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Are industrial wind turbines *substantially in accord* with the Highland County Comprehensive Plan?

Today's View – Tomorrow's Vision

Economic Opportunity, Strategic Questions, page 6

In judging how effectively we are planning for our future, we will ask ourselves the following questions:
Would the erection of a wind-powered electric generating plant contribute to . . .

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| ! maintaining steady low unemployment? | Ⓟ Minimally |
| ! providing a mix of job opportunities for people of various skills/educational levels? | Ⓟ Minimally |
| ! maintaining a strong tax base? | Ⓟ Unknown |
| ! retaining and supporting existing businesses? | Ⓟ No |
| ! encouraging new locally-owned, small business/industries? | Ⓟ No |
| ! capitalizing on tourism and local involvement with the Virginia Western Highlands Travel Council? | Ⓟ No |
| ! supporting traditional agricultural and forestal business? | Ⓟ No |
| ! supporting the economic role of artisans and craftspeople? | Ⓟ No |
| ! targeting those types of business/industry which can contribute the most to the area? | Ⓟ No |
| ! participating in regional economic and job development/training approaches? | Ⓟ No |

A wind-powered utility as proposed by Highland New Wind Development would provide at most two permanent jobs, perhaps only one, in maintenance of the facility, according to the HNWD application. This is in conflict with Economy Recommendation (c), page 89, "Attempt to attract businesses that provide high-skilled jobs."

Such a utility would contribute to the county's tax base but the amount is speculative at this time. It could be \$200,000 but it could be much less. Also unknown is the amount of tax revenue that would be lost if a number of people decide not to build homes or move to the county. Hence the net effect of the facility could be zero or even negative. We don't know.

Wind power's contribution to the other listed concerns would be either nil or negative.

Land Use / Environmental Balance, Strategic Questions, page 7

In judging how effectively we are planning for our future, we will ask ourselves the following questions: Would the erection of a wind-powered electric generating plant contribute to . . .

- | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------|----|
| ! | protecting our historical and cultural heritage? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | strengthening our existing core areas? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | building on established areas? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | planning for potential future growth? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | protecting the rural areas and open space? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | maintaining a human scale? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | encouraging new growth to complement existing development? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | protecting our natural resources? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | improving the aesthetics and beauty of our community? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | maintaining those qualities that make us attractive to residents and visitors? | <input type="radio"/> | No |
| ! | working within the larger region? | <input type="radio"/> | No |

In every instance the effect of industrial wind turbines would range from negative to extremely negative. This entire section reads as if it was specifically written to discourage the type of development that is being proposed. Building on established areas — not exactly. Maintaining a human scale — not even close. Improving the aesthetics and beauty of our community — the exact opposite. Maintaining those qualities that make us attractive to residents and visitors — not in the least.

Goals for community facilities, page 61, includes recommendation (k), “Explore the potential for raising a telecommunications tower in eastern Highland **without significantly altering the viewshed.**” [emphasis added] What would the drafters of this plan, who thought to consider the impact of a cell tower on the viewshed, have thought about giant turbines with flashing lights on Allegheny Mountain?

Goals for the economy, page 89, include (3), “Ensure that new business and industrial development occurs in suitable locations and is compatible with the County’s environmental, scenic, and rural character.” An industrial installation on a high mountain ridge is the antithesis of compatibility with our scenic and rural character.

Every goal and recommendation for utilities, page 137, concern water and sewerage. Nowhere is it suggested that Highland should become the site for an electric generating utility.

Land-use goals, page 187, include (1), “Ensure that growth management schemes complement the County’s natural, historical, and cultural setting,” and (3) “Maintain Highland’s predominantly rural character.” The recommendations, p. 187-88, include (a), “Locate potential industrial development sites on relatively small pads in the vicinity of one another, so as to centralize development in ‘industrial parks.’” and (i.6), “Expand Section 708.00 of the current Zoning Ordinance (Television antennas and Receivers) to include siting specifications for telecommunications towers.” Allegheny Mountain is not zoned for an industrial park. and here are the cell towers again. We should have siting (and presumably height) specifications for cell towers but we can erect giant turbines without such considerations?

The only place that I have found that can be interpreted as favorable to wind turbines is Natural Environment recommendation (a) on page 163, "Seek the establishment of clean industries that do not produce harmful emissions." Wind turbines do meet this criterion but they fail so totally in every other way that, on balance, the Comp Plan, like the populace of Highland County, is overwhelmingly against them.

The Board of Supervisors addressed compliance with the Comprehensive Plan in two different ways in July 2005. Two separate resolutions were drafted by counsel, each citing several sections of the plan in support or in opposition to the application. The resolution of denial, which was approved by counsel but voted down by the board, cited these sections:

- a. The comprehensive plan encourages the preservation and protection of the county's unique natural resources (p. 141) and the proposed industrial use is inconsistent with this provision of the comprehensive plan.
- b. The proposed use is contrary to the goal of the comprehensive plan to maintain the county's predominantly rural character and to centralize industrial development in industrial parks (p. 187.a).

This resolution also listed the following reasons for denial. These are based on the Comprehensive Plan and reflect the overall flavor of that plan but specific sections were not cited.

- c. The proposed use in the proposed location is incompatible with the policy of the county to encourage tourism and preserve the pristine natural environment of the county.
- d. The proposed industrial type use will be isolated and is incompatible with surrounding agricultural uses and will degrade the environment of the area.
- e. The sheer size of the wind generators (turbines) which are proposed to be located along a prominent ridgeline of the county, will change the character of the area in which they are proposed to be located and may adversely affect property values.
- f. The tax revenues paid to the county from the proposed use are uncertain because of changing technology and potential changes to the applicable federal and state regulations.
- j. The proposed use is incompatible with surrounding uses and is inconsistent with the intent of the zoning ordinance and the land use element of the comprehensive plan.

In its resolution of approval, as adopted, the board cited these sections of the plan:

- f. The proposed use is consistent with the comprehensive plan which encourages diversified economic growth and the attraction of other forms of technology to the county (pages 5-6). [However, it is not consistent with most of the rest of the strategic questions on these pages and page 7, as noted on pages 1-2 of this report.]
- g. The proposed use is consistent with the goal of the comprehensive plan that the county protect atmospheric quality by seeking clean industries (page 163).
- h. The proposed use will provide an alternative source of tax revenues for the county and increase the tax base as encouraged by the comprehensive plan (page 105). [However, those revenues are an unknown quantity as noted in item (f) under the alternate resolution and as discussed on page 1 of this report.]

The Board of Supervisors itself has shown, via these documents, that wind turbines are not "substantially in accord" with the county's Comprehensive Plan. I submit these comments to the Highland County Planning Commission and request that they be included in the record of its review of this issue.

Sincerely,



John R. Sweet