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## **First on Water, Now on Land: MVC Pauses Wind Power Plans**

By JIM HICKEY

Despite ongoing protests from a handful of small farmers, the Martha's Vineyard Commission last Thursday continued on its path to develop regulations for wind turbines at sea and on land, voting to designate a sweeping land-based district of critical planning concern (DCPC) for airspace over the Island.

The vote was 12-0; it follows a vote by the commission six weeks ago to create a wind DCPC over the waters around the Island. An exception to the land-based planning district is the town of Edgartown, which asked to be excluded. Island schools and Indian Common Lands are also excluded.

The vote triggers a one-year moratorium on wind turbines over 150 feet in the five Island towns, while rules are developed. Commissioners last week called the vote an important step for the future.

“When I reviewed the current regulatory framework for wind turbines on the Island I found them to be woefully inadequate in all six towns,” said commissioner Douglas Sederholm. “What we need to do is coordinate our approach, and hopefully this DCPC will foster that. Now is the time to do this; we can’t wait any longer.”

Commissioner Andrew Woodruff agreed. “We could have a haphazard mess with all these wind turbines 20 years from now. At the very least, we can attempt some intelligent planning right now,” he said.

A small group of farmers are worried that the DCPC could affect a budding plan to build a network of wind turbines to provide cooperative electricity to farms and the public. Called the Farm-School Wind Turbine Concept, the project is still in the early stages of development.

Mechanical designer Brian Nelson is helping to lead the project; participating farms include the Allen Farm in Chilmark and Northern Pines Farm in Vineyard Haven.

Last week John Packer, owner of Northern Pines Farm, urged the commission not to be too restrictive when drafting guidelines for regulations.

“You’re taking on the mantle of making new wind laws, and I wish you luck, because you are either going to be the heroes or the goats. Remember we’re talking about our children’s future here. You can stick your head in the sand all you want and worry about things like aesthetics . . . but when you can’t breathe the air, it’s going to be on you,” he said, adding: “Think wisely before you vote on this.”

Mr. Nelson reiterated a request that the commission exempt farmlands on the Island from the nomination.

“Our hope was to get an exemption or an exclusion. But I guess we’re continuing the Swiss cheese approach [to a DCPC] of last week that allowed all of Edgartown and all the schools to be left out,” he said.

But commissioners noted that the moratorium is temporary, that the DCPC is expected to promote, not discourage, the development of wind turbines, and that the commission is acting at the behest of the towns.

“We are here at the request of the towns . . . we didn’t just conjure this up. The towns asked us to develop regulations the towns can live with. Yes, you are the people caught in the crossfire, but I think in the end this will benefit you just as much as anyone else,” said commissioner Chris Murphy.

Commissioner Linda Sibley said individual farms can apply for an exemption during the moratorium.

“I think it’s unfortunate that such a meritorious project has gotten caught up in this. But I think there is a process in place to deal with that . . . I love your project, I think it’s visionary . . . but the process must move forward,” she said.

The meeting included lengthy discussion and debate about the draft wind guidelines that will now be sent to the towns for further discussion and revision in the coming months.