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Ira crowd largely opposes wind farm



The audience directs questions to Jeffrey Wennberg at a meeting on wind power at Ira's Town Hall on Tuesday evening.

Cassandra Hotaling /
Rutland Herald

IRA —Per White-Hansen and Jeffrey Wennberg fielded questions from a frequently hostile audience Tuesday.

The president and spokesman of Vermont Community Wind Farm stood before a crowd of about 80 people for more than two hours in Ira's Town Hall. The company wants to build an 80-megawatt wind farm in and around Ira and requested the meeting with townspeople.

Wennberg called it an "introductory" meeting, designed to gather early feedback and concerns to bring to their consultants while they are still in the field, doing preliminary studies on various aspects of the project.

"In the fall we'll report back, give you a chance to meet the consultants, kick the tires," he said.

Much of the feedback amounted to "go away." People in the audience held up signs opposing the project. David Potter, who represents part of Ira in the Legislature, even objected to the company's name.

"It seems the only thing Vermont Community Wind Farm has done to the community is divide it," he said, going on to take issue with the term "wind farm."

"It has nothing to do with agriculture. ... What this really is, is a huge electrical-generating industrial complex."

Several people asked about the noise the turbines would create. Wennberg acknowledged noise as an issue, and said the company plans to use extensive studies and computer modeling to find how far the towers need to be from houses.

Wennberg said that while 20 percent of wind farms generate noise complaints, 80 percent do not.

"Clearly, there's a way to do it so it's not an issue," he said.

Mark Bonazinga of Tinmouth said he had read studies finding that 93 percent of people who live within a mile and half of wind towers suffered from sleep deprivation due to low frequency noise. Wennberg called the statistic "exceedingly hard to believe."

"I would encourage you and others who feel likewise to gather that information ... and present it to the Public Service Board," he said. "The project will certainly comply with any requirements the PSB places on it."

Some claimed that the intermittent nature of wind power generation — the wind isn't always blowing — means that wind cannot replace fossil fuels. Wennberg said the Department of Energy and Public Service Board thought otherwise.

Wennberg also touted potential economic benefits.

He said the towers would not go on the town's education grand list, and thus not affect its status with the state. They will go on the grand list, he said, and the town would get a minimum of \$11,000 per installed megawatt no matter how low the municipal tax rate dropped.

Wennberg said Act 60 makes it difficult for the town to use the money to buy down its school tax rate, but the town could send a dividend to taxpayers that they could then use to pay their school tax bills — or for anything else they want.

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