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Wind turbine plan brings more debate to Urbana council

Mon, 12/06/2010 - 11:41pm | [Patrick Wade](#)

URBANA – The University of Illinois’ proposal to build wind turbines just outside the southeast border of the city produced more heated debate during Monday night’s city council meeting, but council members say it was at least the beginning of a discussion about balancing the benefits of renewable energy with the rights of property owners.

Homeowners said they worry the UI did not take appropriate steps to study the effect of up to three wind turbines on nearby properties, and members of the Student Sustainability Committee say a turbine’s statement about sustainability will benefit the whole community.

Meanwhile, Mayor Laurel Prussing said city administrators met with university officials last week to try to find some common ground. Whether or not the university, as a state agency, would need to comply with the city’s wind turbine regulations has yet to be determined, but Prussing said the groups will await the return of contractor bids on the project to determine how to proceed.

“All of this is going to hinge on how much money is available,” Prussing said.

The wind turbine project has been budgeted at \$4.5 million, partly with money that has been raised with a student sustainability fee. Organizers also have available a \$2 million grant, which they would need to use before it expires at the end of May 2011.

Depending on where the bids come in, students told the city council on Monday, they might be able to fund one or two turbines, but it is unlikely the budget would accommodate three.

The project has been on-and-off as the university faced leadership changes and fiscal uncertainties, and right now “it is in an intensive care unit,” said Suhail Barot, chairman of the student committee.

Nearby residents – Monday night’s speakers lived mostly in the Yankee Ridge and Deerfield Trails subdivisions – hope there is enough time left to revisit the proposed locations of the turbines and more thoroughly examine the effects of the turbines’ noise and shadows on their properties.

Facing a May deadline, students were not sure that could be done in time.

“To redesign now would kill the project, which we know no one wants to see,” said Amy Allen, a member of the committee.

Prussing and the city council members, as they have done in past weeks, continued to call on the university to broaden their engagement efforts with nearby residents.

“They are the number one concern and priority when it comes to something like this,” said Heather Stevenson, R-6. “To develop a plan without consulting the residents, who are going to be the most affected, is the wrong way to go about this.”

Prussing said there are still some gaps to fill in the proposal.

"I'm in favor of wind turbines, but everything needs to be done right," she said. "You don't just put it next to this guy's house without talking to him."

Eric Jakobsson, a Democrat who began the meeting by being sworn in as the Ward 2 alderman to fill a vacancy, said the night's dialogue was a good start and it was encouraging to see students and property owners speaking outside after the meeting.

"I hope this is a harbinger of the future," he said

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#1

[David Illinois](#) wrote on December 07, 2010 at 7:12 am

Still driving from Urbana to Champaign to save money on taxes...way to go Urbana!

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#2

[myattitude](#) wrote on December 07, 2010 at 9:12 am

People continue to ignore the "sight and sound" pollution the turbines can create. They should not be anywhere close to any area where people live. Green is not always as green as people think.

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