

FAA Gives Town Green Light For Turbine

By CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN

The Federal Aviation Administration conducted a test of a new flight path onto Otis Air National Guard Base last week that means the two wind turbine projects currently underway in Falmouth can proceed as planned.

"We have been given the green light verbally," Assistant Town Administrator Heather B. Harper said last night at the selectmen's meeting.

The two projects had suffered setbacks since December, when the FAA reversed its initial approval of the turbines, deeming them a hazard to air navigation.

One of those projects is the town's installation of a 1.65-megawatt wind turbine at the wastewater treatment facility on Blacksmith Shop Road in West Falmouth.

The other is a private installation of a 1.5-megawatt turbine that would power Teledyne Webb Research at Falmouth Technology Park. The project is being overseen by Notus Clean Energy LLC.

Since the permits to both projects were both pulled, Ms. Harper and Daniel H. Webb, the owner of Notus Clean Energy, have been in discussions with FAA officials as well as representatives from the Coast Guard.

The meetings between the various parties have been coordinated by Congressman William D. Delahunt's office, which has attempted to seek a resolution to the issue.

The turbines posed a potential risk to aircraft relying on an instrument approach into Runway 5 at the base. Captain Dan Abel, the commander of United States

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Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod, proposed a solution to that approach that would keep aircraft higher in the air to clear the turbines before starting its descent.

The FAA tested that approach last week. They had until today to conduct the test.

The next step, Ms. Harper said, is for the FAA to publish the new approach in its flight manuals before they will issue a notice of no hazard for the two projects.

Despite the stumbling block, Ms. Harper said she has been impressed with the "the remarkable, unusual and swift response from the FAA. The FAA has been very responsive to this issue."

Normally, an issue like this could take up to 18 months for the FAA to address, Captain Abel said. "This has been done much faster than anyone anticipated," he said.

What expedited the process, he said, was the fact that both projects had already received approval from the FAA and had moved past the regulatory stage into the construction phase, with the town already awarding its contract. Notus Clean Energy was in the process of putting its project out to bid before it was forced to delay that until the situation could be resolved.

"The FAA has been good partners in helping us come to a solution and trying to get this approved," Captain Abel said.

When the FAA reversed its decision in December, Mark Forest, chief of staff to Congressman Delahunt, was unsure how this would all unfold. "I was not convinced it would lead to a completely positive resolution," he said.

Three months later, that attitude has changed.

"Initially we were not at the point where we could see the light at the end of the tunnel," he said. "We are clearly at that point now."

While the decision has specific implications to these two projects, Mr. Forest said, it has ramifications that extend throughout the Cape as more towns look to adopt wind power as an alternative to fossil fuels.

Several towns throughout the Cape that are pursuing wind energy, including Mashpee, have been following this case closely. "We are talking to other towns about the issue of air space and really encouraging them early on to do their research," he said. "We don't want to have a repeat of this. We want to make sure that air space is adequately protected and there are no encroachments on this."

By opening up a dialogue with the FAA regarding Falmouth's two turbines, Mr. Forest said, "we hope to establish a cooperative working relationship as we go forward. That is what we wanted to get out of this process. We wanted to get all the key officials from the base, the FAA, and the community to have an ongoing dialogue on this issue."

At the military base, he said, there is a possibility that more than a dozen turbines could be erected to make the facility entirely energy independent. That is a goal that Congressman Delahunt shares as he has met with officials at the base, as well as at the Pentagon, Mr. Forest said, to move this initiative forward.

As to when the project could get underway, Mr. Forest projected anywhere within the next 12 to 24 months. At least one turbine, he said, could be erected by the

Air Force Center for Engineering and the Environment, which is interested in having a turbine to power its wastewater treatment facility.

In the future, Mr. Forest hoped there would be a better tool for towns and private institutions looking to construct a wind turbine to determine whether such a structure would meet FAA requirements. "Right now it is not like you can go to one place to get that information," he said.

That is something sorely need-

ed on the Cape, which has numerous airports that pose a potential risk to wind projects, he said. "These are not simple or routine procedures," he said. "It is very complicated."

And despite the demands of permitting wind turbines, Mr. Forest admitted, "It is exciting because it shows how committed these communities are to alternative energy. One day we will see all these wind turbines throughout the Cape and out of the way of runways and airports."