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Wind power brings new life to town

By JOAN JOSEPHSON



OBSERVER Photo by Joan Josephson

Brian Smith, program director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Michael Saviola with the Division of Agriculture Protection and Development and Joe Kushner, Town of Eagle supervisor were guest speakers at the Wind Turbine Forum sponsored by Arkwright's Neighbors Informed about Clean Energy

12/12/2007 - OBSERVER Staff Writer

FORESTVILLE — The Town of Eagle, which contains a hamlet called Bliss, has gained a pocketful of revenues from the wind turbines being constructed there.

Town Supervisor Joe Kushner's story of how this came about held the interest of the more than 100 people who turned out Tuesday for the wind turbine forum sponsored by Arkwright's Neighbors Informed about Clean Energy.

"There's been a lot of people coming to see our wind project — before that, no one came to visit us," he said, drawing laughs from the audience.

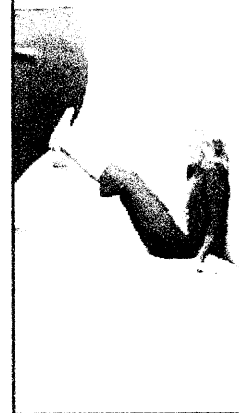
Describing his town as having 1194 residents with small farms, no restaurants, a hardware business and one gas station. Kushner said, "There is no industry and in order to raise the revenues to run the town, we had to charge \$10 per thousand in tax levy," he said.

Then Noble Wind Energy came to town with an offer to construct

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wind turbines.

“We negotiated with Noble to pay for the consultants we needed to protect our interests; we were able to have the company pay \$8,000 to \$8,365 per megawatt produced.

“So far, the company has paid \$1,150,000 for the megawatts produced so far and last year, Eagle received \$643,000 of this amount,” he said.

Eagle’s budget runs between \$450,000 to \$475,000 a year and the revenue from the turbines has eliminated the town taxes, Kushner said.

Not only are the town taxes erased, a tax relief fund has been established to keep the taxes down.

Kushner also said property revenue has increased since the turbines came to town and young families have been attracted to the community.

“My land was valued at a tenth of what it is now worth,” he said.

But, he said, the wind turbine process wasn’t one that involved all smooth sailing.

“Some people don’t want to talk with me and controversy does not go away.”

He advised the audience to take a pro-active approach to wind turbines.

“Meet together as a community and resolve whatever issues arise,” he said.

Brian Smith, director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said rising demands for electricity puts energy at the crossroads.

“Power plants impact health with mercury contamination and global warming,” he said.

The solution, he said, involves decreasing the demand, cleaning up power plants and adding clean technology.

Pointing to the Lackawana turbines, Smith said they produce zero amounts of harmful emissions.

Division of Agricultural Protection and Development representative Michael Saviola said wind turbines do kill birds and bats.

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"In order to address this, the lead agency, in this case the town, must insist that an adequate wildlife analysis is conducted and also demand that a post construction monitoring be done," he said.

Robert Knoer, an attorney who practices environmental law, said wind turbines do not belong everywhere.

"There is no right answer," he said.

But, he noted, the new crop is energy and there is no planet "B" - "What we have now is it and if the turbine towers are found to be unwelcome, they can be taken down.

"It's not so easy to do this with coal and nuclear power plants," he said.

A question and answer session followed the presentations.

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