

Outlines of Orleans-Niagara wind farm aired

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BARKER — Officials from Apex Clean Energy are introducing themselves and broad outlines of plans for a 200-megawatt wind farm in rural sections the northwest corner of Yates and neighboring Somerset.

Around 100 people, including officials from both the Town of Yates and Orleans County Legislature, took in an open house Monday in Barker, where the Lighthouse Wind energy project would be centered.

“We’re introducing ourselves,” said Dahvi Wilson, Apex’s Communications Manager. “We don’t have a ton of details, but we want to start answering questions about Apex and wind energy.”

Orleans County Legislator Ken DeRoller bounced questions off Apex officials for about an hour.

DeRoller said the conversation and his interest in the open house was in part to gauge Apex and its proposal in light of the controversies surrounding past wind energy proposals along the lake and completed projects in Wyoming County and other areas of the state.

“I pressed their buttons, and I came away impressed,” DeRoller said. “There’s a lot of negative history (with wind energy). They have to do it right.”

The Lighthouse Wind project would connect three-megawatt wind turbines spread across rural areas of both towns to the state’s power grid, pulling from a consistent south-western wind in area bordering the Lake Ontario Shoreline.

Around 60 to 75 Turbines with towers between 300 and 382 feet tall – 488 to 570 feet counting the blades – would be sited on bases leased primarily in farm fields across the flat, open stretches of both towns.

Project Manager Dan Fitzgerald said the emergence of new technologies, access to the grid at a coal-powered electricity plant in Somerset and reliable wind makes the project viable for the Charlottesville, Va.-based renewable energy firm.



Turbine talk

Karlis Povisils, left, Apex's Vice President for Development, discussed the company's plans for a wind farm in the open spaces of northwestern Yates and neighboring Somerset during an open house at the Barker Fire Hall Monday. (Jim Krencik/Daily News)

“Five years ago, it would have taken twice as many (towers) for the same power,” Fitzgerald said. “This business model works better and while they’re taller, the footprint on the ground is much less.”

Fitzgerald said Apex has already received some leases from landowners, although siting of each turbine is a ways off. He expects the process to ramp up in the coming weeks, as growers finish their harvest for the year.

Yates is approximately a quarter of Apex’s “area of interest” for turbine siting, with a target area running north of West Yates Center Road from the Niagara-Orleans county line to Route 63.

Yates Supervisor John Belson said the area is home to a smattering of year-round residences in addition to the cottages that dot the lakeside. He attended the open house as a “fact-finding” mission.

“We really haven’t begun the process on our end,” Belson said. “It’s all been the Niagara County side so far.”

Apex received approval for a tower to conduct meteorological studies in Somerset earlier this month.

On the Orleans County side, Belson said Yates’ wind energy regulations, formed in conjunction with Shelby and Ridgeway a half-decade ago, would have to be updated to allow the larger, but less numerous turbines in Apex’s plan.

Monday’s meeting starts a five-month public outreach period required by the state’s electrical generation siting rules. Wilson said the process of completing environmental quality reviews would take at least another one to three years, with construction running an additional nine months.

The company’s current portfolio includes a completed project in Oklahoma and plans for others in the lower plains, midwest and southwest.

For more information about the project, visit www.lighthousewind.com