

ANTRIM

Wind developer offers town \$40K for impacts

Antrim Wind Energy may file an appeal to overturn State Evaluation Committee's decision to deny 10-turbine project

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Monadnock Ledger-Transcript
Wednesday, April 3, 2013
(Published in print: Thursday, April 4, 2013)

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ANTRIM — Antrim Wind Energy has offered the town \$40,000 as recompense for a proposed wind farm's visual impacts to the Gregg Lake area. The caveat is the state's Site Evaluation Committee has already denied the application.

On Feb. 7, the state SEC voted down a proposed 10-turbine, 30-megawatt wind farm for the ridgeline of Tuttle Hill and Willard Mountain. The SEC cited "unreasonable adverse effects" the wind farm would have had on the area, which includes a New Hampshire Audubon wildlife sanctuary.

An appeal of the SEC's decision can be made once the final written order is released by the committee, detailing the court hearings that ended early in February. Antrim Wind Energy has not said whether or not the company will file an appeal, but town officials believe that is the company's plan. SEC representatives could not be reached for comment by press time Wednesday.

The Antrim Select Board voted unanimously Monday night to accept a one-time payment of \$40,000 from Antrim Wind Energy, a subsidiary of Eolian Renewable Energy, if the SEC's decision to not go ahead with the project is eventually reversed following an appeal.

But the decision got mixed reviews from residents at the meeting. Some residents expressed discontent that the town would accept what they said is essentially a bribe from Antrim Wind Energy.

"They want Antrim to sign the letter so there are no hard feelings for visual impacts," said Shelley Nelkens, who has voiced opposition to the project from the start.

"For them to consider that amount of money is absurd," said Lorraine Block — another resident who's been a vocal opponent of the wind farm proposal — in a phone interview

Tuesday, referring to the Select Board.
"To me it's a total bribe. It's apples to oranges. [The money] has nothing to do with aesthetics. If you put a tennis court in, that doesn't help with the aesthetics overall."

Antrim Wind Energy sent a letter to Antrim town officials on March 15, stating the company "intend[ed] to offer mitigation specifically related to visual impacts, the details of which are still being determined.". The \$40,000 could be used to enhance the Gregg Lake Recreational Area, according to the letter.

Town officials drafted a response letter on March 27, saying the town would accept the one-time payment of \$40,000, but asked that it be referred to as "acceptable compensation" for the visual impacts the project would have, rather than as a mitigation payment.

Select Board Chair Gordon Webber said in a phone interview Tuesday that if the SEC does not reverse its decision, the \$40,000 becomes a moot point. But if the ruling is overturned, that's \$40,000 the town will receive, which it hadn't originally planned on.

"Why would we say no to an additional \$40,000?" Webber said. "As a board, I say we use it for Gregg Lake."

The response letter drafted by the town states that the board is willing to accept the offer, and would likely use it to enhance the recreational facilities at Gregg Lake.

Town Administrator Galen Stearns said in a phone interview Tuesday that he was instructed by the Select Board to send the letter drafted by town officials to the town's legal advisor, Barton Mayer, who works in Concord at the law office of Upton and Hatfield, for review.

If the wind farm decision is overturned and the town accepts the \$40,000, Webber said the town will hold a public hearing to acknowledge the receipt of the donation, per town guidelines.

"Any gift of \$5,000 or more requires a public hearing to say that we've accepted the funds," Webber said.

Webber said if the town does receive the donation, they would listen to suggestions at the public hearing about how it should be used to improve Gregg Lake. Ultimately, he said, it would be up to the various town boards to get together and make a decision.

N.H. SEC attorney Michael Iacopino did not return a phone call by press time seeking information about when the committee's final written order will be published.