

Four years later: Timeline for wind project

■ June 2002 — Highland citizens are told wind energy developers are interested in constructing projects here.

■ August 2002 — An informational meeting is held for county citizens. Community Energy, a regional wind energy marketing company, becomes involved.

■ October 2002 — Highland New Wind Development, LLC is established by CE and the McBride family.

■ December 2002 — Highland officials visit a wind utility in Somerset, Pa.

■ February 2003 — West Virginia's first wind turbines get up and running in Tucker County.

■ September 2003 — Highlanders learn HNWD has become eligible for a \$500,000 federal grant.

■ December 2003 — Production tax credits from the 1992 Energy Policy Act, which had been extended from 2001, expire. They are later extended again to Dec. 31, 2005. Community Energy pulls out of its partnership with the McBride family.

■ March 2004 — Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission gives its first seminar on wind energy for regional planners.

■ April 2004 — U.S. Wind Force publicly expresses its interest in Highland. County officials hold a forum where HNWD announces its project has been reduced from 50 to 39 MW.

■ June 2004 — CSPDC recommends Highland add to its ordinance to address wind energy.

■ July 2004 — HNWD applies for a conditional use permit and zoning amendment change. The company says it has withdrawn the federal grant application; USDA says the company failed to meet certain criteria and did not reapply for the grant.

■ August 2004 — Citizens begin gathering petition signatures opposing the project.

■ September 2004 — Highland planners hold an initial review of HNWD's application. Citizens and local officials tour the proposed facility site and neighboring properties.

■ October 2004 — HNWD tells local officials it needs to have the project operational by the end of 2005 to qualify for production tax credits, and asks for an expedited process. Supervisors decline to speed things up. Planners hold a public hearing on the zoning amendment request. Their vote on the amendment is tied; no recommendation is passed to supervisors. Planners' vote 3-1 to send the permit request to supervisors with no recommendation.

■ November 2004 — Petition of those op-

posed to the project climbs to 1,000 signatures.

■ December 2004 — Pendleton County citizens discover their local officials had secretly agreed to obtain easements for a transmission line for U.S. Wind Force's Liberty Gap project, using eminent domain if necessary.

■ January 2005 — Some citizens opposed to the project form "Highlanders for Responsible Development." Supervisors vote against HNWD's zoning amendment request and decide to rewrite ordinance language on height limits. Sen. Emmett Hanger introduces legislation at HNWD's request that would guarantee about \$3,000 per megawatt for Highland, and a joint resolution to form a wind energy study group. Supervisors oppose the monetary figure used. Both proposals stall in the General Assembly.

■ February 2005 — Supervisors ask the Industrial Development Authority to review the impacts of wind energy in Highland. HRD drafts ordinance language prohibiting commercial wind development and requests officials consider the draft.

■ April 2005 — The IDA unanimously votes to recommend the county follow its existing ordinances and comprehensive plan, which would preclude industrial wind development. Two IDA members resign after the IDA chairman submits wind energy "pros" to the board without the IDA's review or input. Planners recommend supervisors not approve the proposed height language, on a 3-2 vote. Supervisors approve the new language anyway, on a 2-1 vote.

■ May 2005 — Supervisors hold a public hearing on the conditional use permit request which lasted more than seven hours — 500 attend; 95 speak (76 opposing, 19 in favor). Residents file lawsuit against county for its change in the height ordinance.

■ July 2005 — Group of seven landowners tells county it intends to file suit if permit is approved. Board approves conditional use permit on 2-1 vote. Attorney Greg Haley is introduced as representing the county.

■ August 2005 — Another group of citizens files suit against the county for its decision to issue a permit to HNWD.

■ September 2005 — County responds to permit suit by asking for it to be dismissed. HNWD meets with state agency officials in Richmond before applying for certificate to operate. The federal General Accounting Office calls for more study of wind energy nationwide.

■ October 2005 — U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Service strongly recommends HNWD consider its recommendations for mitigating potential wildlife impacts from its proposed utility. Court date set for lawsuits.

■ November 2005 — HNWD files its application Nov. 8 with the State Corporation Commission for a certificate to build and operate its facility.

■ December 2005 — U.S. Wind Force's Liberty Gap LLC re-files for its state application with the W.Va. Public Service Commission. Judge rules against county's motion to dismiss Highland lawsuits and cases are set for a June trial. Citizens participating as respondents in the SCC case file a motion to dismiss HNWD's application.

■ January 2006 — SCC sets schedule for hearings on HNWD's application. Sen. Hanger enters another bill on county's behalf calling for \$5,000 per megawatt in tax revenue to Highland from a wind utility.

■ March 2006 — Hanger's bill is amended by the house to allow the county to collect at a tax rate higher than its real estate rate, but no higher than its personal property rate. DEQ suspends its review of HNWD's application with the SCC. SCC holds public hearings on the case — 14 hours of testimony; 60 of 66 speakers oppose the project. Motion by citizens to dismiss the application is denied by the SCC.

■ April 2006 — One of Highland's five planning commissioners resigns; the seat has not yet been filled by supervisors. The four remaining planners vote 3-1 in favor of finding HNWD's project in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan in a 2232 review.

■ May 2006 — A third lawsuit is filed against county officials alleging planners had no proper jurisdiction or authority to conduct the 2232 review. The West Virginia PSC holds public hearings on Liberty Gap's case — more than seven hours of testimony; 49 of 52 citizens say they are opposed to the project. HNWD asks the DEQ to lift its suspension of the review of its SCC application. Two more wind project plans surface in Virginia — Invenergy Wind LLC's interest in Roanoke County, and Community Energy LLC (formerly associated with HNWD) expresses interest in Patrick County.

■ June 2006 — Court rules in the county's favor on two motions for summary judgement and cases are dismissed, but says the third suit, on the county's permit decision, will go to trial next week. A second motion to dismiss HNWD's state application is filed with the SCC by citizens involved in the case.