

Voters defeated two articles Tuesday that would have regulated large-scale wind energy projects in the town.

By MEGHAN PIERCE

Union Leader Correspondent

ANTRIM — Voters defeated two articles Tuesday that would have regulated large-scale wind energy projects in the town.

Almost 50 percent, or 810, of the town's 1,649 registered voters cast ballots at the special Town Meeting vote.

The first article, which asked voters to adopt a large-scale wind ordinance, failed 501 to 309. The second article, which would have limited any large-scale wind development from the town's Rural Conservation District, failed 584 to 225.

A large wind energy project proposed in the Rural Conservation District on Tuttle Hill and Willard Mountain by Eolian Renewable Energy was the driving force behind the ordinance, even though in June the town lost jurisdiction of the project to the state Site Evaluation Committee.

The ordinance would not have applied to the project, however, passage of it would have meant the SEC would have taken the town regulations into consideration when reviewing Eolian's application, which is to be submitted in January.

Brian Beihl was one of the residents lined up outside Town Hall Tuesday afternoon, holding signs.

"An ordinance needs to be in place," Beihl said. "If this was a Walmart that wanted to come to town, the town has an ordinance that says how high it can be, how much parking there is, how much parking can go in and out. So why is it the town of Antrim would not have an ordinance to govern the largest industrial facility since the 1870s?" he said.

Currently, Eolian is planning to present the state with an application for a 30-megawatt production capacity facility that would include 10 turbines along the Tuttle and Willard mountain ridge lines.

Steve MacDonald of nearby West Street held a printed sign held by many others that said, "A NO vote is a Yes for Wind!"

"The intent of the proposed ordinance is not to regulate with, but to make sure it doesn't happen," MacDonald said. "It's far too restrictive. As proposed I think it represents a minority of the town and there are things in it that I think are not good policy."

Most of the Rural Conservations District is undeveloped, generating very little property tax revenue for the town, he said.

This project would bring approximately \$300,000 to Antrim, MacDonald said.

Selectman John Robertson said the town is still negotiating with Eolian, but said the company would make a payment in lieu of taxes to the town.

The articles, drafted by an ad hoc committee and approved by the Planning Board after a public hearing process, were opposed by the Select Board for being too restrictive.

“My personal feeling is — this one selectman’s is — renewable energy is the thing of the future, so it’s got to start somewhere,” Robertson said. “Someday there’s going to be no oil if we keep pumping it out of the earth.”