



Kevin Killough - Tioga Tribune

It was standing-room-only at the Tioga City Hall Thursday, during discussion of the Lindahl Wind Project.

Public meetings on wind farm generate debate

By Kevin Killough

Opinions over a proposed wind farm north of Tioga are divided across the community, and the conversation reached a fevered pitch last week.

Tradewind Energy, the company developing the project, provided two public informational sessions and did a presentation at the Tioga City Commission meeting Thursday night. All three events drew supporters and opponents, and Thursday's presentation filled city hall to capacity.

"It's going to affect all of us," said Corrine Redmond, who lives in the area where the turbines are to be built.

The City of Tioga has no jurisdiction over the permitting process for the project since it is outside city limits. Williams County is in the process of considering a conditional use permit for a few meteorological towers that will take wind measurements for the purpose of determining the placement of the actual wind turbines, which are targeted for construction in the summer of 2016.

The purpose of the presentation and discussion was only to help the Tioga commission determine whether to recommend the county approve the permit for meteorological towers.

Even this small step has generated an intense debate over property rights, regional energy needs, and desires to maintain North Dakota's idyllic scenery.

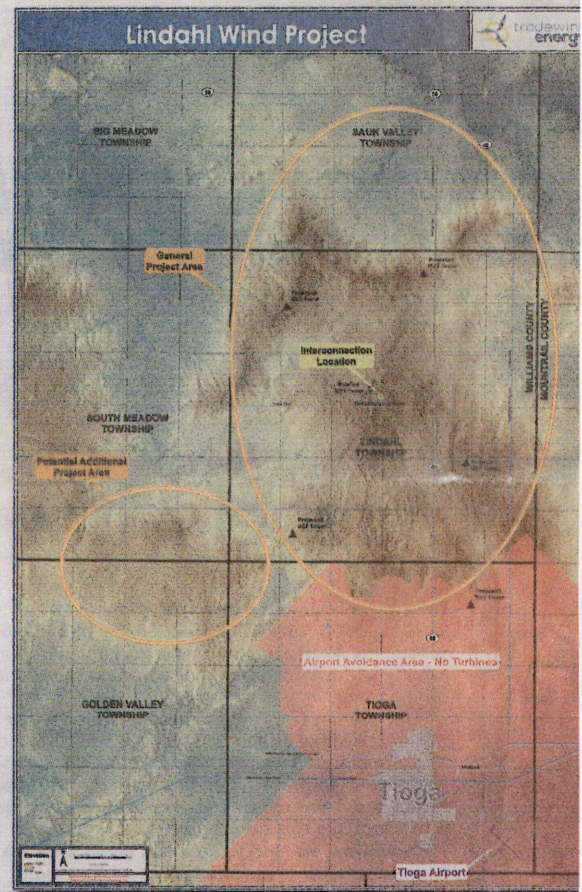
In the eye of the beholder

At the commission meeting, Commissioner Ronda Davidson voiced her opposition to the project. She said disagreement over the project is affecting relationships between residents.

"I've seen where it's splitting friends apart. It's not a good thing," Davidson said.

Just about everyone agrees the project will have some impact, but there's a lot of disagreement over the net benefit or cost to Tioga and the surrounding community.

Opponents of the project are concerned with how
(See WIND, Page 8)



50

WIND: Opponents feel they pay too heavy a price

(Continued from Page 1)

the turbines will impact the natural landscape. The towers' blades can reach up to 400-foot-high and are topped with flashing red lights.

"I don't want it in my backyard," said Valleri Beasley at the public information session. "Country life is country life, and that's not the kind of country life I was looking for."

She and her husband, Todd, moved back to the area from Arizona a few years ago and bought 18 acres for the open spaces. Their concern is echoed by others.

"I already have to look at an ugly cell tower. And now I'll have to look at an ugly wind tower," Jody Weflen said.

Compared to other developments in the past several years, wind turbines do not have a negative impact on the scenery, said others.

"Myself, personally, I like looking at the wind towers. I don't

like looking at oil rigs," said Dan McClintock.

McClintock said he is leasing his property for the project and wouldn't have a problem with one near his home.

Richard Carr, a Toiga city resident, said the economic benefits of the project outweigh any impact the turbines would have on the scenery. He compared it to a pig farmer whose odors are a tolerated byproduct of an agricultural operation.

"I look at wind turbines and it looks like money," Carr said.

Opponents are concerned the turbines will produce too much noise.

According to Joe Arb, director of development for Tradewind, regulations require the turbines to produce less than 50 decibels at 100 feet from any residence. That's about the same level as a conversation and could not be heard inside a dwelling under most conditions.

Economic benefits

Carr also spoke on the benefits of diversifying the local economy. As oil prices fall, it's possible a lot of non-farmers will have nothing to fall back on.

"The bust is going to happen again," Carr said.

Tradewind has said the project will create about 10 to 12 permanent jobs, and they will try to hire from the local labor pool. According to Todd Wilen, a Tradewind development consultant, the skillsets for turbine workers are similar to those in the oil industry.

Senior Development Manager Bruce Barton, who gave the company's presentation at the commission meeting, said the project will result in \$250 million in capital investment and temporary construction jobs. \$25 million in payments to landowners with leases, and \$15 million to \$20 million in taxes to the county.

The figures are over the 25-

year life of the wind farm. Barton also pointed out, unlike oil activities, the wind farm doesn't strain local infrastructure. After construction, aside from some service pickups, there will be little impact on the highways.

Opponents, however, said the touted economic benefits are just compounding existing problems and demands on a region already impacted by the oil industry.

"Toiga is the oil capital of North Dakota, and our community has contributed a lot to supply America with energy," said Stephanie Vagts. "It is not right to ask the citizens to give up more for energy."

Satisfying demands Other proponents say the wind farm will satisfy growing energy demands in the area, which are exceptionally high due to industry.

According to Basin Electric, which signed an agreement to

purchase power from the wind farm, the area is projected to see rapidly rising energy needs.

"Our 2014 load forecast indicated a system-wide growth of 1,883 megawatts (MW) by 2035 ... more than 1,600 MW of that growth is forecasted to occur in the Williston Basin area," said Mary Miller, communications manager for Basin Electric Power Cooperative, speaking after the meetings.

Miller said the cooperative is investing in more energy infrastructure in anticipation of this growth, and the Lindahl Wind Project is part of that plan.

Mary Hoseth said it would be unwise to react to energy needs later, since it can take years to develop infrastructure like wind farms.

"We're going to need that energy. Mark my words," Hoseth said.

Opponents said electric needs should be satisfied in other ways, such as somehow

utilizing the gas currently being flared off oil rigs.

Carr pointed out the wind farm would meet these demands without the pollution associated with other energy sources from fossil fuels.

Tabled The project began when a group of farmers and ranchers put together a lease and shopped it around to wind farm developers. Some of those landowners are looking forward to revenues from the project and believe they have a right to use their property however they want.

"We have the landowners who want to put turbines on the land they own," Barton said.

The Toiga commission voted to table any decision on recommendations to Williams County.

"This is too much, too fast," said Davidson.

The matter will be revisited at the Feb. 16 commission meeting.