

Pendleton landowners urged to negotiate

BY WILL O'CONNOR
• STAFF WRITER

CIRCLEVILLE, W.Va. — “We need to find people in the county who are people of their word,” said Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County member Robbie Sites at the group’s community meeting Monday. “The trust is gone (with our public officials). We need to be responsibly represented.”

Sites said Pendleton County’s economic development authority and commissioners should become actively involved in US Wind Force’s Liberty Gap proposal. Several EDA members and commissioners had told Sites the issue was out of their hands, but Sites argued it was incumbent on them to gauge the public’s sentiment and fight for the benefit of the county. He said they should negotiate with Liberty Gap, so at the very least, if the project is approved, Pendleton will get the maximum benefit.

FOBPC member Larry Thomas said he did not want the county to end up in the same situation as Tucker County. Tucker was the first county in West Virginia to allow a wind turbine project, 44 turbines on Backbone Mountain. Officials there have admitted to not negotiating effectively in the beginning, and receiving less revenue than expected.

Recently The Parsons Advocate, a local newspaper in Tucker, reported the county commission there asked Florida Power and Light, owners of the wind facility, for \$300,000 annually for the next 20 years in addition to property taxes from the utility. The county received around \$100,000 in property taxes last year, an amount likely to decline due to depreciation, but FPL offered only \$35,000 a year.

Thomas said the community of Falmouth, Mass. was a good example to follow. Several residents opposed to a wind project off the coast from their town hired a lawyer to fight it. While trying to stop the project, the attorney also ensured maximum benefit for their community if it were approved, said Thomas.

Sites said if it comes down to it, he’d like to see individual property owners get as much out of granting the developer an easement as

possible. He said he was not in favor of the project, but anyone thinking of granting an easement should consult an unbiased attorney to negotiate the best deal.

FOBPC changed from its normal meeting venue in Franklin to reach out to citizens throughout Pendleton.

FOBPC was formed late last year in opposition to the proposed Liberty Gap wind facility. Pending approval from the West Virginia public service commission and the acquisition of easements needed to hook the project’s transmission line into an electrical substation, Liberty Gap would consist of up to 50 turbines stretching from the Highland/Pendleton line north along Jack Mountain ridge. Many Highland residents have expressed concern that if approved, Liberty Gap would seek to extend the 400 foot turbines further south into Highland.

Sites stressed to the group of 20 North Fork Valley residents that Liberty Gap would most likely be just the beginning if wind turbines are allowed in Pendleton. He said developers were already looking at other ridges in the county for possible development, including North Mountain, and said the county needed to stick together.

Sites talked about the possibility of Liberty Gap running its transmission lines over North Mountain and hooking up to the Seneca Rocks substation instead of taking the lines up the valley and into the Franklin substation. The group discussed possible routes the T-line could take.

Thomas showed the group a documentary video in which several residents living near wind turbine plants talked about how the turbines had affected their lives.

FOBPC will hold its next meeting at the community building in Franklin May 22, at 7 p.m. It hopes the couple from Meyersdale, Pa. who appear in the video will attend.

FOBPC will have a booth at the Spring Festival in Franklin the weekend of May 7, and hopes to have a balloon display showing how high 400 feet is.