

Wind-turbine specialists give their spin on policy

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LEOMINSTER -- Local officials and residents interested in renewable energy resources got a lesson in the long, winding road to siting towering wind turbines during a workshop at the Doyle Conservation Center on Abbott Avenue Tuesday evening.

Two men who know what it takes to make energy-producing turbines a reality -- John Fitch, of the Princeton Municipal Light Department, and Donald McCauley, a lawyer from Wellesley with an interest in renewable energy development -- discussed the challenges and benefits of pursuing wind turbines.

The workshop was organized by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission.

Though cities and towns are becoming more interested than ever in adopting zoning laws that allow for wind-turbine siting in designated areas, there are still many people who oppose them, which stalls the process.

"The opponents do have legitimate concerns. I mean, these are industrial facilities," said McCauley, who after seven years of working with the people of Savoy, was able to build a small cluster of turbines in the tiny western Massachusetts town.

McCauley's project creates energy that his business, Minuteman Wind, sells to the grid.

The Savoy Planning Board opposed the project, but Minuteman representatives were finally able to draft their own bylaw to get the project done, and the town ultimately supported it.

Communities considering wind turbines may want to capitalize on qualities McCauley believes are attractive to the

public. He said it's the most economic way to produce renewable energy, and people like the idea of their community leading the way toward energy independence.

Fitch oversaw the installation of wind turbines near the summit of Mount Wachusett, which also took several years. He advised officials to be upfront with the public about some of the negative aspects, such as noise generated by blades that move at 200 mph, and shadows cast at certain times of the day.

The overarching concern, according to Fitch, is that people simply don't want to have to look at wind turbines, which in Princeton are more than 300 feet high. But



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honesty is the best policy, he said.

"That's the key thing you need to get across," Fitch said. "Yeah, you're going to see it."

In Princeton, wind turbines produce about 40 percent of the town's energy, according to Fitch.

Denis Meunier, water commissioner for the city of Fitchburg, said he's interested in siting turbines to power the city's water-treatment plant on Rindge Road. A feasibility study to measure the wind power proved the site viable. Although the project would cost an estimated \$5 million, Meunier believes it's worth it.

"It would probably be a net gain over the first 20 years of at least \$100,000," Meunier said.

The Fitchburg City Council amended the zoning ordinance more than two years ago to allow for wind turbine siting. Other communities, like Ashburnham and Princeton, have adopted similar laws, while communities like Leominster and Westminster are pursuing them.

In Leominster, Sholan Farms on Pleasant Street might be an ideal location for wind turbines, as the velocity up there is probably high enough to create power, said Conservation member Joanne DiNardo. Proposed changes to the zoning ordinance are on the horizon that would make the permitting process easier.

"We know where we would like to put them, but there's a whole permitting process you'd have to follow," DiNardo said.



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