

OLEAN TIMES HERALD

Sound expert discusses impact of noise created by wind turbines

By Kate Day Sager
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ALLEGANY — Allegany residents heard from a sound expert regarding noise created by wind turbines, and witnessed a heated discussion between a town consultant and resident during Monday's special meeting for the town of Allegany Planning Board and Allegany Town Board.

Gordon Reusing, an engineer from Conestoga-Rovers and Associates of Waterloo, Ontario, opened the meeting at the Allegany Senior Center with a Power Point presentation on the basics of noise. Mr. Reusing was asked by town officials to give the presentation and to address questions that have been raised about noise levels that could be created by a proposed wind turbine farm for the Chipmonk community in Allegany.

A 29-wind-turbine farm had been proposed for the Chipmonk community by EverPower Renewables of New York City several years ago. A petition addressing noise concerns also had been presented to the planning board by attorney Gary Abraham, who represents the Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County group. In addition to noise concerns, the Concerned Citizens group has been against a wind turbine farm moving into the area as they believe it would create aesthetic and environmental issues for the community.

The planning board had tabled the group's petition until Mr. Reusing could attend a meeting and give his input on noise that could be created by wind turbines. Also attending the session was Dan Spillone, an attorney with the Hodgson Russ LLP law firm in Buffalo who is advising the town board on wind turbine issues.

Mr. Reusing told the audience that noise is a pressure or wave and essentially can be defined as unwanted sound. He said in the context of a wind farm, it's important to understand background noise.

"Background noise is the noise that exists, excluding the wind farm," he said. "In an area like this there's not a lot of background noise. Generally traffic is about it ... and the wind itself makes so much background noise, depending where you live."

Mr. Reusing said sound pressure levels are measured by noise meters in decibel units. For example, a quiet library may emit 20 decibels of sound, while a jet taking off might be measured at 140 decibels.

"The background noise of the wind itself, tends to dominate and the noise from the wind turbine is not noticeable," Mr. Reusing said. "At wind speeds that are very low, the wind turbine itself will not create that much noise."

During questions from area residents, a woman asked how the wind turbines wouldn't have an a

the community when residents can hear traffic from two miles away on Route 86, and whistle so from as far away as Bradford, Pa.

“It’s a complex number of factors involved and I don’t think I can comment directly on your question without some study,” Mr. Reusing said.

At one point during the discussion, Chipmonk resident Alan Henderson posed a question to Mr. Spitzer.

“Why are there so many complaints and lawsuits by people because of the sound that keeps them up at night from wind turbines,” Mr. Henderson asked. “Why is this a problem throughout the whole town and why is it such a big problem.”

Mr. Spitzer replied “Define big ... is it 100 people” complaining about the noise.

Mr. Spitzer replied “Define big ... is it 100 people” complaining about the noise.

Mr. Henderson responded: “If you’re the person who can’t sleep at night, it’s big.”

Mr. Spitzer then went on to say that the town board and planning board had listened to the community concerns and have brought in experts on the issue.

“I think everybody knows where you stand and what your concern is,” Mr. Spitzer told Mr. Henderson. “And frankly, bringing in a joke of an expert like Mr. James when there are other people who say otherwise isn’t helping us any,” he said. Mr. Spitzer was referring to Richard James, a sound expert from Michigan who has provided information to Concerned Citizens on the potential impacts of noise emissions.

Mr. Henderson became offended at the comment and asked Mr. Spitzer what right he had to make derogatory comments about Mr. James.

“I’m their lawyer, that’s who,” Mr. Spitzer said of his role as the town board and planning board attorney.

“You’re our lawyer and we’re the town, sir,” Mr. Henderson shot back.

“Knock it off. I’m the town board’s lawyer and the planning board’s lawyer,” Mr. Spitzer yelled.

Following another minute of arguing, Bob Phillips, planning board chairman, called for a recess to give the town board and planning board time to discuss matters with the attorneys.

When they returned a half hour later, the town board adjourned their meeting and the planning board opened their session.

Mr. Phillips then asked Mr. Reusing to provide a written recommendation on the petition presented by Mr. Abraham.

Mr. Abraham said he would like Mr. Reusing to comment on whether an increase of as little as 3 decibels in sound, over background noise, could occur as a result of a wind farm at distances beyond 2,500 feet. The town board had determined that the wind turbines should be set back 2,500 feet.

receptors such as homes and schools. Mr. Abraham's petition asks that the sound emitted from the turbines would be no louder than 3 decibels for all residents living in the area.

Mr. Reusing's recommendations on this, and the town's proposed ordinance for a wind zone over the district in Chipmonk, are expected to be presented at the next planning board meeting at 7 p.m. Monday at the Allegany Senior Center.

Kevin Sheen, senior director of development for EverPower, was at the meeting and said the company's goal is to have the planning board accept their application as completed so it can be open to the public.

"Once it is open for public review and comment, I think people will feel better about this because they'll get the entire document," Mr. Sheen said. "We've been working feverishly to have it done as complete as possible."

Once completed, there will be copies and drafts of the plan available in the public library, town hall and on line for review.

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