

County Legislature goes on record opposing Lighthouse Wind project

By Tom Rivers, Editor Posted 16 December 2015

ALBION – Orleans County legislators today stated their opposition to a proposed Lighthouse Wind project that could include as many as 71 industrial-sized wind turbines in Yates and Somerset.

County legislators have avoided taking a public stand on the issue, saying previously they wanted to wait on a survey of town residents and also not appear to be meddling in a town issue.

But the Public Service Commission has set a Jan. 6 deadline for comments on a preliminary scoping document from Apex Clean Energy. (The PSC today announced the deadline has been extended until Jan. 12.)

Legislators said they have heard “the voice of the people” and want to state the county’s opposition to the project to the Public Service Commission.

“Keep in mind we still have an uphill battle,” Legislature Chairman David Callard said at today’s meeting that was attended by several Yates residents who have opposed the project.

A siting board will decide if the project is approved. The seven-member board has five members from state agencies and will include two local residents. That gives the state the majority of the say in voting on the project.

Legislators opposed the project that they said would “place commercial wind turbines within this quaint, beautiful Town of Yates.”

The Legislature also opposed the state’s Article 10 law, which gives the state the power to site the turbines, not the local government leaders.

In a separate resolution, legislators stated their support for “Constitutional Home Rule.”

Legislator Don Allport said he worries the state could force landfills and other unwanted projects on communities with the Article 10 Law. Allport said Albion was able to prevent a new landfill in the community since the mid-1990s because it has local laws against additional landfills. He said the proposed turbines are “monsters.”

By passing Article 10, the state led by Gov. Andrew Cuomo has stripped local municipalities of their powers to use zoning and land use in their communities, legislators said in the resolution.

Paul Pettit, Orleans County public health director, said the Genesee-Orleans Board of Health also has concerns about the project because the state and Apex haven’t done baseline studies measuring the health of residents and environmental conditions in the community before the project.

Pettit said the Article 10 process skirts some important environmental studies for such a large project.

“We’ve been very concerned with the health impacts,” Pettit said at today’s Legislature meeting. “We feel strongly that studies should be done.”

Russ Martino, a former Yates town supervisor, spoke at today’s meeting. He said the Town of Yates is working on the results of a 10-question survey of residents. More than 1,000 have been returned to the town, Martino said, and results should be presented at the Dec. 28 Town Board meeting.

Martino is a retired Lyndonville principal who has lived in Yates for 48 years.

“I’ve never seen the commotion that the siting of the wind turbines has caused,” Martino told county legislators. “It pits neighbor versus neighbor.”

Richard Pucher, a retired Lyndonville superintendent, has been active with Save Ontario Shores. Pucher said many school administrators head to Florida in retirement, but he has opted to stay in the community.

"I stayed here because I love my community and I don't want to see it destroyed," Pucher said.

He urged the Legislature to follow the Somerset Town Board, Niagara County Legislature and State Sen. Robert Ortt in opposing the project.

Jim Simon was elected Yates town supervisor in November on a write-in campaign. Simon was endorsed by Save Ontario Shores and has been against the turbine project.

He was pleased with the Orleans County Legislature resolutions opposing Lighthouse Wind and Article 10.

"I am very encouraged by the Orleans County Legislature resolutions for Home Rule and against the Apex proposal," Simon said.

He said he expects the town survey will show strong opposition to Lighthouse Wind. He expects the new Yates Town Board will officially oppose the project early next year.