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Urbana council, residents hit UI over wind turbine plans

Mon, 11/15/2010 - 9:46pm | [Patrick Wade](#) 

URBANA – Some city council members on Monday night said they were frustrated that a University of Illinois wind turbine project is moving along without consulting city officials or adhering to a new zoning ordinance.

Diane Marlin, D-7, said the UI's plans for up to three 400-foot wind turbines in unincorporated southeast Urbana do not comply with city code regulating such developments.

"The wind turbine project is quickly moving forward without involving the city of Urbana, and that's very troubling," Marlin said, reading a prepared statement before the council.

"I'm just so taken aback by this whole situation," said Heather Stevenson, R-6.

Although the proposed wind farm is not within the Urbana city limits, it is within 1 1/2 miles of the southern boundary. Under state law, a city is allowed to enforce its wind turbine zoning regulations within that radius.

City Planner Libby Tyler said whether or not the UI, as a state agency, must comply with municipal zoning standards is not clear, and has not been fully tested in the courts.

"If you ask our attorney, yes," she said. "If you ask a university attorney, no."

Mayor Laurel Prussing said city staff will talk to determine an appropriate way to move forward.

"It's definitely a jurisdictional concern," Tyler said.

The UI on Oct. 27 issued a request for project proposals from contractors it would consider the lead the construction of the wind farm, and those proposals are due Nov. 23. The university's board of trustees could approve a plan at its December meeting.

One of the problems, Marlin said, is that the packet the UI issued describing the scope of the project did not reference the city's new wind turbine zoning ordinance. That ordinance regulates things like the maximum height of the towers, how far they must be from residences, noise levels and controls on the turbines' shadows.

The city must "mitigate the impact of these enormous, industrial-sized structures that will appear on our southern boundary," Marlin said.

Doug Wolfersberger, representing the Deerfield Trails Homeowners' Association, said he feels the UI project would hurt his neighborhood.

"We saw nothing or any kind of offer from the university that says, 'Hey this is good for us, and we'll make it good for Urbana,'" Wolfersberger said.

The residents say they do not want 40-story towers in their backyards.

"That lowers our property values, and that's why we're here tonight," Wolfersberger said.

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#1

[heckbill](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 7:11 am

Leave it to Urbana to push industry or anything that would generate any kind of work out of the area.

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#2

[thechampaignlife](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 8:11 am

I'd take one in my backyard. I think they look cool. Then again, I'm in an older neighborhood and not a \$250K new subdivision. Put one at the 5th and Hill site or North Prospect!

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#3

[ronaldo](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 8:11 am

....and go sticking their noses in everyones business. I think the key word here is "unincorporated", and Urbana is so slow to embrace growth that the turbines will likely have outlived their useful life before any growth occurs in the area. Another example of a small, regressive community trying to throw it's insignificant weight around.

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#4

[David Illinois](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 8:11 am

I'm still driving to Champaign to buy the cheaper gas, and now Urbana is against wind power!

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#5

[toddles75](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 9:11 am

Perhaps we could somehow harvest all this hot air.

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#6

[spencergore4](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 11:11 am

Perhaps the next build site should be over the city council? :)

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#7

[dw](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 9:11 am

Un-effingham believable.

Just imminent domain the incorporated Urbana in 3 small sections of land the width of a windmill base and the necessary length to get inside the 1.5 mile radius, level what's there and make it a green space/prairie and seed it with those obnoxious overly aggressive wild turkeys.

They should fit into Urbana just fine.

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#8

[bluegrass](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 9:11 am

The Urbana Greens are against wind turbines? Shocking. One would think they would be pushing the idea of sustainable energy.

It sounds like the real problem could be that while the turbines may represent green energy, their proposed location doesn't make any greenbacks for the City of Urbana, which makes them a problem.

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#9

[spencergore4](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 11:11 am

This is actually one of the first really well thought out plans I've heard the University make in a while. Consider this -- all of the power that is not generated from renewable sources will be coming from either their Abbot power plant or the grid.

