

Hearing On Turbine Draws Vocal Crowd

Board Takes Proposal Under Advisement

By CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN

With a picture of two dead snakes on a homeowner's lawn and accusations that board members would rather watch the Boston Celtics game than hear residents' testimony, there was no shortage of drama at last night's Falmouth Zoning Board of Appeals meeting at town hall.

More than 50 people crammed into the selectmen's meeting room for a hearing on a proposed 1.5-megawatt wind turbine at Webb Research Corporation's property in Falmouth Technology Park.

The milk snakes were found yesterday morning on a Blacksmith Shop Road property owned by Terri Pentifallo-Drummey, a vocal opponent of the project.

Her neighbor Colin P. Murphy of Blacksmith Shop Road, another opponent, was at the center of the most contentious debate and was cut off several times by board members, one of whom, Patricia A. Favulli, complained about his sarcasm. When not allowed to speak he wondered if the board was trying to rush the hearing in order to watch the NBA finals between the Celtics and Los Angeles Lakers.

At times, the meeting matched the intensity of that basketball rivalry, pitting those in favor with those against Webb Research's project.

At a time when so few turbines exist, not only on Cape Cod, but in the state, Webb Research's attorney Robert H. Ament said this is a historical time for Falmouth.

And, he noted, it is a historical time for oil, which has been witnessing record-breaking prices in the markets. When Mr. Ament first appeared before the board for a hearing on this project in April, the price of a barrel of oil was \$115. Yesterday, it was \$136. There is speculation, he said, that prices could go as high as \$200 a barrel.

"We need to wean ourselves for multiple reasons off oil, particularly foreign oil," he said. "This is an effort to do so that benefits all of us."

In writing, the project has received the support of numerous residents and organizations, including State Representative Matthew C. Patrick (D-Falmouth), the Falmouth Energy Committee, the Falmouth Technology Park Association, and the Falmouth Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, among others, Mr. Ament said. "Someone on your board said they have never seen so many letters of support for a project," he commented.

In total, there have been 100 letters endorsing the wind turbine at Webb Research, appeals

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board member Ms. Favulli said, with none in opposition.

Even the direct abutter, Cape Cod Aggregates, he said, has no issue with the turbine, allowing the blades of the turbine to pass over 44 feet of its property. Paul C. Lorusso, owner of that firm, said that anything that can be done to mitigate the high costs of oil is the proper thing to do.

"I don't want a 'not in my backyard attitude,'" Mr. Lorusso said. "I don't want to be the one who says you shouldn't be allowed to benefit from it."

After the April 15 meeting of the appeals board, Mr. Ament said, his client addressed several of the concerns raised by those in opposition, submitting a written response to those questions to the board last night. Those issues involve electrical dangers, potential audible and visible impacts, insurance questions, and whether the turbine would impact wildlife.

During Memorial Day weekend, at the behest of the appeals board, a balloon was raised to the height of the turbine to determine how the machine would impact sight lines. "The photos of the balloon test confirmed the accuracy of the photo simulation we [originally submitted]," Mr. Ament said.

The applicant, he said, also received input from town officials in Bourne regarding the wind turbine at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy. There have been no complaints, he said, with one restaurant owner, a direct abutter, "fully in support of what is at Mass Maritime and what is being proposed in Falmouth."

Although not discussed at the last meeting, he said, Mr. Webb has a decommissioning plan for the turbine, putting \$50,000 in escrow and adding another \$15,000 per year as long as it is operational. The projected life of a turbine is roughly 20 years, he said, meaning there would be more than \$250,000 available for the removal of the machine.

For any concern that the board may still have, he said, Mr. Webb will be willing to pay for an independent consultant to study the matter further.

He urged the board not to deny the project on abutters' concerns that were not based on good science.

In addition, he stressed that



Photographs by CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN/ENTERPRISE

Nearly 50 residents filled the selectmen's meeting room at town hall to learn about the proposal for a wind turbine at Webb Research's property in Falmouth Technology Park. After hearing testimony for and against, the board of appeals closed the hearing and took the matter under advisement.

