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Friday, December 18, 2009

## Wind Restrictions Could Thwart Farmers' Plan to Power Schools

By JIM HICKEY

A small group of Island farmers appeared before the Martha's Vineyard Commission last Thursday to voice concerns over a proposal to nominate nearly all of the air space over the Island as a special protection zone to control the development of land-based wind turbines.

If it is designated, the district of critical planning concern would trigger a one-year moratorium on wind projects over 150 feet.

But the farmers said it might derail an innovative plan to build a network of wind turbines to provide electricity to farms and the public.

"Over the years many farms on the Island been the models of planning in many ways, committing to open space, preserving conservation areas, clustering subdivisions," said Clarissa Allen, owner of the Allen Farm in Chilmark. "It seems to me this is an opportunity to let them take the lead, to let the farms take responsibility for the whole wind energy issue."

The proposal she was referring to is called the Farm-School Wind Turbine Concept, which calls for a group of farms to build a network of larger wind turbines that could provide power to farms, all the Island schools and a large number of homes.

The project has been spearheaded by mechanical designer Brian Nelson, who envisions a collection of turbines located at various Island farms that would be owned by either a single town or a private entity such as a Vineyard farm wind co-op.

The plan is still in the conceptual stages, but Allen Farm in Chilmark and Northern Pines Farm in Vineyard Haven are already in the early stages of building wind turbines that could be part of the network. The Allen Farm has put up a meteorological tower to test wind conditions, and Northern Pines Farm is expected to put up a similar tower in the coming weeks.

The towers at both farms would be exempt from the moratorium, but the wind turbines would not.

At a public hearing last week Ms. Allen urged the commission to exempt farms from the wind DCPC as planned. “Why not let the farmers have some of the larger turbines, instead of letting a zillion of them pop up in people’s back yard?” she said.

As a result the commission did not vote on the designation and agreed to continue the discussion until their regular meeting last night. If the DCPC is designated, regulations will be developed and brought before voters in each town at either a special or annual town meeting.

Several commissioners said they supported the Farm-School Wind Turbine concept, but noted that DCPC guidelines do not allow exempting an entire classification of properties such as farmlands.

“I am convinced that we can only exempt geographical areas and not classes of use; we have been told that many times by legal counsel,” commissioner Linda Sibley said. “Even if we wanted to change the boundaries [of this DCPC] tonight we couldn’t, we would have to hold another public hearing . . . it’s not that simple.”

Commissioner Douglas Sederholm said individual farms can apply for an exemption during the moratorium. The the land-based wind turbine DCPC already exempts the town of Edgartown, as well as Island schools, and Indian Common Lands that include the cranberry bogs, Gay Head Cliffs and Herring Creek.

The DCPC grew out of parallel effort to create an Islandwide DCPC over water up to three miles around the Vineyard, in response to the state Oceans Plan. That DCPC was designated on Nov. 5, triggering a yearlong moratorium on all wind turbines in near-shore waters while rules and regulations are developed by the commission.

The land-based Islandwide DCPC nomination excludes Edgartown at Edgartown’s request.

“We feel this was unnecessary, we already have zoning regulations that allow wind turbines by special permit, and that process is very stringent and comprehensive,” said Edgartown selectman Arthur Smadbeck. But last week Edgartown’s absence from the process was noted.

Tisbury planning board member Henry Stephenson said his town has been put at a disadvantage with Edgartown left out, because both towns are trying to build municipal wind turbines and both are competing for state and federal grant money.

“I think real harm comes when one town excludes itself from the DCPC, especially when that town is planning on building a wind turbine, much like the one we are looking to build . . . my own feeling is that the towns should be all in or all out,” Mr. Stephenson said.

Oak Bluffs resident Richard Toole, a former longtime member of the commission, echoed the disappointment.

“This commission has always had the Island’s best interest at heart — especially when it comes to farming and wind energy. I think it’s a shame that Edgartown is exempt. I think it’s absurd, really,” he said.

But the main theme was the effect of the nomination on Island’s farms.

Eric Glasgow, who recently purchased Rainbow Farm in Chilmark with his wife Molly, said he is in the early planning stages of building a mid-scale wind turbine that would not be part of the Farm-School Wind concept. Mr. Glasgow said he understood the moratorium was temporary, but worried the 150-foot limit would stick in the long term.

“If this goes through at 150 feet — fully understanding that you aren’t setting that number in stone — I worry the towns will pick that number and run with it, and preclude farms from building these mid-scale wind turbines,” he said.

But commissioner Douglas Sederholm said the nomination is not meant to stop anyone from building wind turbines. He said the height was set at 150 feet to stop larger commercial scale wind turbines from being built, while giving the commission time to work on draft regulations that promote responsible wind development in locations that do not harm important views or areas of special interest.

“This is not about precluding anyone from putting up wind turbines . . . it’s a matter of appropriate development. This will allow us to work with the towns to come up with regulations that promote wind energy in the right way,” Mr. Sederholm said.