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► Proposed wind turbines in Allegany

Acoustic engineer: Do sound studies first

By Kate Day Sager
Olean Times Herald

ALLEGANY — Can the noise generated from a wind turbine be detrimental to the health of nearby residents?

That question and others

were touched upon during a special presentation made to the Allegany Town Planning Board on noise impacts of commercial wind farms. The presentation was made by Charles E. Ebbing, a retired acoustic engineer in response

to a request made by residents of Chipmonk and their attorney, Gary Abrams. The Chipmonk area is being considered for a 32-turbine wind farm by wind-energy developer Everpower Renewables. A draft study is expected to

be submitted to the planning board by the company in mid-February.

"I am not pro- or anti-wind turbine but I am pro-facts," Mr. Ebbing told several dozen residents who gathered at the Allegany Senior Center on

Birch Run Road.

Mr. Ebbing said he has 47 years of experience in acoustic engineering and serves as a facilitator for a wind committee in the community of Orleans.

The presentation included

the importance of obtaining true ambient noise readings in a community to determine the affects wind-turbine sounds will have on the area. Ambient noise can be

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everything from the sound of a highway to a running stream or chirping crickets in a field.

"You should really be taking a sample (of ambient noise) that will be representative of every person's house in the affected community," Mr. Ebbing said.

He said it is important for the community to have this data gathered before the wind turbines are installed because it will be difficult to alter them after they are constructed.

"Based on my experience they (wind companies) won't be able to do significant noise reductions with these wind turbines after they are installed," Mr. Ebbing said.

He said the sound studies should be conducted by a reliable individual the community trusts. The studies also should take place at as many as 20 sites conducted at different times of the day and night, as well as during dif-

ferent seasons.

When Mr. Ebbing was asked if the wind-turbine sounds have been linked to health issues, he said no illnesses have been tied to the turbines at present. He did note he believes the noise from wind turbines do cause sleep issues for people.

"My gut tells me that a large portion of problems come from when people can't sleep," he said.

A man attending the meeting from Steuben County said he and several others from his community were hopeful of "separating rumor from fact" in their on-going debate about a proposed wind farm. The man said the wind farm could be constructed within the upcoming year in his community.

"In your experience, what kind of distances can you imagine the sounds are being projected" from the turbines, the man asked Mr. Ebbing. "Are we talking half a mile, a mile or 2 miles."

Mr. Ebbing replied that depending on several environmental factors, sound from the turbines could carry as far as 2 miles.

A man in the audience said he visited the wind farm in the community of Bliss in Wyoming County and couldn't hear noise from the turbines.

"I went there twice randomly and I couldn't hear them," the man told the audience. "I also talked to a person living near them and he said he couldn't hear them either."

When the man was asked by an audience member if he had stayed in Bliss 24 hours at a time to determine if there were no sounds at all from the turbines, the man said he had not.

Bob Phillips, vice chairman of the planning board, said he found the meeting interesting and informative.

"We're now going to move on to the next step in our process, which is analyzing

more data we'll be getting" from Everpower, Mr. Phillips said.

Mr. Abrams said he was pleased with turnout of residents and their interest in the topic. He said he also hopes to see changes made with the wind-farm proposal.

"The town has a very stringent noise standard in the local law," Mr. Abrams said. "It says no increase beyond three decibels over the ambient" noise level.

"And that would require a different location than they (Everpower) are proposing," he said. "I think Everpower has to come back to the proposal and state that they will move the wind turbines far enough away from the homes in the valley to achieve that level."

He said the proposal currently has the wind turbines located about 1,000 feet from 14 homes in Chipmonk.

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