"the evidence is overwhelming that this is an ideal location in town for a turbine. That is why we changed the zoning bylaws to encourage a turbine here."

However, Christopher G. Senie of Westborough, attorney representing four abutters on Blacksmith Shop Road—Loretta O'Brien, Todd A. Drummey, his wife, Terri Pentifallo-Drummey and John J. Ford—argued that the town's zoning bylaws do not permit what he termed a power plant to be built on Webb Research's property.

He explained that when the town changed its bylaws to allow a turbine here, it was for an accessory use. He said the turbine at Webb would not be an accessory use under the law. "This is a power plant," he said. "I'm glad they will sell [excess power] to the national grid, but this should be done thoughtfully and carefully." He suggested that they return to Town Meeting and change the zoning for this property to allow a turbine before this be permitted.

"We shouldn't be married to the site because the applicant happens to own it," he said.

To further prove his point that the turbine will not fit the definition of accessory use, he said, Webb Research will use roughly two percent of the power generated by the machine and sell the rest to the grid for profit. While he did not begrudge Webb Research from witnessing financial gains from the turbine, he said,

"we can't skip a zoning step."

He added that because of fall-zone requirements for a turbine, the project should not be permitted because the applicant does not satisfy them with the acreage of his property.

Mr. Ament refuted these claims, highlighting the fact that the Falmouth Energy Committee pushed for a change in the zoning bylaw, with the cooperation of town counsel, so that a turbine could be properly permitted in technology park.

He admitted that Webb Research will only use a small percentage, five versus the two Mr. Senie mentioned, of the energy generated by the turbine. He argued that Webb Research was not creating a wind farm, but erecting one single turbine.

That turbine, he said, is an accessory to the other uses on the lot. He also said that Webb Research has combined its lots to ensure that the turbine meets the town's fall-zone requirements.

There were a handful of residents opposed to the project, including Ms. Pentifallo-Drummey, who alleged someone sent her a message yesterday morning by leaving the two snakes on her property.

Her main argument against the project was its visible impacts, noting that it will tower over the Bourne Bridge with a maximum height of 389 feet.

The most contentious moments came when Mr. Murphy, a vocal opponent, complained that the

turbine will negatively affect his views, but he will see no benefit from the project.

When asked by Kenneth L. Swartz, appeals board chairman, whether he opposed the proposed turbine at the West Falmouth Wastewater Treatment Facility, Mr. Murphy said he did not. His reasoning is that, as a taxpayer, he will benefit from that project, and with this one, he will not. "I wish [Mr. Webb] would work with the neighbors," Mr. Murphy said. "Why should he have the right to bother one person?"

Those in favor of the project were just as vocal. Kirsten A. Moritz of the town's energy committee praised Mr. Webb for his foresight, leading the way for clean energy in Falmouth. With Massachusetts a potential leader in utilizing wind power, she said, "we need to step up to the plate and make some sacrifices."

Kathleen R. Driscoll of Antlers Shore Drive, Falmouth, an employee at the maritime academy, dispelled some of the myths of the turbine there, noting that there is no noise generated by the machine. All one can hear at the structure, she said, is the sound of wind. "If you are going to oppose the sound of wind, you might want to walk around with earmuffs every day."

She said the turbine has generated two million kilowatt hours of electricity in two years, roughly enough to power the Town of Falmouth for one day. In addition, she said, the turbine has prevented the emission of 2.3 million pounds of greenhouse gases since its installation.

In terms of visibility, turbine proponent Anastasia K. Karplus of Hamlin Avenue asked those in attendance to compare coal, oil, and nuclear energy to wind power. "If we close our eyes and look, what does oil look like? What does coal look like? What does wind look like? I think we can all agree that wind adds to the overall aesthetics of the Town of Falmouth."

After hearing both sides of the argument, the board closed the hearing with a four-to-one vote and took the matter under advisement, with Mr. Swartz, Ms. Favulli, Ronald H. Erickson, and Dennis D. Murphy in favor, and Kenneth H. Foreman opposed.

Dr. Foreman voted against closing the hearing because he wanted more time to discuss the project.

