

Not All Noise Is Annoying

No one claims that the turbine Dan Webb of Notus Clean Energy plans to install at Webb Research in Technology Park will not make noise. Turbines make noise, especially in high winds.

Discussion of noise at last week's meeting on the proposed wind turbine focused on quantity and quality of noise. Megan Amsler, executive director of Cape and Islands Self-Reliance Corporation and chairman of the Falmouth Energy Committee, said any noise from the turbine would be drowned out by other noise created by strong winds. Robert Shatten, principal for the company that did the feasibility study for the project, said the noise would not be tonal.

Some of the neighbors were not convinced. What if the turbine does make noise, one neighbor wanted to know. Could he call the police? Another said the state's noise regulations would not provide enough protection. There is already noise coming from another business in the technology park. If Mr. Webb's turbine were to make noise, these people do not want to hear it.

Enough wind turbines have been built and installed that there is now ample information about the noise that is associated with them. It can be easily found on the

Internet. There are graphics showing noise levels at various distances. There are tables that relate the noise to various things, such as cars going different speeds.

But perception of noise is anything but science. The sound of surf can be intense, yet town assessors would think anyone had taken leave of his senses were they to argue for a tax abatement on the grounds of excessive noise. The rumbling of construction equipment at the same decibel level is something else altogether.

Most people find the sound of birds chirping in the morning quite pleasant. But a neighbor's radio at a quarter of the volume would be generally considered unforgivable at five o'clock on a summer's morning.

It's all in what the noise means to the listener.

The point was raised at last week's meeting that Mr. Webb will profit from his wind turbine. The neighbors no doubt don't want to listen to Mr. Webb make a profit.

But what about climate change? What if the noise from Mr. Webb's turbine were associated with something good? Perhaps if Mr. Webb's neighbors considered that his turbine will do something good for them they might consider the noise it will make as something other than annoying.