

SCC wind project hearings: How to participate

MONTEREY — The State Corporation Commission will hold public hearings here next week in the Highland Elementary School gym for citizens who wish to comment on the application for an industrial wind project on Allegheny Mountain.

Anyone can participate, regardless of where they live, except those who are represented by an attorney as a formal respondent in the case. Respondents cannot comment, though they can ask questions of those who speak.

Those who intend to express opinions on the application from Highland New Wind Development LLC should understand the hearings will be formal, and will be conducted in a way that's similar to a courtroom proceeding.

SCC has offered the following information for those who speak; the hearings will be held in four sessions over two days next week:

- Speakers are encouraged to arrive 15 minutes early to sign up, but late arrivals will be registered and accommodated. Speakers are called "public witnesses" for the proceeding, and are called in order of sign-up. Speakers should be prepared to stay until they are called.

- All comments are transcribed by a court reporter, and the transcript is made part of the case record.

- Speakers may bring supplemental material, and give it to the bailiff. That material will also be made part of the record.

- As speakers approach the podium, they will be sworn in by a bailiff avowing their comments are truthful. They will be asked to give their full name and address, and state whether they represent themselves or a group.

- SCC does not require a written copy of a speaker's comments, but they are helpful, and can include supplemental material including maps, photos, CDs or reports they wish the SCC to consider.

- Citizens should speak slowly and clearly, and always address the hearing examiner even if asked questions by respondents in the room.

- Short quotes are permitted. The essence of longer quotes should be paraphrased rather than read in their entirety, and the entire quote can be submitted as supplemental material after speaking.

- One copy of supplemental material is

enough.

- The gym will be considered the SCC's "courtroom," and the hearing examiner should be addressed as "your honor."

- Only news media are allowed to photograph or record the hearing.

- No signs, posters or demonstrations are allowed.

- The audience is to refrain from applause, boos, catcalls or laughter.

- There is no time limit on speakers, but comments should be concise, on point, and not repetitive.

- After speaking, the hearing examiner, attorneys representing the applicant, SCC staff, or other case participants can ask questions, but speakers are advised not to get defensive and address their answers to the examiner.

- Speakers may not ask questions, but the SCC staff will be available at the hearing to address individual questions.

- Written comments are accepted until March 13; the SCC's web site will be open for comments until midnight March 13.

Following the hearings, the SCC continues its process reviewing the application. At some point, an evidentiary hearing will be held in Richmond for respondents, but citizens who cannot attend next week's hearings could speak just prior to the evidentiary hearings. After a few months, the hearing examiner will issue a recommendation to the SCC commissioners in the form of a report. Formal respondents will have 21 days to comment on that report.

Finally, the three commissioners will either approve the application, approve the application with conditions attached, or deny the application. Their decision can be appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court only by formal respondents.

— Anne Adams

SCC hearings on Highland New Wind Development's application will be held:

- ***Monday, March 13 beginning at 1:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.***

- ***Tuesday, March 14 beginning at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.***

All sessions will be held in the Highland Elementary School gym, Monterey.