



The irony of the desperate attempt by many Highlanders to prevent industrial wind power from taking root in the county is that the massive towers are sprouting all around us even as this is written. Pendleton County has gained at least temporary reprieve, but other areas of nearby West Virginia have taken the bait and as the map indicates, many other projects are in the works. As each facility is constructed, a turbine-free Highland County becomes more and more rare and valuable.

Act of courage would be gratefully received

While the exchange Tuesday night between supervisors and opponents of industrial wind power as proposed for Highland County was pretty chilly at times, it offered some encouragement to the majority of residents who are adamantly against the prospect.

Chairman Jerry Rexrode, contrary to earlier statements, said he was still open to gathering wind-related information and that he and his colleagues need to continue to listen to their constituents before Monday's crucial vote on whether to allow 400-foot structures on ridge tops. We have no reason to believe supervisors Lee Blagg and Robin Sullenberger won't also retain open minds right up to the moment of decision.

Unless there is information in their research material we're not aware of, we have every reason to believe the full board will vote on behalf of the clear majority of their fellow residents. To string this out further by tampering with the zoning in such a way as to irreversibly open the door to massive ridge top development down the road would set an extraordinarily dangerous precedent — no matter what evolves later this month relevant to Highland New Wind Development's request for a conditional use permit that would seal the deal.

By not voting to change the ordinance, the board in no way forecloses its options later when all the information is in and accurate conclusions can be drawn. But a vote to alter the code absolutely forecloses our opportunity

to shut the barn door as powerful special interests jockey to determine our future quality of life. Such a vote would surely be the first step on a long road to losing control of our destiny — a prospect in direct opposition to our land use plan and our best interests no matter how you look at it.

As the temperature rises, we can understand Blagg's contention that residents opposed to wind power in Highland view their board as the enemy. It didn't start out that way, but it's headed in that direction. The supervisors' reluctance to hear more public concerns as proposed by resident Carolyn Pohowsky only adds to the sense of alienation residents feel and the reality of embattlement the board has fallen into.

And as organized opposition in the form of Highlanders for Responsible Development enters the discussion, it should be clear that a vote to alter structure heights Monday will not be the end of the matter. It will more likely be the beginning in a long, hard fight that will result in a rift between the board and most residents in proportions no one wants to think about. If we're in for that kind of battle, it should only be waged when each side knows exactly what the effects of wind power here will be.

Stories in today's Recorder offer new information on the issue that should increase the need for caution before plunging ahead. Virginia is way behind on the wind curve as Del. Chris Saxman, a landowner here, points out,

and Sen. John Warner, though a strong supporter of wind energy, has underscored in previous legislation on delaying offshore wind development. Saxman emphasizes the state is not known for subsidizing such projects, and these projects depend entirely on being heavily underwritten by public dollars. You don't have to read between the lines to see Saxman is not inspired by the vision of rows and rows of wind turbines on our mountains that won't contribute a spit to the nation's energy problems.

No case has been made whatsoever that Highland will benefit financially from wind projects either now or down the road. That is the only argument on which the board can hang its hat. Unless or until a hat rack is provided, and the volume of money we would take in can be shown to outweigh the losses to land values and quality of life we would absorb, we need to back away from the edge of the cliff. Because, have no doubt about it, that is where we are.

Our supervisors may not see it this way, but a vote to maintain the height ordinance the way it's currently written, far from constituting a loss of face or admission of weakness, would be seen as a profile in courage and result in an overwhelming vote of confidence from the vast majority of a grateful constituency.

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