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Firm hired to develop plans for UI's wind turbines

Fri, 07/14/2006 - 11:38am | [Christine Des Garennes](#)

CHICAGO – For years, University of Illinois students and staff have envisioned using clean wind energy to supplement the university's power needs.

On Thursday, that dream moved closer to reality when the UI Board of Trustees approved hiring a North Dakota company to develop plans for building three wind turbines on the UI's South Farms.

The project will cost about \$5.7 million; \$2 million of which will come from a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation. In addition, UI students will contribute \$300,000 through a \$2 per semester fee they had approved for clean energy projects on campus. The rest of the money will come from the UI's budget.

The UI would connect the turbines to the UI's power system, and the wind turbines could generate about 2.7 percent of the campus's energy needs.

The three turbines are proposed for an area just northeast of the new beef and sheep facility on South Race Street in Urbana. That's a tentative location.

Among the many issues the firm will discuss: the turbines' location and their size.

A few trustees raised questions about the turbines' locations near farms and Willard Airport, how neighbors will react to having the turbines nearby, possible buildup of ice on the blades during the winter, and whether or not wind turbines interfere with military radar, an issue raised by the Department of Defense earlier this year.

"This is the starting point for our analysis," said Lyle Wachtel, the UI's associate vice president for facilities planning and programs. One of the things that the firm will examine is federal approval of the site, he said.

Several wind farms are proposed or are in development in Illinois. UI President B. Joseph White, who said he fully supports the project, said wind power will be in central Illinois' future. But "the real economics of alternative energy forms need to be scrutinized," he said.

The UI will pay the North Dakota firm, Engineers Architects PC, \$87,500 to design the project and prepare construction documents, plus \$24,000 in additional fees. Reimbursable expenses are not to exceed \$46,000.

The board of trustees will approve the design and specific site location at a later date.

Guenther gets raise

Trustees on Thursday also approved a raise for UI Athletic Director Ron Guenther.

Beginning today, Guenther will earn \$500,000 per year, up \$90,000 from his previous salary of \$410,000.

The board also approved extending Guenther's contract through Jan. 1, 2009. Plus, if Guenther stays on as athletic director with the university until Dec. 31, 2008, he'll receive a \$250,000 lump-sum bonus.

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« **December 2010**

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

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