

S.O.S. survey shows opposition to Yates wind project

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YATES — The surveys were tabulated in an assembly line of ripped-open envelopes, called-out results and a running tally projected onto a screen watched by some 20 people inside the banquet facility at the White Birch Monday.

“No. 1 Yes, No. 2 No, No. 3 Yes, No. 4 Yes, No. 5 Yes, No. 6 Oppose,” came the call most often heard as the 421 surveys were tallied.

The experiment, funded by Save Ontario Shores to gauge public feelings on the proposed Lighthouse Wind project in Yates, was sent to more than 1,200 property owners and residents.

The survey’s first five questions probed feelings about the project before getting to the heart of the matter.

“Do you support or oppose the proposal by Apex Clean Energy” to construct a network of wind turbines in Somerset and Yates?

According to unofficial results announced Monday, 328 survey respondents oppose the planned wind farm and 82 support it.

The results, S.O.S. members agreed, is a another signal of their town’s general discomfort and concern with the project.

“I think it confirms where I think the town is at,” said Jim Simon, a S.O.S. member running a write-in campaign for town supervisor.

Simon and Glenn Maid, a candidate for the town council, said that they’ve seen a similar pattern in tracking public comments at meetings and in door-to-door campaigning.

“It’s the feeling we’ve gotten since January,” Maid said. “People are overwhelmingly against it.”

Each of the questions before the support/oppose finisher were phrased with information, references to research or estimates based on communications between Apex and the public. Some town residents who support the project declined to take it.

But the 34 percent response rate was “pretty incredible” to Mike Basil, part of an S.O.S. committee that drafted the survey after dissatisfaction with delays in getting a formal town-backed survey together.

“Having more than 400 people respond gives us a good picture of where the people are thinking,” Basil said. “The biggest thing was to make it objective.”

Respondents said by a 338-to-65 margin that they believed the town of Yates should fight the state’s Article Ten regulation, which makes turbine siting a state-appointed board’s decision.

By a 347-to-52 vote they said a PILOT payment from the project — which S.O.S. estimated in the question would be only \$36,000 to Yates — did not offset potential “negative impacts” of the project.

A total of 310 respondents agreed that the project would reduce their property values and the town’s tax base, compared to 94 who disagreed. S.O.S.’ question estimated that values could go down by 30 percent.

Asked if an impact study should be done concerning potential radar interference on Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station and Mercy Flight communications, 347 agreed and 61 disagreed.

A question asking whether respondents were concerned about potential health impacts from the proximity to the turbines was the closest vote of the survey, with 297 agreeing they were concerned and 106 saying they weren’t concerned.

Each question had about a dozen blank answers among the returned surveys, with many also having comments written on the back side of the mailer.

Sara Dayton, a partner at Lumsden, McCormick LLC, which handled the compiling of the surveys, said those will be scanned and submitted to the town and other parties along with an official count of the surveys.