

Letter to the Editor
September 28, 2011

The Swampscott Renewable Energy Committee would like to express a sincere thanks to the residents who have attended our last two meetings as we continue to review a draft report examining the feasibility for wind turbine power in Swampscott. We are writing this letter in an effort to address some of the concerns and questions that have come up at these meetings and to share this information with the public at large.

First, to provide history and background, in 2005, in an effort to reduce both the energy costs and the environmental impact of the town, the Board of Selectmen established the Renewable Energy Committee to explore potential energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Over the last six years the Committee has made significant contributions to Swampscott, some of the highlights being: over \$250,000 in grants and utilities rebates, recognition as a Green Community, and creating a plan to reduce the town's energy use by 20%. In connection with our mandate to investigate potential renewable energy production opportunities, we also have been investigating the possibility of a wind turbine in Swampscott. The first question we asked is where, if *anywhere*, could we do it? In an attempt to answer this question, we applied for and were awarded a formal Fatal Flaw Analysis including a site visit by the UMass Renewable Energy Laboratory in March, 2008. The resulting report analyzed the viability of wind power at four potential sites in town: Phillips Park, Aggregate Industries, behind the track at the new High School, and behind the Little League fields at the Middle School (the site now under review). The study found that all of these sites had flaws, but none of them fatal, and the one that was most attractive was the Middle School mainly because it has a favorable wind resource, and an on-site load (the school itself) nearby where the electricity generated can be used. We received a \$75,000 Grant for a formal, comprehensive Wind Feasibility Study of this site in May, 2010 from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center.

At the July 20, 2011 meeting of the Swampscott Renewable Energy Committee we received a draft version of this study from Meridian Associates, an environmental consulting firm based in Beverly. The study gathered a tremendous amount of data including wind speeds at multiple altitudes, background environmental noise levels and projected noise impact, shadow flicker effect estimation, and a total cost/payback analysis.

Understandably, this study has created some serious questions and concerns from residents town-wide, and especially those in the neighborhood that would be immediately affected. Chief among them: the noise, the size, the cost, the safety, and the potential effects a turbine may have on property values and the quality of life in Swampscott as a whole.

The Feasibility Study helps to provide an answer to some of these questions such as: How big would it be? How loud? How much energy will it produce? And of course, how much will it cost?

The report found that we do have enough wind speed at this location to make a turbine feasible and that a 900KW turbine would meet the state requirements in terms of noise, flicker and safety. So what now? The REC has reviewed the draft study and replied to Meridian with a number of questions and concerns, both from the committee and from residents attending our meetings. Some of these concerns have been addressed in writing and at our next meeting we will be able to discuss them with representatives from Meridian Associates. In the meantime, we have not formed any conclusive opinions or given any advisements, but the process of our decision making will be based upon the following general guidelines:

1. Is there an acceptable financial model or incentive to the town for further exploration of the report's recommendations?
2. If the current models do not work, what would be the requirements and threshold financially for which the Town *would* embrace wind power? We now have the valuable wind data. If future technologies are developed to generate more energy with the same wind results, how much is enough?
3. Siting concerns based upon the specific turbine recommendations from Meridian. Based upon the environmental data in hand, will this match community goals? We recognize that any wind turbine will be not just in the Middle School neighborhood, but seen throughout the town. What conditions would be needed for community acceptance?
4. Laws governing local energy generation are still fluid. How does this affect us? And what are the implications?

The important message though, and a major reason for our letter is that this is the beginning of what will certainly be a long process should it be pursued at all. This report only tells us whether this site meets fundamental minimum state requirements. It does not answer but certainly opens a discussion as to whether or not it meets our community requirements. That is for all of us, as a town, to decide. As for now, there are still many questions that need to be answered and many conversations that need to take place. We hope this letter helps to address the concerns we've been hearing.

We welcome you to review the Feasibility Study and the Fatal Flaw Analysis, both of which are posted on the Renewable Energy Committee website accessible through the Town website:

http://www.town.swampscott.ma.us/Public_Documents/SwampscottMA_BComm/energy1

We also encourage you to attend our next meeting on Thursday, October 13th at 7:00 PM in room B-129 Swampscott High School where Jonathan Markey, an engineer from Meridian Associates, along with an audio engineer, will be presenting their findings and will be available for any questions. Additionally, if anyone has further questions or comments they should feel free to contact any of the committee members by phone or email. Our contact information is available on the above mentioned website. Thank you,

The Swampscott Renewable Energy Committee:

Neal Duffy, Chair
Wayne Spritz, Vice Chair
Victoria Masone
Milton Fistel