

# Big wind in Bath?

## *Officials want to limit turbine industry in comprehensive plan*

**BY AMANDA ISLEY • STAFF WRITER**

WARM SPRINGS — While Highland County still remains the only Virginia locality actively targeted for the state's first industrial wind power project, Bath County should get ahead of the curve on the issue, Bath officials warn.

Bath County planner Miranda Redinger attended the regional meeting on a possible scoring system for renewable energy sources recently, and was surprised to learn there is a strong potential for wind energy development in Bath County.

“Apparently Bath is priority one for wind development. I always thought winds measuring four and five were good for turbines, but it's three to five — Bath has a lot of three,” she told county planners Monday.

High winds are one crucial characteristic for establishing wind energy utilities, and while higher, consistent winds are most important, commercial turbines no longer need wind speeds as high as they used to. Technological changes in turbine construction can now take better advantage of class 3, or mid-range, winds.

In conjunction with the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, James Madison University has been working to develop a scoring system for Virginia to determine suitable sites for wind and solar energy utilities.

Using geographic information system tools, JMU created a Virginia Wind Resource Map ranking counties from low to high in wind energy potential based on location and average county-wide wind resource assessment. That landscape classification map has been a controversial resource, as its original authors do not agree with the way it has been used by JMU, and two versions are now published.

Since Bath is currently reworking its comprehensive plan, Redinger said she feels the time is right for the planning commission and citizens to form a solid opinion about commercial wind energy in the county.

Based on the map's information in either case, Bath County ranks high for wind development and should work quickly to include language addressing industrial wind plants in the comprehensive plan, Redinger said.

Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission senior planner Darryl Crawford also strongly encouraged planners to review the topic with considerable scrutiny.

“We recommend that localities address it in the comprehensive plan before they get an

application. You can't exclude (wind turbines) 100 percent, but wind developers look at it to see whether or not they are welcome,” he said.

Aside from general questions, planners made no comments and took no action.

Crawford, who conducted months of research on wind energy for Highland County officials, had urged Highland supervisors to address the topic in their land use plan, but so far it has not been an issue in discussions. Members of Highland's comprehensive plan review committee believe it's better to wait until lawsuits pending on the board's decision to issue a conditional use permit for a wind plant are resolved.

The Highland project is currently under review by the State Corporation Commission which is expected to rule on the merits of the proposal within the next several months.

Currently, the section under wind utilities in the Bath plan reads, “To be continued,” and Redinger said Wednesday she is working on a couple of paragraphs to plug in.

“We want to talk about the differences between small, medium and large scale wind development and leave the door open for the first two, but restrict the latter,” she explained.

Grist said he had the impression most Bath County residents were not in favor of large scale wind, but might be open to small scale wind energy as technology continues to improve.

“We want to show that Bath is not in favor of large scale wind development. The county might consider small or medium, but not commercial wind,” he said.

Once the comprehensive plan is in place, Redinger will work on revising land use regulations to reflect the new version. Wind energy will definitely be addressed in the updated regulations, Grist added.

Bath's next planning commission meeting is scheduled for Monday, Dec. 18 due to the Christmas holiday.