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Northampton Sets Wind-Energy Standards

By Ron West

After months of discussion and hearings, the Northampton County Board of Supervisors has reached a decision regarding the standards for wind-energy facilities, including test and energy-producing units.

The Northampton Planning Commission had spent months battling the zoning change around, with several members opposing the change in favor of protection for birds and bats that might be killed by flying into the devices. *Delsea Energy* of Toms River, NJ., has been seeking the change that would allow it to erect energy test facilities in Northampton.

While no company has approached the county to erect energy-production towers, some Planning Commission members feared that the zoning change would open the door for them.

Sue Rice, manager of the Eastern Shore Wildlife Refuge at Wise Point, addressed the board and suggested changes to the proposed zoning that would lessen the impact on birds and bats. Rice suggested that the maximum sound levels produced by a wind turbine be set at 50 decibels (dB) at a distance of several hundred meters. Rice also requested that all towers be of mono-pole construction rather than using guy-wires to it. Additionally, she requested that bird- and bat-warning devices be attached to guy-wires if they were to be used.

Planning Commission members Mary Miller and Roberta Kellam both outspoken opponents to the towers, sent letters opposing their approval. Kellam pressed for the sound produced by the towers to be no higher than 35 dB at night. Additionally, a letter from the Department of Defense requested that it be advised of any wind towers so their effect on military operations can be determined.

Supervisor Spencer Murray said there is no way to predict the economic impact of wind turbines or wind testing towers. He also noted that it would be almost impossible for a company to comply with the 35 dB requirement. Supervisor Sam Long Jr. asked if the proposed testing tower would be of mono-pole construction or if it would require guy-wires and was informed that the latter was the case. Supervisor Richard Tankard stated that while he supports the concept of using test towers in the county, he opposes any wind-generating turbines on the mainland. Instead, he said, they should be erected offshore. The board voted 5-1 (Tankard opposed), to approve the zoning change to allow for the use of wind turbines and/or testing towers in the county. A special-use permit is required for the erection of wind turbines and towers, thus giving members of the public an opportunity to speak if such a request is made.