



PSB approves wind testing towers

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A proposed wind farm in and around Ira has cleared its first bureaucratic hurdle.

The Public Service Board issued certificates of public good Friday allowing Vermont Community Wind Farm to place meteorological testing towers on Herrick Mountain in Ira and Susie's Peak in Clarendon.

The company wants to put up wind turbines with a total capacity of 80 megawatts, which would make it the largest wind farm in Vermont. First, though, it needs current data on the wind at the potential sites it has identified.

The PSB decisions require that the 200-foot towers, which gather data on wind speed, direction and temperature be removed within five years. Representatives of the company have said they will want a year's worth of data to determine the project's viability.

The towers, which are 10 inches wide at the base and 6 inches at the top, are held in place by wires and will be brought up the mountains using existing logging roads and ATV trails. Batteries with solar cells power the towers.

"It's a very temporary structure, which involves minimum site work," said VCWF spokesman Jeffrey Wennberg.

Wennberg said Wednesday they want to get the towers up "as soon as possible" and that he expected the necessary manpower, equipment and weather would be available in the coming weeks.

Wennberg said he could not rule out the company seeking to put up additional towers later due to the length of the Herrick Mountain ridgeline.

"When we get the results from the first one, they may want to put up a second one for some reason," he said.

The decisions, numbering 21 and 22 pages, addressed a variety of concerns raised by comments during the application process. The board concluded that a public hearing was not necessary because the "comprehensive nature" of the public comments sufficiently addressed the issues.

The decision also said it would not serve as precedent when VCWF applies to put up wind turbines.

"The Board notes that it has denied approval of a petition for a wind generation facility after approval of a temporary wind measurement tower," the board wrote.

The Clarendon Select Board filed a letter saying the tower there violated height restrictions in the town's zoning ordinance. The decision said local zoning does not apply to cases it reviews and that the town did not provide an argument as to how the tower would interfere with the orderly development of the region.

Beyond that, the board found that neither tower posed a threat to public health and safety or wildlife.

Clarendon Select Board Chairman Michael Klopchin said his board will discuss appealing the decision at its meeting Sept. 14 and that he expects the Planning Commission there to discuss the decision as well.

"They overlooked a lot of things, as far as I was concerned," he said, going on to object to the PSB's disregard for local zoning.

Klopchin added that he has heard of a movement to turn the Public Service Board into an elected, rather than an appointed, body and that he plans to talk to his legislators about introducing a bill to that effect.

Ira Select Board Chairwoman Christine Tyminski said Wednesday she had spoken to the town's attorney that day and she did not think Ira would appeal the decision, though she was not positive.

Wennberg said environmental and engineering studies of the area are nearing completion, and that VCWF expects to apply to the PSB to put up the turbines in the first quarter of 2010. While that means the application will come before the wind data, Wennberg said the data will be available before the end of the application process, which will take at least a year.