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Proposed Wind Energy Project

PPM Energy outlines project

Zoning and Planning Council OKs conditional use permits

By Matt Mullally
Tribune Editor

The Pierce County Zoning and Planning Council last week granted conditional use permits filed by PPM Energy for the development of a large wind energy farm and installation of a 9.5 mile 230 kilovolt transmission line which would tie into the power substation just east of Rugby.

The decision was made at a public hearing on June 21 which about

a dozen people attended. The council's recommendation will now be forwarded to the county commission for consideration.

About the project

PPM Energy representatives Tim Seck and Raimund Grube were at the hearing to outline the estimated \$170 to \$190 million project which could include up to 100 1.5 megawatt wind turbines to be erected north of Rugby and mean the creation of seven to 10 tower ser-

vice-related jobs in the future.

Last week, PPM officials also met with land owners who have signed easements to allow the wind turbines and transmission lines to be placed on their property.

Seck said the precise location of the towers has not been set as soil samples must be completed to determine what sites are most favorable. A final map of the turbines will be forwarded to county

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PPM Energy is planning to construct a wind farm north of Rugby which could have up to 100 1.5 megawatt wind towers, averaging 300 feet in height.

A 9.5 mile 239 kv transmission line would extend south from the towers and tie into the existing substation on the east edge of Rugby.

Construction on the estimated \$170 to \$190 million project would likely begin next year.

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officials for review and approval.

The turbines could range in size and power level from 1.5 Mw to up to 3 Mw, depending on price and availability. If the larger towers are selected, it's possible fewer than 100 would be needed to be erected.

Grube reviewed the project timetable which is projecting construction as early as 2006. However, permit applications at the county and state levels must be approved as well as developing a power purchase agreement with a utility company; establishing an interconnect agreement; and applying for a federal production tax credit.

Changes requested

Grube went through the company's permit application which requested flexibility in some of the existing zoning requirements. They included:

—Latitude regarding the 200-foot setback requirement of construction of towers from the property line. PPM proposed a 400-foot setback from the property line if there is no easement on one of the adjacent properties. If there are land easements on both proper-

the 50 dBA requirement apply only to occupied residences—a distance of 750 to 1,000 feet from the tower or line to a residence.

—A change regarding the height restriction on the towers. The zoning requirement now reads no higher than 300 feet for a tower or structure. Grube said some of the towers could range from 285 to 345 feet in height, depending on the size of power and turbines.

—Flexibility on the requirement that all connecting power lines must be buried underground. It's PPM Energy's preference to have lines buried, but there are issues regarding terrain and wetlands which make underground burial of lines impractical. The request would allow above the ground power lines when necessary. The poles would average 80 feet in height, and when possible, parallel the existing 230 Kv line which extends north of the substation east of Rugby. Seck said when the lines are buried they will be between 40 and 48 inches deep.

Following the proposal, the council allowed for questions. Ron Montonye asked what company PPM plans to

sell the power to.

Seck said no power purchase agreement has been signed. Montonye also asked why a separate transmission line must be installed from the towers to the substation east of Rugby. Why couldn't PPM Energy use the existing 230 Kv line? Seck said there were some difficulties with the interconnection process and it was the preference of PPM to come into the substation.

Brian Blessum, a land owner near the substation east of Rugby, asked if the addition of another transmission line will increase the noise level at the substation. Blessum said right now the level of humming from the station is so loud it forces him to sleep with the radio on to drown out the noise. He added at the time of the construction of the substation a sufficient sound barrier was to be installed but wasn't.

Seck said he was fairly confident the addition of the transmission line would not add to the current noise level at the substation. However, he stressed he was not qualified to make a firm guarantee whether the changes would make any

difference in the noise level.

County Commissioner Duane Johnston said county officials would look into the noise level issue at the substation for Blessum.

Seck said during peak construction of the planned wind farm and transmission line, up to 200 people could be working on the project. PPM Energy has wind farm projects in other states, including Minnesota and Iowa.

The firm began surveying the area north of Rugby as a potential site for a wind farm three years ago. Seck said the advantage of the site is the availability of moving the wind-generated power from the area with the adjacent transmission infrastructure in place.