

# MINUTES OF THE PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

## TOWN OF CHARLEMONT

8/17/09

### **Members Present:**

Gisela Walker, Co-Chair  
Dan Miller  
Jerry Pratt  
Kathy Eicholz, Associate  
Trevor Mackie,

Also in attendance were: David Strong and Kevin Schulty of SED; Roy and John Schaefer, Applicant, Bambi Miller of the Charlemont Historical Commission, Carlene Millet, taking minutes for the Board and members of the public.

The meeting was brought to order at 7:06 p.m. by Walker. Walker explained that the need for the continuations of the hearings were due to the major impact this project has on the landscape and scenery of the town, so it deserves much time and consideration. Walker went on to explain that the agenda for this hearing will be to focus on environmental impacts; both on wildlife and human life. Walker explained the research the Board has done since the last hearing, and noted the difficult job the Board has in making a reasonable decision that they can feel comfortable with.

Walker stated that she spoke with Dr. Richard Podolsky, who did the original bird assessment study at the wind turbine site, and said that he felt that the risk to songbirds from this turbine is minimal, and also informed her that the Endangered Species Program had no concern in this particular area either. With respect to the bat kills, Walker stated that Podolsky felt this is a real concern, but that scientists still do not know what attracts bats to turbines, and that he felt that for this area and the fact that it is only one turbine, it wouldn't be significant enough to prevent the turbine from going up.

Regarding raptors, the concern was mainly with whether the turbine would be in their migratory corridors and would cause injury to them, and Podolsky told Walker that he felt that a raptor survey by a local birder would be a good idea.

Walker explained that she spoke with a wildlife Professor at U-Mass, who said that there was still time to assess raptor migratory patterns because their migration time doesn't peak until mid-October. Walker stated that she didn't have any expert opinions on the impact to other types of wildlife, but given that it was only one turbine going up on an already much-disturbed ski area, she didn't feel it was too significant.

Strong passed out an information sheet reflecting information obtained from the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, which stated that the nearest bat hibernacula are over four miles away from the site.

Discussion ensued around some local birders who might be willing to conduct a study on the impact to the raptors, and possible minimal fees involved. Schulte stated that he felt to have an expert research the impact to raptors would be time consuming and expensive, and that the research and studies the Board had gathered would prove the same result; that most impact to raptors would be incurred by wind farms, cutting off long stretches of flyways, rather than with just one turbine.

Walker agreed that most of the information on impacts to wildlife pertained to wind farms, but stated that she put a lot of faith in local birders and would like to some local experts come do an assessment.

Discussion ensued between Schulte and the Board with regards to the cost, feasibility, and time involved in the gathering of data by an expert versus a professional. Schulte also wanted to know if the Board had a threshold with regards to the number of birds that can be impacted. It was decided that local birders would be contacted within the next couple days, to ask if they would come and do a study of the area to see how many birds were sighted, and whatever was found out would be communicated between the applicant and the Board.

Next, the discussion centered on the impact to people. Walker again explained the problem with researching impacts of a wind turbine is that most of the studies conducted and information gathered has been on wind farms, there is little available with regards to a single turbine. Walker explained that the most significant concerns have to do with shadow flicker effect; the shadows thrown when the turbine blades spin and hit the sun, and with the effect of low frequency vibrations on people.

Strong passed out a shadow flicker analysis that SED had done, using a wind farm wind modeling tool to conduct the analysis. Strong also showed images on an overhead projector, pointing out the Hawlemont School and two of the nearest properties to the proposed location of the turbine; one to the east of the project site and one to the west. Strong stated that Hawlemont school, according to their study, would have 0.0 hours of shadow flicker, house 2 would have 3.4 hours and house 3 would be exposed to 2.9 hours of shadow per year. Schulte added that this model assumes a worst-case scenario, and that although the houses would receive a number of hours of shadow per year, it would not be a flicker effect, as the houses were too far away. More discussion ensued as to the effect of shadow flicker on nearby houses, with Schulte and Strong insisting the effect would be insignificant.

There being no more questions on shadow flicker, Walker moved the discussion to low frequency noise and intermittent light change impacts to the neurological system. Walker stated that she had handouts with claims of health effects, and that there were several reports out on the negative effects from low frequency noise and vibrations on people living near wind turbines, some from Doctors, but admitted that she was not sure at what distance the noise becomes impactful or how something like this could be measured. Schulte stated that most of the low frequency noise emissions were removed with the elimination of a gear box on this particular turbine, and that most of the noise is eliminated with distance from the turbine. Miller asked about audible noise. Strong stated that some noise from the turbine would be detectable, but reiterated that he didn't feel it would be an impact in that the turbine is a good distance from residences (about 4,000 feet).

Helen Carcio spoke to a study conducted by Dr. Pierpont, which claimed that the noise increases anxiety, sleeplessness, and depression. Helen questioned the controls, and the possibility of the symptoms existing before the study was conducted, and added that most research is outdated. Helen also mentioned that wind, water, and vehicles made noise as well, but that residents have acclimated to those.

