

Be prepared for SCC hearings, citizens advised

BY ANNE ADAMS • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — At Sunday's seminar sponsored by Highlanders for Responsible Development, citizens learned more about how to participate at the hearings held this month on Highland New Wind Development's plan for a wind utility here.

The company has applied for a state certificate to build and operate a 39-megawatt facility consisting of about 20 turbines standing 400 feet high on Allegheny Mountain.

Hearings will be held in Monterey in four time periods on Monday and Tuesday, March 13-14.

Highland landowner Lucile Miller spoke with representatives from the State Corporation Commission, and shared what she learned with the group of about 75 who attended Sunday's seminar.

Miller noted citizens are reminded that while the hearings will be conducted in the school gym, "the gym is (the SCC's) courtroom" for that purpose, and the hearing examiner should be addressed as "your honor."

There can be no signs, posters, or demonstrations on site, and only the news media will be allowed to record or photograph the proceedings.

Those speaking to the SCC should arrive about 15 minutes early to sign up and be sworn in, but late arrivals will be accommodated, she said. Those signed up should be prepared to stay until they are called.

Citizens addressing HNWD's application

cannot ask questions, only submit their opinions. Formal respondents involved, who are represented by attorneys, will be allowed to ask questions of speakers, though that does not often happen, Miller was told. "Don't get flustered by aggressive attorneys," she said, "and always address your statements to the hearing examiner no matter who asks you a question."

Citizens are encouraged to be concise, and submit any documents, letters, or supporting material to the bailiff at the time they speak, but there is no time limit on the speakers.

Miller said it's likely the majority of those who address the SCC will focus on the agency's responsibility to consider whether HNWD's project has any effect that's contrary to the public interest, and consider what effects the project may have on the environment.

"They want to know about how you think it will affect your quality of life, your business, your property values, our cultural history, which includes the view shed, and wildlife. Ask the SCC to consider the cumulative effects that could happen if all these wind projects are built and ask the SCC to coordinate its reviews with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries," Miller said.

In addition, the SCC assured Miller citizens may speak right before the evidentiary hearings held later in Richmond, and encouraged those who could not attend the Monterey hearings to try to speak then.

A Bath resident attending asked whether

she could speak to the SCC even though she did not live in Highland. Miller said yes, citizens who live elsewhere, including those in West Virginia, will be heard by the SCC.

Highland resident Bill Banks asked whether he could address the financial effects of the project. "Are they interested in my opinion on using my tax dollars to support a private enterprise? I can talk about the environment but that's what really bothers me," he said.

Miller assured him he could speak to the financial issues.

Following the hearings, it will be several months before the hearing examiner's report on the application is issued, and it will serve as a recommendation to the commission. Only formal respondents in the case will be allowed to comment on that report.

The hearings will be held in the Highland Elementary School gym as follows:

■ Two on Monday, March 13, from 1:30 to 4 p.m. and 6:30-8:30 p.m.

■ Two on Tuesday, March 14, from 4-6 p.m. and 7 p.m. to about 8:30 p.m.

Citizens can provide their comments in writing until the public comment period closes on March 13. Miller says the SCC's web site, which provides a method for submitting comments online, will remain open until midnight that day. However, citizens are encouraged to get their comments in ahead of deadline to allow room for correcting mistakes.

Watch next week's Recorder for further details on how to participate.