

Group forms to address wind power concerns

BY ANDY COMBER

"Pitting neighbour against neighbour" is just one of the many concerns listed by a citizen's group that is opposed to the numerous wind power developments proposed for Essex County.

The Essex County Wind Action Group (ECWAG) formed on Feb. 12, just days before an open house was held in Amherstburg by Gengrowth, a Toronto-based wind energy developer.

Gengrowth wants to construct a 10-megawatt project with five large wind turbines northwest of Malden Centre and directly north of Holiday Beach, which is recognized as an internationally important bird and butterfly migration area.

"We feel it is the responsibility of our local and provincial political leaders to ensure that all the implications of the project, both positive and negative, are carefully considered," said Bill Anderson, a Malden resident and interim chair of ECWAG.

Anderson said residents' concerns over wind power installations include health



effects, safety issues such as ice throw, property value loss, visual pollution, noise, and the risks to wildlife, birds, bats and butterflies.

Gengrowth officials acknowledged they had been approached about a number of concerns.

"There has been some opposition," said Jeff Segal, vice-president of development and construction for Gengrowth, when questioned at the open house in Amherstburg, Feb. 15.

Segal said the company

was considering 12 sites in southern Ontario, five of them in Essex County, including one north and one south of the town of Essex. Test towers have been erected at the proposed sites to record wind data.

"The results are still coming in. What we are looking for is a consistency," said Segal. Gengrowth is looking for a wind speed of eight metres per second and over to power the German-made turbines, which will be about 80 metres high at the hub.

For residents with livestock there is concern about how the turbines will affect their animals. However, for a couple with a sheep farm just north of the project, there is a more pressing concern.

"There are two elementary schools in close proximity to the project," said Allan Parks, pointing to the two schools located at Malden Centre, on a map provided at the open house. "That's our number one concern. Those kids are the future," he said.

"Every one of us has a stake in this. What is the impact? It requires definitive proof," he said.

Essex County has garnered support for a regional study to review the issue of wind energy and the siting of wind turbines. The study

BEAUTY OR BEAST – Some citizens have formed the Essex County Wind Action Group to oppose the development of wind turbines, such as those near Port Burwell, Ont. pictured here.

would consider issues such as sound, flicker, ice throw, density of units, the protection of viewscapes, and bird migration routes. Gengrowth officials said they had been advised of the study, which could be completed by the end of this year.

The formation of the local wind action group has been spirited by reports from Ontario residents who are already living with wind power developments close to their homes.

"Since these wind turbines came online my health has suffered," said Ernest Marshall, a 64-year-old retired industrial engineer, who lives beside the Kingsbridge wind power project near Goderich, installed about a year ago.

"When it was first

brought up, they were welcomed. We were told they were 'whisper quiet' - it is just unfounded," said Marshall. "I have laid in bed and felt the bed frame vibrating while my head is buried under pillows and blankets trying to block out the sound."

Marshall also claims the wind turbines disturbed two ponies, which he sold out of concern for their safety. "I had never seen this before."

For skeptics of his experiences, Marshall said, "You tell them to come here."

Another couple repeated many of the same concerns in a letter to their town council over the Melancthon wind project developed near Shelburne, Ont.

"We are at a loss as what to do," stated Bruce and Helen Fraser, whose list of problems with the wind turbines include the strobing effect of shadow and sun – also called flicker – health, noise, and the loss of property value.

The Frasers stated that their property has been appraised almost \$50,000 lower in value, compared to before the wind project arrived. "That means our land is worth nothing. What we have been planning on using for a retirement nest egg has gone with the wind."

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