

Wind developer no-show at EDA meeting

BY WILL O'CONNOR • STAFF WRITER

FRANKLIN, W.Va. — “This ain’t green energy,” Sandy Ridge resident Ruby Hoy told the Economic Development Authority Tuesday. About 100 Pendleton landowners and residents filled the community building in Franklin to hear what U.S. Wind Force’s Jim Cookman had to say to the EDA regarding the proposed Liberty Gap wind facility.

Cookman had contacted the EDA Dec. 9 requesting time to discuss gaining an easement through the county’s business center, formerly Hanover Shoe, which the EDA operates. But, Cookman called the EDA’s executive director around noon that day to strike himself from the agenda.

According to the director, Cookman was not ready to discuss details and would contact them again after Jan. 1.

EDA member Reed Waggy said he was disappointed Cookman was not there, and said this was the second time he had asked to be on the agenda and canceled.

With Cookman absent, the EDA opened the floor to public comment. Property owner Robbie Sites said he was also disappointed in USWF. It was Sites’ understanding that USWF would not move forward with the process until Jan. 1 and he felt the developer was trying to slip one by the public by meeting with the EDA without publicizing it. Sites and others told the EDA they had learned about USWF’s presentation through the grapevine. A copy of the EDA’s agenda was posted at the courthouse a few days prior and word got around soon after.

Sites said granting a 100-foot easement for a transmission line through the PBC property would reduce the property’s value and stymie future business growth. He asked if Sugar Grove Navy Base had been contacted to see if the development would interfere with communication. “I’m surprised we’ve gotten this far in the process without asking the naval base,” he said.

Several more people from the audience voiced concerns, citing lowered property values, an unknown environmental impact, the effect on aesthetics and viewsheds, health concerns, TV reception, noise, misleading information from USWF and the wind industry, and a general lack of quality information to indicate the true impact of the development, as reasons to stop or slow down the proposal.

William Vance, who lives near where the

transmission lines might run, told the EDA he was on a pacemaker and couldn’t be around certain household appliances for health reasons. He wanted to know how the transmission lines would affect his health.

Hoy told the commission research had led her to the conclusion that wind turbines were not efficient and tax breaks and government mandates on the purchase of green energy were the driving forces behind the profitability of the industry.

Ske Ellington of Blue Grass, Va., who owns land in Pendleton, said, “We don’t want these things in Highland and we don’t want them up here. It would be like putting a fence around these mountains.”

Resident Jennifer Taylor-Ide said Pendleton needed a broad-based approach to economic development. This project has the potential to damage a large portion of the county, and will benefit only a few, she said.

Larry Thomas told the EDA to wait until USWF answers the list of questions asked by the state’s public service commission. The PSC is trying to address many of the same concerns. He encouraged the EDA to develop a list of questions and to hold public meetings for input.

Sites asked the EDA how it would handle the situation, saying the county needed a strategy on how to deal with the issue and solid leadership to implement the plan.

Waggy addressed the crowd with two pages

of prepared notes. He said it was strange no one had defended the proposal, if it’s as wonderful as the industry and others say it is. The EDA has gotten in trouble in the past by acting in haste, he said, and he advised it take its time on the issue.

Waggy said he believed Pendleton’s greatest asset was its natural beauty. “They aren’t making anymore of it,” he said. He agreed with Sites that a 100-foot easement through the PBC property would affect future growth there, and devalue the land, and was concerned about the effect on the ball fields behind the building. The EDA allows youth league soccer to use the field behind the PBC and the transmission line could run above it.

He cited concerns about radiation from the transmission lines, and said he would not want any child or person in the county to develop a health condition because of a decision the EDA made. He also noted the PBC belongs to the county, and felt it should be a countywide decision as to what to do with it.

After assuring the crowd it would not vote on the proposal until USWF produced a map showing the transmission lines, and it had gathered more information, and publicly announced the date it would vote, the EDA tabled the issue.

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