

I was asked at the end of a recent public hearing to write an opinion piece in opposition to wind power. I responded that I am not opposed to wind power. Rather, I am against how the Antrim Planning Board intended to change Principal Permitted Uses (encouraged uses) in the Rural and Rural Conservation Districts. The editor suggested my perspective might be helpful in this debate.

At issue are a proposed zoning change to allow wind-energy facilities as a Principal Permitted Use in the Rural Conservation District and a separate change that would allow excavation sites as a Principal Permitted Use to the Rural District. These two changes could have a significant impact on approximately 70 % of land in the town. Yet, the proposed ordinances would only require a site review rather than the more-involved process of a zoning special exception.

I hope this piece can add to the conversation.

- Antrim Wind Energy LLC has leased approximately 2,000 acres for 25 years in the Rural Conservation District. While the final design is still in the works, tentative plans include multiple structures for monitoring and maintenance; 40- to 50-foot wide roadways; plus 9 to 13 structures, each 400 feet tall with 300-foot propeller-spans.

The scale and type of development that would be permitted in the new ordinance is contrary to the intent of the Rural Conservation District. The purpose of the Rural Conservation District is “to protect conserve and preserve the remote mountainous portions of Antrim from...activities that would be detrimental to the unique environmental characteristics and qualities of this district and detract from the peaceful enjoyment and tranquility that this district affords local residents. The intent of this district is to preserve and promote a remote and rural character.”

An industrial scale wind facility is not a low-impact facility. It is important to get a sense of the scale of this proposal. This wind farm and its associated infrastructure will be *larger* than the village of Antrim. While for the most part many citizens generally express support of renewable energy, few of us can visualize the magnitude of that footprint. This wind facility is larger than any proposed, or completed, project in the past 100 years. *Energy Sprawl* is a term used to describe the space and impact of wind facilities, especially when combined with others in a region. Antrim citizens would certainly expect more than a site-review process if a developer planned to build a new industrial park in Rural Conservation District, particularly if there were more than one proposed in the area.

Antrim currently has a detailed Small Wind Energy Systems ordinance. It is five-page document. Yet, an industrial wind facility development isn't covered in our town regulations. This does not make sense. True, there are not many ordinances written to date for wind facilities, but that does not mean we cannot create them. Across the region and the country, wind organizations are working with conservation nonprofits, governmental agencies and landowner groups to create guidelines and standards. Antrim's ordinances could set parameters for such developments and the town's planning documents would be used by agencies, if the project progresses to the state review phase.

And finally, the earnings garnished from this project will go to the leases of the land, the company that prepares and secures the facility permit, and to those who run the facility. It is important to consider the parallel with hydropower facilities. The profits are made in the start-up phase, not in running of the facility. Yes, there will be temporary construction-related jobs for excavation, hauling, and construction. However, most wind facilities employ corporate technicians to maintain and monitor the facility on 1- to 2-year rotating assignment.

- The proposed excavation ordinance would make sand and gravel pit excavations a Principal Permitted Uses (an encouraged use) in the Rural District. But our zoning laws define the Rural District as “intended to be a district of rural residential dwellings complimented by other traditional rural/ agricultural uses.” The district also permits certain nonresidential uses that are compatible with the rural character of the district. Such uses are permitted by Special Exception.”

A modern excavation operation is not a traditional agricultural use. The excavation and transporting of sand and gravel is an industrial process. Additionally, excavation is not the only activity at a modern gravel pit. Materials are brought in to the pit for processing, crushing and sifting, then are re-transported from the site. The direct and ancillary uses at a gravel pit are the equivalent to a construction zone, and often persist for decades.

Much is made of the town’s need to capture additional revenue from excavation. The town receives 2 cents per yard, the equivalent of \$2.00 per 10-yard dump truck and no revue from the reprocessed materials. Nothing in the existing zoning for the Rural District is comparable to the noise dust and traffic associated with a sand and gravel pit. These factors are likely why other towns allow excavation in the Rural District by special exception only.

The Antrim Planning Board needs to down settle down to the hard work of creating ordinances rather giving up our opportunity for local control. In the past, when a complex ordinance – such as housing for the elderly -- has come before the Planning Board, the town formed an ad hoc committee to study it. The committee worked through potential zoning ordinances, brought their findings back to the board for discussion, and then proceeded with public hearings, voting, and enactment of the ordinance.

So far, the discussion has focused on the benefits of wind facilities and excavation. The real focal point should be how our community uses its nonrenewable resources and meets the challenges of today and the future.

I truly believe there are solutions that can provide for these activities and while assuring preservation of community character.