

FROM THE TWO RIVER TIMES

BRSA Plans Wind Turbine For Union Beach
By Ryan Fennell

UNION BEACH - While New Jersey legislators are taking steps to advance renewable energy sources in the state, the people of Union Beach have major concerns over a proposed wind turbine project within borough limits that is headed full-speed toward the construction phase.

The Bayshore Regional Sewerage Authority has proposed a single wind turbine to be constructed at its 100 Oak Street location in Union Beach to power its Sewer Treatment plant.

The proposed turbine would reach approximately 280 feet at its center and peaking at 380 feet when the turbine blades are at their highest points.

The project comes with a \$7.7 million price tag but has been offset by a 50 percent grant under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The BRSA would be responsible for repayment of approximately \$3.85 million under the terms. The project also includes upgrades for odor control.

BRSA Executive Director Robert Fischer said that the projected savings in energy costs could reach approximately \$500,000 per year. Fischer also said that the turbine would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by four million pounds per year while reducing sulfur dioxide emissions by 24,000 pounds per year.

Opposition to the project has stemmed from a perceived lack of transparency and communication from the BRSA to Borough Mayor and Council as well as the public in general.

Health concerns over the proximity of the wind turbine to residential areas has also fueled the controversy.

Mayor Paul Smith and Councilman Louis Andreuzzi have expressed their opposition to this project along with Union Beach residents and the Hazlet Area Quality of Life Alliance.

"First of all the BRSA's lack of transparency is one of the issues," Smith said.

According to Smith a meeting between the BRSA and Borough Council took place in December 2008 where the BRSA said several public information meetings would be held regarding the project.

According to Smith one meeting was announced last minute and held at 6 pm on a weeknight in July 2009.

One additional meeting was held on a Saturday morning in November 2009 according to Smith.

Fischer contends that three public forums were held in addition to open house presentations and availability of informational DVD's.

Health concerns have also been of major importance to the council and residents.

"The Hazlet Area Quality of Life Alliance is unanimously and adamantly opposed to the BRSA Industrial Wind Turbine Project," said HAQLA President John Curran. "Our primary complaint is based on the serious health and safety risks that will be created by the close proximity of the turbine location to homes, schools, businesses, and roadways; which will expose not only the residents of Union Beach, but also people living in neighborhoods located in Hazlet and Keyport."

HAQLA cites a study performed and published in 2000 by Dr. Nina Pierpont PhD. of New York State, the leading researcher in the field, that identifies the potential for industrial wind turbines to be responsible for

a cluster of symptoms known as Industrial Wind Turbine Syndrome.

Pierpont attributes this syndrome to low frequency and ultra-sonic noise and vibrations as well as shadow and flicker effects produced by industrial wind turbines.

Pierpont recommends a 1.2-mile setback from residences, schools, hospitals, and businesses. The World Health Organization recommends a 1.5-mile setback.

The proposed turbine would be within 1,100 feet of the nearest residence according to Fischer.

"That's one opinion," Smith said of Pierpont. "But if it's true, it's scary."

Fischer said that the BRSA has identified and addressed the shadow flicker that the turbine could create. The flicker occurs when the blade of the turbine crosses between the sun and the observer. Fischer said that it most often occurs during sunset and lasts approximately 40 minutes. Fischer said that if it is found to have an effect in the borough the turbine would be shut down for that time period.

Fischer also said that the health concerns are unfounded.

"After we were able to demonstrate there is no audible sound at all, the next thing that came out was what about sub-audible sound?" Fischer said. "There is absolutely no proof that sub-audible sound from a wind turbine has any effect on human health."

According to Fischer the project began in 2006 and merged well under the requirements of the ARRA and was ultimately awarded a permit by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection in October 2009.

The permit is conditional and the BRSA must adhere to new rules that are expected to be adopted later this summer. The new DEP rules do not require setbacks for wind turbine projects. Under the current rules a setback of 500 feet from tidal creeks is required.

However, Fischer expects to receive an unconditional permit as early as this month and construction is scheduled to begin in September.

Smith and Andreuzzi also have major concerns over the construction process. According to the mayor and councilman the trucks transporting the turbine equipment could weigh approximately 200,000 pounds. Smith and Andreuzzi question the logistics of transporting that equipment through borough streets.

The propellers are 180-feet long.

"This thing has been clouded with all this 'green' stuff," said Andreuzzi who has an extensive environmental record. "Open space and being green is something I've been involved with for years."

Andreuzzi does not want to see the project proceed "until we get solid evidence that this is not going to hurt the people. My first concern is the people in my town."

"We are the host community (for BRSA) which means they are our guests," Andreuzzi said. "There was no transparency. There was no communication."

"I'm hoping the project stops, but it doesn't look that way," Smith said.

Smith has sent letters to the DEP commissioner as well as the governor and lieutenant governor.

"It's not a political issue," Smith said. "They said they were going to let the public be informed but he public is not informed."