Abbot is the largest producer of sulfur dioxide emissions in Champaign county, which takes a toll on public health and property values. It also looks much worse than a wind turbine -- Google Streetview "Abbot Power Plant" if you're curious.

Power taken from the grid is going to only further increase utility prices and the environmental impact on our coal ash recipients in southern Illinois -- especially once the University's Petascale supercomputer goes online.

There are many worse things than a wind turbine for Urbana. I think the city should embrace it and try to find ways to make similar progress on their own.

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#10

[enginerd07](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 12:11 pm

It's disappointing that people are looking to turn this into a fight between the University and Urbana. I think this is a great project for both groups, and that both can benefit from cooperating to make this project work as smoothly as possible.

While the University should not blatantly ignore Urbana's wishes, it needs to be taken into account that this wind turbine was being planned long before the Urbana wind turbine ordinance was passed. Urbana has a climate commitment of its own, and should embrace the University's efforts instead of restricting them. Working together, the City of Urbana could learn a lot from the University's project when they look into renewable energy sources themselves.

As far as the property value concern goes, studies show that the presence of wind turbines has no impact on nearby property values (<http://newscenter.lbl.gov/press-releases/2009/12/02/wind-power-property-...>). The noise they generate is much less than the noise of the wind itself, and in such a green community, proximity to renewable energy may actually have a positive effect.

The desire for renewable energy is not going to just go away. Wind turbines are popping up all over the state, and Urbana and the University both need to celebrate this opportunity join in the movement. Renewable power will provide electricity that is not only clean, but that will not be affected by rises in the price of fossil fuels. The wind turbine is an investment in the community's long-term health, and I think both the City of Urbana as well as the University stand to benefit from this project.

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#11

[GeneralPeeved](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 2:11 pm

So, the Urbana City Council is against wind turbines!what a bunch of frickin' hypocrites!oh, we're Tree City USA, oh, we want bike lanes everywhere.....oh, we want green this and green that.....phewy! Classic case of NIMBY (Not In My BackYard). Some of those tree-huggers need to take a long look in the mirror!

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#12

[EcoEcho](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 4:11 pm

I appreciate the art of journalism, but I think the slant of this article is rather misleading. Exactly what impacts of these enormous structures must be mitigated? How does 1.5 miles beyond city limits in unincorporated Urbana translate into a wind turbine in citizen's backyards, casting detrimental shadows over their crops or basil plants, keeping their children up at night due to noise and hindering their wellbeing (either way I think I'd prefer a wind turbine as a next door neighbor over rambunctious college students)? Enginerd07 is correct, and anyone who has even stepped foot onto property containing a wind turbine can attest to the same; the noise generated by the turbine is not noticeable due to the noise of natural wind in your ears (which to me just compounds the utility of this force of nature). I first (excuse my pun) caught wind of the turbine coming to town about 5 years ago; after falling off the map for a bit, I was elated to hear that the initiative lives. With all due respect, Urbana, I think we should embrace this endeavor. Renewable energy is the future waving hello to us with a smile. The University recently adopted a Climate Action Plan in May 2010 promising to become carbon-neutral. For this to happen they need to phase out the Abbott Power Plant. This wind turbine is a step in the right direction. The fact remains that Urbana is home to a Big 10 prestigious public university, and maintaining a symbiotic relationship with it is the avenue with the greatest reward. Of course, the University should be discussing this with Urbana and stay in their good graces. But the article's quote from Wolfersberger complaining about a lack of an "offer" to make it "good for us" sounds aggressive and it sounds like a fiscal demand. I think this should be approached in the context of how we can work together to support an initiative that will allow us both to maintain values that we share, and capitalize on the benefits available to both entities. The only claim that holds in this article is the technicality in dispute, or the zoning ordinance. I disregard the negative information in regards to the size, placement and noise of the wind turbine, I don't consider them to be legitimate concerns.

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#13

[eulerismyhomie](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 3:11 pm

"Enormous, industrial sized structures?" So the city is interested in limiting the influx of big box stores and urban sprawl? Great. Wait...nevermind, they're talking about limiting a pioneering installation of renewable power that will be an enormous asset because they think it will reduce the opportunity for miles of sprawl to the southeast of the city. When did the city's economic and planning priorities go so off course?

