

## Ira struggles with proposed wind farm

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Marshall Squier points to a proposed wind site.

(Host) The town of Ira is holding a public meeting Wednesday so townspeople can talk over a proposal that has upset many in the small community. A large scale commercial wind farm is being proposed for Ira and five other towns west of Rutland. If completed, it would be the second largest energy producer in the state after Vermont Yankee. Although many in the area say they support wind power, a growing number say this project is too big.

VPR's Nina Keck has more.

(Keck) Marshall Squier starts up his dusty blue Honda and drives up a back road near his farm in Tinmouth. He points to a breathtaking overlook of the Taconic Mountains where ridge after lush green ridge folds into the horizon.

(Squier) "Alright, here we are. And we're looking now north from here - and what you see, Susie's peak is that last little peak and then the two peaks just this side of it are also in Ira. And there's windmills to be on each of those. I think there's 12 proposed on this side of the mountain -- and there's 38 proposed in Ira, all of 'em you'd see from here."

(Keck) Those wind mills would be part of an 80 megawatt wind farm that Vermont Community Wind, a Charlotte-based company, wants to build.

The company is assessing 60 potential turbine sites. The vast majority are in Ira, but properties in Tinmouth, West Rutland, Clarendon, Middletown Springs and Poultney are also being considered.

The exact number of turbines hasn't been decided, but company officials say it will likely be between 32 and 54 - depending on the size of the towers. The smallest wind towers are roughly 400 feet tall while the larger models are nearly 500 feet high. Marhsall Squier says they'd be over twice as tall as the windmills in Searsburg, the only existing commercial wind project in the state.

(Squier) "One of the big problems is how do you get these 200,000-pound towers up there, because the bottoms are gigantic. The Taconic ridges are peaked. If you look down the valley you'll see that they come up to almost to a point. So a lot of these ridges are going to be blasted. And the fact that all of these ridges may be altered is something concerning people. It's not just the fact that it's a wind farm, it's like, what's it going to do and what's it really going to look like after."

(Keck) That's what Jason Sevigny is worried about. His family owns 400 acres in Ira up along Herrick Mountain.

(Sevigny) "It's a beautiful mountain. My grandparents grew up there - they passed it on to my father and me and my cousins, they've all grown up there. I don't want to see it get ruined."

(Keck) Sevigny shakes his head. Ira has fewer than 460 residents and doesn't even have a general store. A development this size, he says, would hurt property values and destroy the community.

(Sevigny) "The noise level, just looking up there and seeing the towers - the visual effects of it. I just don't really want it. I mean I'm for wind power I really am. Just put it where it's not going to affect so many people."

(Sheloski) "I'm Ted Sheloski and I live approximately a mile from here. And the whole wind tower project I'll be able to see from my front porch and I'm still all for it. I have no trouble with it whatsoever."

(Keck) What bothers Sheloski is what he calls the hypocrisy he's seeing over wind power.

(Sheloski) "Vermont's a green state - they keep saying green power, green power - but everybody says not in my backyard though. But if not in our backyard, who's backyard? It's going to go somewhere, why not benefit from it."

(Keck) Officials with Vermont Community Wind say they'll pay each town that hosts a turbine between \$10,000 and \$11,000 per installed megawatt per year. That's on top of state education fees and lease payments to private landholders.

For Ira that could mean between \$400,000 and \$630,000 a year for the next 25 years, depending on how many windmills are installed.

Considering Ira has a municipal budget of about \$160,000, Sheloski says the project could provide much needed tax relief as well as jobs for the whole region.

(Sheloski) "This would help out with all the excavating businesses around here - all of 'em. It'll help with all the cement companies and from what I was told at one of these meetings they're going to have people on 24 hours a day doing maintenance. Whether it's plowing snow, or maintaining the windmills or just cutting grass. Whatever it is. - 4-5-6-8-10 jobs right there and we need jobs."

(Keck) Jeff Wennberg, an official with Vermont Community Wind, says the project will actually create between 30 and 40 long term jobs tied to operations and maintenance.

(Wennberg) "This isn't the kind of economic development where somebody could buy it out and decide to move it to Ohio, or India. It's fixed to the resource and the resource is tied to this part of the state of Vermont. So, it's not going anywhere. Those jobs are safe and secure."

(Keck) But opponents argue that most of the profits from the wind farm will go to corporate investors who haven't been identified. And most of the land that's being earmarked for towers is forested property, owned by a group of investors and managed by a timber company in New Hampshire.

(Squier) "I don't mind seeing the windmills. The fact that it's green energy and it's not polluting - I like that. What I don't like is who may own them."

(Keck) Tinmouth resident Marshall Squier says he'd be much more willing to support a wind farm if it was smaller and owned by the local towns. Obviously, funding is an issue. But Squier says considering all the money various groups have raised to fight the proposal . . .

(Squier) "That money could be used to develop a project that could be acceptable - and the right size. And you wouldn't need as big a project because you wouldn't have to be a profit."

(Keck) Squier is one of the organizers of the popular alternative energy celebration known as Solarfest. He admits it's ironic that a community that prides itself on promoting sustainable living is struggling over this issue. Michael Beattie, an architect in Middletown Springs, agrees.

(Beattie) "I think that's the internal debate that people are having. 'I don't want to be a roadblock. I don't want to shift the burden to somebody else. But, gosh, do I really have to take this on.' That's the question and that's tough."

(Keck) Beattie says there are still too many unanswered questions about the project. Vermont Community Wind says they've commissioned dozens of studies to examine how the wind farm might impact the area and they expect results by the end of the year. At that point, community members and the state Public Service Board will have a chance to sort through more detailed pros and cons and decide the project's future.