

Revising Set-back Requirements for Wind Turbines

Good morning. It is an honor to be here to testify on the issue of set-backs relating to the positioning of wind turbines in relationship to human habitations in certain areas of Griggs and Barnes counties.

My name is Dennis Stillings, and my wife Cathryn and myself are Dakotans. Cathryn is from South Dakota; I was born and raised in Valley City. Both sides of my family—the Stillings and the Axelsons—come from pioneer families that settled in Green Township southwest of Valley City in the late 19th century.

After some 50 years of seeing the rest, I decided to retire to the best. Our previous 15 years were in Hawaii, and in spite of negative comments regarding our sanity, we took up official residency in North Dakota—the best kept secret in North America—in 2006.

I rediscovered the Spirit here—and Cathryn also understands what that Spirit is. The spirit of the North Dakota landscape arises from at least three sources: Its authenticity, its unobstructed prairie vistas, and—perhaps most importantly—its Great Silence.

After searching throughout Barnes, Griggs, and Stutsman counties, we found an attractive, affordable farmstead located about 12 miles north of I-94 on County Road 27. It is now in the middle of a large wind field. Only our good neighbor Bill McKay, by his refusal to accommodate the wind developers, has left us with a dramatic, uncluttered North Dakota prairie view to the east. We need to be more careful in regulating industrial projects that despoil just those areas that many newcomers and returnees seek.

Until the arrival of the wind turbines we also had the Great Silence as part of this environment. I believe that many North Dakotans, particularly those who farm and hunt, have an understanding of this sacred Silence. It is the Silence that is alluded to in the Bible: “Be still, and know that I am God.” It is where the divine “still, small voice” can best be heard.

Now wind turbines and their whirling blades chop this part of the North Dakota Spirit out of the land and skies, and grind the still small voice out of our souls 9 days out of 10. The peace of that occasional tenth day only emphasizes the loss of that silence. When the wind ceases to turn these noisy prairie pinwheels, the tension that goes out of one’s body is a startling reminder of the ongoing stress to which one has been subjected.

We know that our life here will never be what we had counted on, life here may never again be what we experienced for those few short months. Upon being approached by residents of Griggs county threatened by a similar problem, we felt it important to help. We received considerable information on the darker aspects of wind-turbine technology, and we googled up a lot of this information on our own.

Contrary to popular belief—and contrary to our own earlier belief—there are many, many problems associated with wind turbine developments, not least of which are the health problems. I have made available a CD containing relevant references.

But we are here to focus on wind turbines, noise pollution, and set-backs.

Nothing is more certain than the fact that wind-turbine developers have de-emphasized and misrepresented the issue of wind-turbine-generated noise. It is much to their profit to do so,

since, among other things, efficient positioning of the turbine site involves the length of the service road that must be built with its associated costs.

When we were visited by a wind development representative in late 2007 (dressed in a very local style), we were assured that there would be no noise problem with a quarter-mile set-back from our residence. He also expressed a wish to rout the collector cables through our shelterbelt, run them underground down the county road ditch, including under our elevated entrance road. They would pay \$1200.

When I asserted that no shelterbelt trees could be damaged, and that current and future damage caused by tunneling under the road would have to be covered in the contract, they decided to rout the cables around our property instead.

Back to the noise of the wind turbines. From the literature on set-backs, it is apparent that if any standard at all is used, it is based on apparently theoretical calculations, such as: “5 turbine-blade diameters” as the proper distance. I have yet to find any indication that the wind-turbine developers actually went out into the fields and checked out the reality of the situation. If they did, they have suppressed such information.

Depending on a variety of variables including wind speed, wind direction, terrain, approximate distance from an observer, and time of day, the turbines appear to generate noises that sound variously like a huge cement mixer or dishwasher, a jetliner that is overhead, but doesn't move on, or a peculiar whap, whap, whapping. It can be heard throughout the house, particularly in the evening and at night. The first time I heard it at its loudest, I came close to calling the turbine service people to report a failing bearing.

Arriving at a recommended quarter-mile set-back can only arise from incompetence or fraud. There was nothing remotely approaching full disclosure. European standards are more on the order of one to one-and-a-half miles. The turbines that are problematical for us are, as best I can tell, 650 to 700 yards distant—more than a third of a mile and this distance is completely inadequate.

As I have said, it might be too late for us. Not only too late, but more serious than that. My age and health status may require that we sell our property and move into town. Our property may now be virtually unsaleable, or at least greatly reduced in value. Estimates in some areas of property-value losses due to proximity of wind turbines range from 30-40%. Therefore, at a critical time in our lives our happy retirement to North Dakota, and other important aspects of our retired lives, have been severely damaged, not by prairie breezes, but by Big Winds blowing in from Florida.

Thank you.

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