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#14

[GayPride123](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 3:11 pm

thank you city of Urbana

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#15

[Utowner](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 4:11 pm

This is a clear case of zoning law. The 1.5 mile 'zone of influence' is a well-known Illinois zoning issue. It has rarely been tested, especially when one of the bodies is a state agency, but many private coporations who have tried to develop unincorporated land on the fringe have lost their court battles. My guess is that if it comes to a court battle, UIUC will find itself on the losing end. On a second note, if you've never been around one of these turbines, and I'm not talking about driving by them on the highway, you have no idea how noisy and awful they really are. They cast shadows during the day and the lights that are on top light areas in an unattractive red glow. Not exactly something I would want in my backyard either.

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#16

[William_D](#) wrote on November 17, 2010 at 12:11 pm

exactly!

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#17

[ronaldo](#) wrote on November 17, 2010 at 12:11 pm

Excellent insight. Then don't live on the edge of town.

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#18

[ParkerLaubach](#) wrote on November 16, 2010 at 4:11 pm

It is a shame that Urbana is will to talk to talk but not walk the walk when it come to fighting climate change. This is something that has been in the talked about since a turbine was proposed in 2003, and not a new issue for the C-U community. It is time we start utilizing our renewable resources around us! Come on Urbana, seriously?

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#19

[avbubba](#) wrote on November 17, 2010 at 5:11 am

this makes me sick. i think everyone has been watching a bit too much fox news. get real or be left behind as society moves on and grows up. one more reason why I can't wait to graduate from the University and get the heck out of this backwards community.

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#20

[ronaldo](#) wrote on November 17, 2010 at 8:11 am

I'm guessing that by the tone of your post you would be best served by graduating and "getting the heck out of this backwards community." I'm sure that some McMansionville complete with its adjacent endless sea of well-planned *wink wink* strip malls and the token ornamental tree happily awaits your homecoming. Oh yeah, and once you get re-settled be sure to lobby your suburban mayor to build wind turbines in your community. Let us know how that goes, ok?

And you do realize that the average Urbana city council members news station-of-choice is more along the lines of npr and NOT FoxNews, right?

Oh....and one more thing lest I forget. You really seem intent on graduating. Before walking up on the stage to get your diploma, can you do all your future suburban newspaper readers a big favor and take a creative writing/composition/grammar class? Please??!!

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#21

[William_D](#) wrote on November 17, 2010 at 12:11 pm

No, these aren't Urbana "greens." You're making a false equivalency. These are homeowners concerned (and rightly so) about their property values. I am a firm believer in wind power and enjoy seeing them churning away across the state. However, I can see the point of view of the homeowners who don't believe the UofI or City of Urbana are acting in good faith.

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#22

[dw](#) wrote on November 18, 2010 at 11:11 am

Those homeowners need to do their research:

Berkeley Lab Study Finds No Widespread Impact of Wind Power Projects on Surrounding Residential Property Values in the U.S.

<http://newscenter.lbl.gov/press-releases/2009/12/02/wind-power-property-...>

The new report, funded by the DOE, is based on site visits, data collection, and analysis of almost 7,500 single-family home sales, making it the most comprehensive and data-rich analysis to date on the potential impact of U.S. wind projects on residential property values

A similar study done locally:

WIND FARM PROXIMITY AND PROPERTY VALUES IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS November 6, 2010

<http://indianadg.wordpress.com/2010/11/06/wind-farm-proximity-and-proper...>

Thus, this study presents evidence that demonstrates close proximity to an operating wind farm does not necessarily negatively influence property values or property value appreciation rates. The estimation results strongly reject the existence of "wind farm area stigma theory" for the area surrounding Twin Groves I and II.

And an analysis of the existing research by people who "know":

National Association of Realtors

<http://www.realtor.org/library/library/fg509>

"Although research remains limited, wind farms appear to have a minimal or at most transitory impact on real estate." - Oct 2010

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