

A Community Wind Project in Rural Albany County, New York State

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A community wind project is in the predevelopment stage in rural Albany County, New York State. The project leadership team consists of two wind energy consultants, a wildlife biologist, and a county legislator who is also a farmer in the county. All are or have been residents of rural Albany County. The project team seeks to develop a business/project model that can be replicated by other communities throughout the country. Cost-sharing for the project has been provided by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). The project consists of the following activities: identifying and assessing potential sites for a small (< 10 MW) wind project, establishing a community-based wind energy focus group, conducting community education, completing the preliminary environmental assessment including a radar bird study, and producing a business prospectus. The business prospectus will be designed to provide the basis for a community group to seek financing for the completion of the project. Activities to date have included conducting a series of community public educational forums, selecting a site for detailed resource assessment, and examining the potential impact on wildlife habitat at several sites. A number of techniques are being used for assessing the degree of community support for utility-scale wind energy, and for discerning the major causes of misunderstanding. Insights from the efforts to assess and build community support will be presented, along with preliminary results of the environmental assessment work.

Site Prospecting and Resource Assessment

Criteria for site selection:

- Modeled wind resource (NYS wind map, www.awstruewind.com)
- Housing density & parcel size (tax maps)
- Terrain & surface cover (aerial photos)
- Distance to transmission (road survey)
- Community acceptance



Public review and comment:

- Nine areas were identified among three Albany County Hilltowns (Berne, Knox and Rensselaerville)
- Areas with potential sites were presented as maps to the Community Focus Group at two successive meetings
- Some sites were eliminated because of potential opposition.
- The site selected for resource assessment in the Town of Knox was chosen primarily because of a concentration of interested landowners.



Reaction to site selection by Town:

- A public hearing regarding wind development was held by the Town of Knox on April 26, 2006.
- Approximately 75 people were in attendance.
- Some concerns about utility-scale wind power were expressed by community members.
- There was overwhelming support for installation of a meteorological tower at the Knox site to begin the process of resource assessment.

Next Steps:

- Installation of the meteorological tower.
- Sodar study at the site
- Energy Yield Analysis

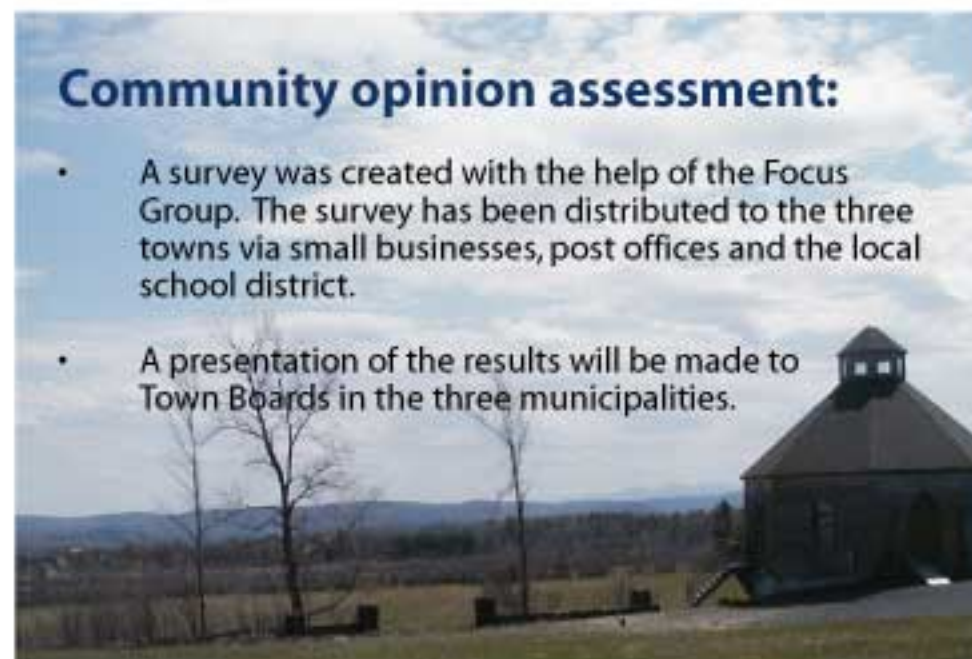
Building and Assessing Community Support

Informational/educational meetings:

- Outreach efforts began in February of 2004.
- A field trip to the Fenner Wind Farm, two hours to the west of Albany County was held for interested Hilltown residents.
- Once NYSERDA funding was approved (mid-2005) a series of monthly meetings was held in the three towns.
- A Focus Group was formed to provide feedback, and to examine community concerns about utility-scale wind power.
- The list of concerns is being addressed through study and will result in a series of "white papers" which will be published on the project's website.

Community opinion assessment:

- A survey was created with the help of the Focus Group. The survey has been distributed to the three towns via small businesses, post offices and the local school district.
- A presentation of the results will be made to Town Boards in the three municipalities.



Website:

- www.helderbergwind.org or www.hilltownswind.org
- Minutes of meetings, contents of presentations, and "white papers" addressing community concerns are included.
- Links to other wind related sites available.

Next Steps:

- Analyze survey results
- Conduct additional rounds of Focus Group meetings
- Resurvey at the end of the project.



Environmental Assessment



Environmental concerns expressed:

- Ongoing development pressure and "rural sprawl" have been identified as serious environmental concerns by rural Albany County residents.
- Wildlife issues (bird and bat)
- Viewshed valued as integral to Hilltown identity
- Noise
- Various concerns raised based on misinformation

Addressing environmental concerns:

- Utility-scale wind energy development promoted as an open space conservation measure.
- Concerns based on misinformation were immediately explained by project team members.
- Other environmental concerns are being addressed by sub committees of the Focus Group facilitated by members of the project leadership team (resulting in "white papers").



Next Steps:

- Radar Bird and Bat Study (Integrated Environmental Data)
- Noise Study (Integrated Environmental Data)
- Visual Impact Study (Sustainable Energy Developments)
- Ecological Resources Study (Integrated Environmental Data)

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