

Wind Power Draws Close Look in Lake County

By Mick Zawislak | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 7/29/2009 4:26 PM

<http://www.dailyherald.com/story/?id=310232>

With interest - and options - for wind power increasing, Lake County and several communities are working to head off problems before they arise.

Clean power is regarded as an exciting possibility, but few towns have ordinances on the books to regulate potential impacts, such as noise or flickering shadows.

To avoid pitfalls, several towns have imposed moratoriums and about a dozen have teamed with the county in a task force to study issues surrounding wind power.

The intent is to produce a model ordinance outlining rules for a variety of technologies and situations, as many products are emerging that have no track record, said Lake County senior planner David Husemoller.

"We're trying to learn from people's ups and downs and be prepared as much as possible," Husemoller said. "We want to make sure this ordinance is watertight and everyone is protected."

The task force, which has been meeting since May, also wants to produce a fact sheet to answer common questions and dispel inaccurate information.

"It is complicated, so we're putting our heads together to share resources," he added. "There's so much out there, it's hard to organize it all. We're trying to digest all the different perspectives."

On July 13, the Bannockburn village board approved a six-month moratorium on applications for any wind or solar energy device. The action was taken after an individual wanted to install a wind turbine, according to Village Manager Maria Lasday.

"The more you find out, the more questions you have," she said. "Many communities in Lake County are going that route just to give us time." Lincolnshire and Wadsworth are other examples.

A 120-foot turbine that went online in Libertyville in early May is an example of what can go awry. Aldridge Electric described the turbine as an investment in clean technology to power its facility on Rockland Road, but neighbors have had a different experience.

Residents filed a complaint against Aldridge and the village, describing the turbine as a nuisance that provided "relatively little gain" compared to the hardships it produced.

The complaint portrayed the turbine as producing a grinding and squeaking noise that woke residents from sleep, drove them from their yards, and caused headaches, nausea and anxiety.

The turbine was quieted after a temporary restraining order was secured. A revised order issued Friday allows it to operate from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. but it has remained idle.

Residents promise to pursue the issue and want the turbine removed.

One of several residents who addressed the village board Tuesday night described the sound as that of a helicopter that never takes off.

"It's real. I hear it," Tim Barkules said.

Residents also want the village to revise its ordinance governing such uses and investigate the circumstances regarding the various approvals for the project.

"It's not just crabby neighbors who have nothing better to do," said Dave Gates, a 26-year resident of the neighborhood and a plaintiff in the case.

The approvals were given before the April election and the board has a different make up with four new members, including Mayor Terry Wepler.

Before the public comments, Wepler said the board would take the considerations seriously and would ask village staff to reconsider wind turbine standards.

He also suggested a moratorium on such uses, which the board will consider at a future meeting.