



Ira wind supporters begin to stir publicly

By Gordon Dritschilo
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A group of Ira residents say it may not be quite so clear which way the wind is blowing.

Opposition has thus far dominated public discussion of a proposed 80-megawatt wind farm, most or all of which would be in Ira. However, a group calling itself Friends of Ira Wind has informally organized, saying the proposal has backers in town as well as detractors.

"I really think there are a lot more supporters who aren't willing to come out and be as vocal as I am," said Ted Sheloski, who organized a meeting of supporters of the plan last week. "Just walking and talking to people ... I find nothing but support."

Shortly after they learned of Vermont Community Wind Farm's plans in March, opponents of the plan began organizing and discussing how to stop it. They listed concerns including the destruction of local views and potential environmental and health effects.

At public meetings in Ira, the apparent sentiment toward the plan has been overwhelmingly negative, with almost no one speaking in favor of it.

Sheloski said about a dozen people attended his meeting last week. He said he plans to hold another in early October and to organize committees to take on various tasks promoting the project.

"We're a group that believes strongly in wind power for all the right reasons —environmental reasons, economic reasons, the whole nine yards," he said. "I've personally seen a wind farm. I have 39 towers behind a camp of mine in Maine."

Sheloski said he does not own any land involved in the project and that he does not work for VCWF.

"There's a rumor out there that I'm getting paid by Vermont Community Wind," he said. "I got a hat and a T-shirt, that's it. ... I'm doing this strictly privately, on my own, because I believe in what they're doing."

Sheloski said he was inspired by looking at his 11-month-old grandson and thinking about how the world has changed in the past 30 years, going from affordable gas and electricity to an explosion in energy prices.

"It's time for our generation to fix this for future generations," he said.

Sue Johnson, an Ira resident who attended the meeting, said she also supports wind power out of concern for her grandchildren.

"We need to do something, so why not Ira?" she asked.

Like Sheloski, Johnson said she thinks there are many people in Ira who support the project, but have not spoken out publicly. She thinks the two sides can common ground once people on both sides get their facts straight.

"We need more information," she said. "In the long run, we need to come together."

Ron Johnston, another supporter of the project, said he missed the meeting because he was out of town. He said that three or four of the potential sites are right in front of his house and that he has seen towers in upstate New York and spoken to people who live near them.

"My wife and I, we don't mind the look of them," he said. "I think they're a good, clean way of making energy."

Johnston also said he liked the potential financial benefits of the project, which could include payments to the town in excess of the total municipal budget.

"We could do a lot with that money, pay for new buildings and lower taxes," he said.

Select Board Chairwoman Christina Tyminski said the board has heard from some people who support the project, but her impression is that more opponents have contacted the town than supporters.

Sheloski said rhetoric about how divisive the project is has been misplaced.

"It's not pitting neighbor against neighbor," he said. "It's like me being a Democrat and you being a Republican. We're still going to be friends. We're still going to talk."