

moratorium decision on hold



By **JASON COX** | **THE LEADER**

Hal Graham, of Cohocton, speaks to the town board about the effects wind turbines have had on him and his neighbors at a meeting Monday in Prattsburgh.

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Prattsburgh, N.Y. -

Public opinion in the town of Prattsburgh heavily favored a moratorium on industrial wind development Monday night, although the final decision on the temporary ban will wait until March.

Nearly 100 people attended the Prattsburgh town board's public hearing on the proposed six-month moratorium, with dozens voicing their support for a halt to any industrial wind-related activity in the town.

The town is being considered by developer Ecogen for a 16-turbine wind farm.

Health and safety issues appeared to be the key concern of those supporting the moratorium.

Many urged the board to look at dramatically increased setbacks to push tower sites farther back from homes and reduce noise levels.

Others said the moratorium should provide time to do more research, saying there is too much uncertainty and misleading data on wind projects.

Not all those attending the public hearing supported the moratorium.

Mara Parker, of Prattsburgh, said she understands residents might not like living near proposed sites for wind turbines. But delaying the project could mean a financial loss to the school district and town.

“This has gone on long enough,” Parker said.

Ecogen launched its plans to put the massive electricity-generating turbines up in Prattsburgh more than eight years ago.

Since then, local resistance has grown steadily as concerns over disruptive noise, land use and reliability have mounted.

Ecogen threatened the board with legal action throughout 2009 as board members considered how to respond to growing concerns. The board’s action last year followed reports of disruptive noise at an operating wind farm in the neighboring town of Cohocton.

When two pro-wind board members were defeated during the November elections, Ecogen filed a lawsuit, demanding the lame-duck board remove any issues the developer considered harmful to the project.

The court declined to rule on the matter, and the new town board rescinded a settlement made in December.

Defending against future lawsuits was on the mind of one resident at the public hearing Monday.

“Wind farms are a problem ... My problem is the lawsuits,” Lenny McConnell said. “Can we afford this?”

A town of Italy representative also weighed in on the two towns’ intertwined Ecogen projects.

The Yates County town is the proposed site of 18 turbines and an electrical substation, and the defendant in a separate Ecogen lawsuit.

“You have our full support,” Italy Town Supervisor Brad Jones said, adding he would forward Italy’s moratorium laws and wind industry regulations to the Prattsburgh board.

Prattsburgh board members unanimously agreed to extend the comment period on the moratorium until Friday to allow time for more written comments.

Prattsburgh Town Supervisor Al Wordingham said the board has received about 20 letters so far.

Other residents submitted written comments Monday night.

“We intend to read them all,” Wordingham said.

The board also is waiting to hear from the Steuben County Planning Board, which received a copy of the proposed moratorium.

Prattsburgh’s legal counsel Ed Brockman said the county has the right to make recommendations or reject the town proposal.

If the Steuben board rejects the proposal, it would require the approval of four-fifths of the town board to enact the moratorium, Brockman said.