

Power developers test Essex's wind resources

BY ANDY COMBER

One of several wind power development companies has announced plans to construct wind energy facilities, also known as "wind farms", on lands in this area.

"We are commencing a number of environmental screenings," said Jeffrey Segal, project manager with Gengrowth, a Toronto-based wind energy company considering several sites in Essex County.

Gengrowth outlined details of the environmental screening and proposals for wind farms consisting of four to six wind turbines on each project site, in announcements placed in the Essex Free Press Nov. 8.

Two sites are in close proximity to Essex – the proposed North Malden Wind Farm, located southwest of Essex, and the Naylor Wind Farm northeast of the town. If approved, construction could start in June 2009, according to Gengrowth.

"Eventually, there will be a public meeting," said Segal, advising interested residents to look for future notices in the local newspapers. Segal said additional field studies would be con-

ducted in the spring of 2007, followed by another public meeting.

Like Gengrowth, a number of wind energy companies are conducting studies in the region. The studies involve the installation of a number of test towers equipped with devices to measure and collect data, such as wind velocity at varying heights and the prevailing direction of wind.

"They are like glorified flagpoles," said Tim Lang, development manager with UPC Canada Wind Inc., describing the 60-metre wind test towers erected north and west of Harrow. Based in Stratford, Ont., UPC Canada is a subsidiary of UPC Wind Management, an American company based in Maine.

Lang said data collected from the instruments on the towers is transmitted directly to UPC's offices.

"We are exploring the wind resources in Essex County and right across the country," said Lang, noting that UPC Wind has already developed wind energy facilities in the U.S. states of Maine, Hawaii and New York. They are examining other sites in southwestern



UNDER STUDY – Wind speed and direction are being measured by instruments atop 60-metre test towers, installed in numerous locations around Essex County by wind power development companies.

Ontario, including plans for a large-scale 100-megawatt project, he said.

"Proximity to the Great Lakes makes better wind resources," he said.

Unlike Gengrowth's smaller 10-megawatt projects, another Toronto-based company, AIM PowerGen Corporation is planning several large-scale projects in southwestern Ontario. AIM's plans include a 50-70 megawatt "Harrow Wind Farm", which is listed as a project "under development"

on their website.

Although wind farms are touted as producers of clean, environment-friendly, "green" energy, they are not without their critics.

In recent months, opposition to wind power developments in both Leamington and Kingsville prompted wind power companies to seek other areas for development. One group, Citizens Against Lake Erie Wind Turbines (CALEWT), derailed a plan to put wind-powered turbines on the Point Pelee peninsula, a 10-megawatt project promoted by Toronto-based Advantis Energy. A month earlier, CALEWT helped prevent a

large wind power project situated in Lake Erie - 119 turbines to be placed offshore from Kingsville to Leamington by the Southpoint Wind Power Company.

"We're turning our attention to the land-based developments," said Dr. John Lee, a retired professional engineer from Kingsville, who is working with CALEWT to bring serious concerns about the development of "wind energy factories" to national attention.

According to Lee, the Ontario Power Authority, pressured by unrealistic targets to provide the province with renewable energy supplies, has been directing wind energy companies to look at areas in southwestern Ontario.

"Just about anyone can start a wind energy company," said Lee, noting the numerous companies lined up to apply for the OPA's Renewable Energy Standard Offer Program, which will contract the sale of electricity to the grid. Hundreds of companies are now listed on Canada's Wind Industry Directory.

Lee also cautioned farmers and landowners who are considering land lease agreements or other negotiations with wind power companies.

"The first recommendation is to get a lawyer," said

Lee, noting 22 considerations recommended to farmers by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture concerning "unique landlord/tenant agreements for wind turbines."

In the recommendations, OFA gives advice on topics ranging from, terms, building restrictions, rent, insurance, power sales, times of access, wind rights, assessment and property taxes.

"The landowner is ultimately responsible for taxes," states the OFA, noting "an ironclad clause to require the wind power company to pay taxes associated with the wind tower is essential and it requires an extremely punitive enforcement clause."

"You cannot afford their taxes unless you have their income," OFA warns.

Advice is also listed in the 40-page Ontario Landowner's Guide to Wind Energy, released by the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association in 2005.

"Land option agreements are legally binding documents and as such should be reviewed by your lawyer before signing," the Guide says. "Any homework you do is in your own best interests."

"As in every other aspect of life, if the deal is 'too good to be true,' it probably is," the Guide says.

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