Ipswich will be helpful in this process. Kieley explained the state Site Evaluation Committee (SEC) can become involved in any project of 30 megawatts or greater. He also said Antrim is voluntarily utilizing the SEC, and has thereby lost some local control. However, state requirements include consideration of any local ordinance. Kieley continued that the PB feels with a local ordinance in place, the state will pay more attention to local interests. He also said Pioneer Green may consider going directly to the state rather than having to deal with two towns with two different ordinances.

Q – How to determine sound levels and size of setbacks?

A – Lowry described her impression of a visit to the Lempster wind farm, and how temperature, wind and distance variables can alter noise. Setbacks typically range from 1000-2000 feet. Kieley mentioned decibel levels, and protection of involved property owners and non-participating (abutting) property owners. There can also be negotiations with surrounding property owners that may involve financial compensation.

Q – Statement from resident who owns property as part of Wildcat Partnership. He has talked with Pioneer Green and also visited Lempster site; mention of “siren sound” as blades cut through fog, disturbed at screeching noise and thought too loud; not impressed by site of wind farm there.

A – Lowry discussed the access roads at the Lempster site and stated work sites need to be recovered.

Q – Efficiency of wind energy, history of Pioneer Green Energy, and contact with New Ipswich?
A – Lowry explained that wind is considered one alternative source of energy and an emerging technology. Pioneer Green is the project developer, and when ready they will shop the project around and sell to a new owner. This is their first wind energy project. The Temple PB is already talking to the New Ipswich PB and attending meetings/hearings in that town. Kieley stated while the focus now is on Pioneer Green, an ordinance will apply to any/all other projects that may be proposed in the future.

Q – Comment about understanding the need for Temple to have a LWES ordinance in place to give the town some control.

A – Agreement from board members.

Q – Why should Temple allow this type of project; how does it improve the town?

A – Lowry answered there are mixed feelings, but embracing alternative energy is positive, and there would be some income for the town. Kieley stated energy companies are being subsidized by government funding and are encouraged to promote alternative energy projects. He agreed that “green” energy and local tax revenue are the main reasons for consideration.

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PLANNING BOARD

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Q – Can Temple say “no” and keep commercial wind turbines out?

A – Pickman said the town could pass an ordinance saying they are not allowed. However, state involvement might override this, and a court case could be brought forward. Pickman and Lowry agreed a definitive answer to this question is still unknown. There was a brief discussion of the town’s rights vs. state intervention, and how an extremely restrictive town ordinance might actually encourage the state to step in. Kieley said the town has its “hand on a dial” with regard to how restrictive a LWES ordinance should be.

Q – How is PSNH involved?

A – Lowry said PSNH owns the existing transmission line, and could purchase and then sell the power generated by a wind farm. There would be no break on power costs to town residents.

Q – If the project in New Ipswich should fail to go through, how would this affect Temple?

A – Kieley said it is possible if Temple has a weak ordinance, the entire project could shift here. It was also noted that if there is no immediate need for power, the project itself might not be needed. Lowry said this situation has occurred in other states.

Q – Where is Planning Board going with developing an ordinance?

A – Kieley said he has searched other towns in New Hampshire for LWES ordinances and found few currently exist. Portions of those are being scavenged to create a draft for Temple. He noted there is no zoning in the town of Lempster and therefore no ordinance. The PB would like a completed draft ordinance for the town to consider by January. If not, the board would like to step back, take more time and have the town vote at a later date. Pioneer Green will not be ready until May of 2012 to come before the board with a solid proposal. They do not yet have approval to push power onto the existing transmission line, which will buy Temple some time. The ordinance draft has been started – there are tricky issues to debate and decide.

Q – How can public stay informed and involved?

A – Planning board meeting minutes are available on the town’s website; emails can be sent to the PB clerk at TempleAssist@comcast.net; letters can be sent to the PB at the town offices; ongoing PB meetings are open to the public. Pickman stated the next few meetings will be work sessions to discuss and construct the ordinance; the public is welcome to attend.

Q – Why not encourage small wind energy projects rather than large?

A – The town already has a Small Wind Energy System ordinance in place. However, it can be an expensive proposition at this time for a homeowner to do this.

Q – Comment to encourage the board to check out the New York wind documentary previously mentioned and do further research.

A – Board members agreed.

Q – Is other wildlife affected besides birds?

A – Lowry suggested some data indicate bats may be affected.

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PLANNING BOARD

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Q – Could the PB check into wind regulations in the state of Vermont, where there are many existing turbines?

A – Kieley said he believes there may be a statewide ordinance, instead of various local ones; he will investigate.

Q – Are the slides from tonight's presentation available?

A – Some images will be posted on the town website, but come to meetings to stay informed.

Q – Will personal input be accepted at PB meetings?

A – All are welcome to come and listen but not talk unless invited to do so, as work sessions are necessary to get the ordinance developed in time to meet deadlines.

Planning Board member Bruce Kullgren then asked to speak. He said he believes the prospect of a commercial wind farm in this area is “an atrocity”, the energy is not needed, and the project is just an example of “corporate greed”. He made reference to a few years back when the Planning Board was considering a large subdivision located on a mountain, and said the town was in an uproar then due to concerns about the view shed. He indicated consideration now of a mountain covered with turbines is “appalling”. He stated any PB ordinance would be a “set-up” for a developer – “you do A, B, C, D – you got it”. He suggested the town tell them “no” and “stick to it”. He stated this development would be destructive, with massive cuts of trees, massive roads, and huge graveled tower sites. He urged “do not destroy the hillsides” and said he finds the whole proposal is “beyond comprehension”.

Selectmen Tedd Petro then spoke, saying he was “not crazy about them”, but the PB should ask the town what they want. He suggested contacting a lawyer to see if the town can say “no”.

An audience member then said he feels Temple “has a powerful voice” and its input may have an impact and even reduce the New Ipswich project,

At this point Lowry asked for a straw poll with a show of hands in response to three questions: 1) in favor of commercial wind? – a few; 2) against? – approximately half the audience; undecided? – approximately half the audience. Lowry encouraged residents to research this subject on their own. Pickman said the Planning Board will be working hard to create an ordinance specific to Temple and have it ready to go into the public hearing process. Lowry thanked the audience for their interest and participation. The forum ended at 8:55 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Betsy Perry