Dan asked about ice throw from the blades spinning, and said he read on the internet that the turbine should be a distance of 1.5 times its height away (from any homes, activity

etc). Schulte said that the turbine would be 650 feet away, 1.5 times would be a little under 500, so they are more than 1.5 times away from the nearest ski trail. Dan asked if they felt that was sufficient, as he read that Searsburg, another wind turbine project, had an 800 foot throw. Schulte said that it is important to remember that the machines at Searsburg spin 35 times per minute, and this machine spins 20. Schulte went on to explain that one of their turbines in Worcester is 162 feet from a high school, and when the machine has ice on it, it is turned to the south, and is released at a time when there are no people around. Also stated that there will be an automated controller on this machine, it will be managed well, and most of the ice that collects will go straight down. Strong stated that they have a good Operations and Maintenance plan in place and there will be many layers of protection, including the machine automatically shutting down when any problem occurs.

Walker opened the hearing to public comment. Several members of the public spoke in favor of the project.

Walker read a letter from Maureen Flaherty, in favor of the project.

Walker then read a letter from Bill Stephens, (recused) Planning Board Co-Chair and abutter, who was not able to attend the hearing. Stephens noted that he wasn't happy about the location, and felt the 300 foot tower would overshadow the village and his property. He further noted concerns with shadow flicker.

Earl Bowen wanted to state for the record that Bill Stephens is a Co-Chair of the Charlemont Planning Board, is also an abutter, and (he felt) is in violation of the Ethics law. Millett informed the Board that this is untrue; although Stephens had recused himself because he is an abutter to the project, there is nothing stating that he cannot be present at hearings; he simply cannot vote, and as an abutter, has a right to voice his concerns.

Tom Campbell made an official request that the Planning Board vote on the project this evening. Walker stated she understands that time is an issue with this project, but there is a list of issues that the Planning Board needs to cover, and the Board is waiting for a report from the Mass Historic Commission with regards to the second balloon test, so the vote will not happen tonight. Campbell stated that this business (Berkshire East) has an opportunity to buy a wind tower, and they are going to lose that opportunity in about 15 days, and they have a significant deposit on it., Miller informed Campbell that he is not ready to vote and will not be until he has all the information, and added he sees at least two more meetings. Miller agreed with Campbell that this does need to move along . Walker explained that the Board has their rules and procedures that they need to follow and noted that the Schaefer's have never mentioned any deadlines or losing machines if not purchased within a certain time.

Discussion ensued as to what more the Board needs to know, and how long it will take for them to make a decision. It was requested of the Board to provide agendas to the public for the issues that would be discussed at each hearing; Walker pointed to the agenda placed out with the sign in sheets and also agreed to provide them at the next hearing.

Strong stated that there are many other approvals needed, but they are not necessarily dependent upon each other, and added that the Mass Historical Commission's process does not need to impact the Planning Board's. Per the Board's request at the last hearing, Strong showed some pictures, with the use of balloons, showing what the wind turbine

would look like if it was moved 30 feet lower or 100 feet laterally. Strong explained that due to the wind and the distance the pictures were taken from, it was difficult to see what the results were. Schulte stated that to meet Berkshire East's economic requirements, the turbine needed a 26% or greater capacity factor, and the 900 kilowatt machine was the only one they found which gets that, and which would yield a reasonable economic return for Berkshire East. Also stated that it was one of the most economic turbines to construct, with respect to economic viability and the location with which it will be placed.

Walker asked the Schaefer's to comment on the 15 day deadline, so that the Board knows what kind of time frame they are dealing with. Roy Schaefer stated that the deadline has passed, and while they can order another one, time is of the essence. Schaefer also mentioned that a road needs to be constructed to accommodate the equipment to bring the machine to the site.

Strong concurred that SED had reserved a machine with the vendor and that deadline has passed and now when the Board has made their decision, they will put in the purchase for it and will have nine months from that time to wait on the machine.

Walker closed this portion of the hearing at 9:30, and continued it to October 1. The motion was seconded by Mackey and passed unanimously.

At 9:37 p.m. the Board reconvened for their regular meeting. The Board signed the minutes from July 23, 2009 and reviewed and approved the minutes from August 6, 2009. Walker stated that the Board of Health has requested all minutes from the hearings from June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 until the date of request. Walker reminded the Board that they need to discuss the Blue Heron Farm issue on October 1, because the Board had agreed to that in September. Miller said he would contact the Coli's to let them know. However, due to the workload with the wind hearings, the Board decided that they didn't have time to address the Blue Heron Farm on October 1, therefore the discussion for that would be put on the October 15 meeting agenda or later.

Walker stated that she would ask the UMass people about the strobe effect from 4,000 feet away. Miller noted that he felt uncomfortable not having a consultant come in. Because the school alarm goes off at 10 pm the Board had to postpone other matters on the agenda and leave in haste.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carlene Millett,  
former Secretary to the Boards