

Testimony of Joyce Hemingson, President of
FairWindCT, Inc.
Before the Committee on Energy and Technology

Thursday, February 3, 2011

My name is Joyce Hemingson and I've lived in Connecticut most of my life. I grew up in Suffield and have lived in Colebrook for the past 39 years. Last November, my husband and I were surprised to find out that two wind farms with six 492-foot, utility-scale turbines were being proposed for our neighborhood. Colebrook schedules town meetings twice a year, and not one meeting in the last two years has had wind farms on the agenda, as a way to inform or to educate townspeople.

We did know about the Zoning Enforcement Officer's controversial approval of a met tower in November 2008, which was upheld by the Zoning Board of Appeals in February, 2009, and had heard that the company who owns the met tower bought out a dissenting neighbor. The Colebrook Selectmen's minutes from 2008 through 2010 do not mention wind turbines or the company proposing them. I looked up the minutes of the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund (CCEF) and discovered our First Selectman had in fact sent a letter in December, 2008 supporting the met tower and that letter was the basis for continued support with public funds.

CCEF Projects Committee minutes for October 15, 2009 state:

"In response to a question about opposition to the projects, Mr. Hedman indicated that staff has copies of written letters from the town officials supporting the projects. The Committee members requested that staff encourage the developers to obtain as much support for the projects and alleviate potential opposition sooner rather than later in the process."

CCEF Projects Committee minutes for November 12, 2009 state:

"Mr. Hedman mentioned that some concern was expressed with obtaining support from the two communities prior to funding, and CCEF was provided with letters of support from the Mayor of Prospect and first Selectman of Colebrook.Mr. Hennessy raised questions about public relations and outreach. Mr. Hedman stated that the developer has been focusing on obtaining the data needed to move to Phase 2 and understanding the markets for the turbines. He noted that the activities for outreach and public relations will begin in the near future and before filing with the Siting Council."

It was almost a year later, in November, 2010, that we found out about the project for the road we live on, Rock Hall Road. One of the first things I did was help found FairWindCT, a grassroots organization with initial support from residents of Colebrook, Winchester and Norfolk, who called for a moratorium, public hearings, and regulations about siting wind farms. We educated

ourselves very quickly about wind energy, turbines, and the Connecticut Siting Council and declaratory rulings, hired legal representation, created a web site, and mailed flyers to the entire town. For most residents, our mailing was their first notice of the projects.

At the end of December 2010, as President of FairWindCT, I wrote the following letter to the Connecticut Siting Council, and sent copies to many state and local leaders:

“Before rolling out large numbers of wind turbines on hills and ridgelines, the State of Connecticut has the unique opportunity to learn from wind farms in other states and do its best to ensure the health and safety of its citizens. The State of Connecticut and many of its towns, including Colebrook, do not have regulations for wind farms in residential areas. The State and towns need time to plan for this substantial change in our mix of energy resources. We ask that the Connecticut Siting Council (CSC) call for a moratorium on commercial wind energy applications and initiate regulation-making proceedings on the subject.

“Essential questions need answers -- what are the appropriate setbacks from homes, occupied buildings, property lines, wetlands, and local and state roads? Noise, shadow flicker, ice throws, mechanical failure, fire safety, environmental effects, decommissioning, bonding, tax assessments, and the size and weight of trucks and cranes used to install and repair huge turbines are just some of the other issues that every wind farm and every town will need to address and live with for many years.

“The public and its elected representatives deserve to be heard on the issues, before acres of forestland are cleared, gravel roads built, and wetlands destroyed to accommodate wind farms in residential areas. In addition to a moratorium and the initiation of regulation-making proceedings, we urge the CSC to hold public hearings locally on all applications.”

Well, a lot has happened in the past month: Our group and Save Prospect, as similar grassroots organization from Prospect, met with Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, who supports careful regulations for siting wind turbines. The Connecticut Siting Council agreed to hold public hearings on the applications before them, and today, your committee (the Energy and Technology Committee) is holding a hearing on a moratorium and regulations concerning the siting of wind farms. However, there is still much to do to make sense of the situation we are in.

One of the first questions I researched was “What is Connecticut’s public policy on wind energy?” I eventually found a report online called: “Final Results of the New England Wind Integration Study (NEWIS) PAC Meeting, 11/16/10 ISO New England.” It has several scenarios for wind energy in Connecticut, all but one indicating zero onshore and offshore wind generation. However, the scenario on page 23 shows 20 onshore wind sites with a name plate total of 2.642 GW of and a capacity factor of 24%. Does this mean that Connecticut’s goal could be to install more than 1,500 utility-scale wind turbines in our towns? If so, we need state regulations to protect the health and safety of citizens.

I grew up in a time when the Marlboro Man rode across TV screens and the pages of magazine ads. The tobacco industry denied smoking had any effect on health and even suppressed studies that showed it did. But we've come a long way in 60 years. Product recalls due to safety concerns are routine, and last year the president of Toyota, a major automotive company, apologized to customers for not making quality its first priority. The wind industry is a new industry and, quite frankly, needs to get out in front of concerns about health and safety. As the use of wind energy expands across the globe, health and safety issues continue to be reported in the U.S. and other countries, from Australia to Europe and Canada. These issues should not be dismissed out of hand by the State of Connecticut, because if not properly sited, any wind farms here will suffer from the same controversy.

For example, regulations are needed for appropriate setbacks. While ice throws and equipment failure are concerns, noise and infrasound carry much further. Setbacks should be determined with input from scientists, physicians and acoustical engineers, and by using plain good sense. Wind turbines should not be allowed to use public roads, nearby landowners' property, and wetlands as a fall zone.

A second example where regulations are needed is in the area of tax payments and decommissioning. How can you protect towns from projects that ultimately don't work or that could be abandoned?

As our elected officials, you have the responsibility to see that business is carried out fairly and with standards in the State of Connecticut. We are asking you to create regulations that will site wind turbines appropriately to protect residents' health, neighborhoods and regulations that will guarantee a transparent process and public hearings on all wind farm applications.

In closing, I would like to point out that our small town of Colebrook, with about 900 homes and a population of 1,400, has been not only producing but exporting renewable energy for many years. Colebrook lost the community of Colebrook River in the 1940s so the Goodwin Dam and Colebrook River Dam could be built by the Metropolitan District Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The MDC web site reports that "The Goodwin Facility generates 13,600,000 kilowatt hours of electricity in a typical year, enough to serve 2,000 homes. The Colebrook River Facility generates enough electricity to serve 1,000 homes -- approximately 6,700,000 kilowatt hours annually." There is also a small 600kW hydro dam in the Robertsville section of Colebrook. We do not oppose renewable energy -- we just want it to be subject to reasonable regulations. Let's be sure our State looks at all its options for renewable energy and supports the best long-term, cost-efficient projects for its ratepayers.

Thank you for calling this hearing so quickly. We appreciate your support and urge you to vote in favor of HB 6249.

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