Shelld Oil plans wind farms on crest of Helderbergs

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Growth is expected in the industry that is producing these large machines. "The noise and appearance are objectionable," said, "and, in fact, that town has been granted variances at the state and land. All the ridges surrounding the town have windmills on them, and it's the ugliest thing you've ever seen."

The plan

While some do support the use of wind energy, others near the proposed areas for the wind farm proposals are displeased with Shell's proposal.

"I've been pushing for 20 years to get wind power up here," said Steven Dickerson of Camp Woodside Road, who is estimating these turbines have already met twice with representatives from Cleco.

"They didn't return phone calls from Shelly. The nearest representatives from Houston, Texas: Kevin Johnson and Chanok Motheral. "They're estimated to have the contract re­presentatives from Cleco, he said. Johnson didn't return phone calls from The Enterprise.

Peter Boudreaux, who lives down the street from Dickerson, has already met twice with representatives from Cleco.

"We had a group meeting with some of the neighbors on the street," Boudreaux said. "Shell Oil drops down to Shell Winz­bergen, which drops down to Cleco Land Energy — that's the chain of command."

Boudreaux said Cleco was passed two representatives from Houston, Texas: Kevin Johnson and Chanok Motheral. "They gave us a contract to be paid $5,000 if Shell decides to build the tower."

Cleco told Boudreaux that the landowner will be agreeing to an annual payment of $6,000, per turbine, per year, after commercial operation.

"So, said Boudreaux, "if I had one turbine on my land, and I only have nine acres, I don't get the $5,000 signing bonus. But if someone next to me had one turbine and had 100 acres, they'd get way more in royalties than I would," he said.

"They don't ev­en do an environmental impact study until after you sign," Boudreaux said.

Location

Two sites have been designated for the project, dubbed Site 16 and Site 10.

"Site 16 is where we live in the Hel­derbergs, the high­est point in Albany County, just outside of Rensselaerville," said Boudreaux. This site, he said, includes Pond Hill Road, Camp Woodside Road, Wood Road, and Peasley Road.

"They're proposing to put 25 towers here," Boudreaux said, "of which no less than three quarters are going to put on state land. That land, he said, is the Helderberg Ridge State Wildlife Management Area. Among the 250 landowners they have in contact with Site 16, they're only offering the landowners seven or eight of these windmills. And, since it's state-owned land, they have to pay taxes and all that, so the state is get­ting to make out on it as well," said Boudreaux. "They say it's a done deal."

The other site, Site 10, is des­ignated as Wolf Hill, New Scotland, he said.

"I think it would be that ridge along Berne, just on the bar of Thacher Park," said Boudreaux. "The map wasn't very clear, and they wouldn't give us the names of the other landowners of that area that they were planning on building on."

A new proposal

Boudreaux was on reason to sign the contract because it's not equitable, he said. "My property value may go down, and there's nothing in their clauses saying that I can recover any loss of prop­erty value," he said.

Dickerson is worried, too, about reduction of property values, though wind-energy advocates call this an invalid concern.

"It seems reasonable that, if you have a huge wind turbine in your backyard, you might have issues trying to sell it," Dickerson said.

In a letter to the Enterprise edi­tor this week, Dickerson writes, "Shell's proposal will reduce the value of our property by substantial amount (while only compensating landowners) based solely on the number of acres and number of windmills on their land."

The problem with this, he says, is that, while many landowners will suffer reduction of property values, those with larger acreage will receive more income from the wind farm proposal.

He plans on proposing a plan of his own when he meets with Cleco on Friday.

"I am introducing a proposal," the letter goes on, "which will prob­ably be a model for other wind farm proposals, which will compensate the affected property owners based on valuation ra­tions, rather than acres alone.

"I am also proposing protection for the land owners, so that, if they choose to sell, but cannot achieve their tax valued amount, Shell Oil would have to pay them, after the sale, the difference between the sale price and the valuation amount," said Dickerson.

"They're saying anyone who has 20 acres or more, and signs off before Nov. 1, will get $6,000, no more," Dickerson said this week. "I don't know all the details yet, but supposedly they already have ap­proved to use the (Partridge Road) State Wildlife Management Area at the top of the Helderbergs, which is the highest point in the Helderbergs, other than my land. There's a ridgeline in there that's very conducive for wind energy, the ridge being the top­ most edge of a mountain ridge."

Feedback

"I'm more concerned about "where they put it," said Dickerson. "I think the ridgeline is already a block of the cell towers built there."

"I guess if I have to sum it up, I'd say the Helderbergs are already in danger because the cell towers have industrialized them," Dickerson said.

"The towers are visible for miles below the escarpment."

Michael Riccillo, Tomasen's neighbor, hadn't heard about the project. He was concerned about the noise produced by the windmills. "I'll have to give that a thought," he said. "I wouldn't want it too close to my home."

"The wind generators that I've seen in the Berkshires are ring­monsters," he says that they're very big, and you can see them from miles away. "I think it's healthy, it's good, the real down­side is the sound."

One resident on Indian Lodge Road, who wants to have the contract reviewed by Shell, said, "They don't even do an environ­mental impact study until after you sign."

A letter to the editor from Pratt, a former engineer, built the first wind turbine in America, said, "Wind projects can bring specific benefits to a community: increased tax base, and a source of carbon free power."

"In short," Dickerson concluded, "I am concerned that we lose our property value, and will sacrifice some value in my land, as long as those who see big money might lose some of the marginal value. My concern is that property owners are not the only ones sacrificing."