

Board trying to get it right

We don't know yet whether an industrial-scale wind utility project will be constructed within our borders, but supervisors, by redesigning ordinance language on height limits, are evidently giving a great deal of thought as to how to proceed on this proposal — and any project in which height will be an issue. Their vote Monday provided cautious optimism to those strongly opposed to allowing 400-foot turbines on local ridges, though there is a long way to go and the outcome is by no means clear.

What's been frustrating so far — for the developer, the officials, and Highland citizens — is how much time this whole process has been on the radar, even though time is precisely what so many residents and landowners have asked for.

It's been very frustrating for those opposed to industrial wind energy development here to sit back patiently while our officials deliberate, investigate, and research this issue. This has been especially true for those who so firmly believe the project is wrong for Highland. It's equally difficult for our supervisors to be patient with those who are applying strong pressure on the board to reject the proposal.

However, what we've seen evolve over the last six months has been very encouraging for the future of our county. After years of begging for citizens to attend meetings and voice their opinions on so many issues, supervisors are finally getting a response. Whether it's in the form of letters, conversations in local restaurants, phone calls, or public comment periods at regular meetings, residents and landowners are speaking up. And they are organizing, offering assistance (as in the newly formed Highlanders

OUR VIEW

for Responsible Development), and contributing to the public conversations about where we're going and how we're going to get there.

There's never been any lack of discussion among residents here privately, but that has, historically, been where the debate ended. So often we hear residents complain or criticize local leaders' decisions without offering their own good ideas and constructive solutions. That, fortunately, seems to be changing.

Supervisors, though probably overwhelmed at first by the volume of input from their constituency on this particular issue, are encouraging it to continue. And they're listening. This is precisely the kind of civil discourse that will keep this community focused and operating jointly with its leadership for the betterment of economy and protection of the quality of life we all hold dear.

The decision on wind energy will not be the last challenging choice for Highland County. It's only one of many prospects we'll face as development pressures of all kinds increase in coming years. Chamber director Carolyn Pohowsky has said more than once over the last few weeks this community must stand together, especially because there are so few of us here. She's right, and we're beginning to see some evidence that's exactly what's happening.

Our future well-being depends on a united voice reflecting the will of a clear majority.

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