

Chowan Board tables wind energy ordinance proposal

BY REGGIE PONDER
Chowan Herald

The Chowan County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously Monday night to table a proposal to make the county's wind energy ordinance substantially stricter.

Both Chowan and Perquimans Counties are considering a project called Timbermill, which would include turbines that are 600-foot tall to the top of the blades.

Lin Bond presented the petition to the Chowan board on behalf of Citizens for Protective Wind Ordinance.

Bond noted the Planning Board had recommended six changes to the existing

wind ordinance. The petition has garnered more than 645 signatures, according to Bond.

Commissioner Alex Kehayes briefly chaired the meeting Monday night after Lauren Womble, the county attorney, recommended that Chairman Jeff Smith not vote due to a conflict of interest.

Womble said her research, which had included consultation with the School of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, had led her to the conclusion that Smith should not vote on legislative matters related to wind energy because of his ownership interest in a family corporation that has entered

into negotiations with Apex Clean Energy Inc. regarding the Timbermill Wind Energy Project.

Smith said he didn't agree with the attorney's determination but would abide by it.

At the request of Commissioner Emmett Winborne, Womble also reported on her research into whether Winborne would have any conflict of interest on the wind energy issue. She said she had found that Winborne does not have any conflict of interest in the matter.

Smith noted he had never tried to hide his family's negotiations with Apex regarding the project. He has been upfront from the beginning, he said.

Smith said he was concerned that the area he represents in the northern part of the county is losing a vote in the matter because of his recusal from voting.

Kehayes pointed out that Commissioner Ellis Lawrence was not present at the meeting.

"We do not have to take a vote on this," Kehayes said, adding he would hate to see Lawrence's absence affect the outcome of the vote.

But Kehayes added that at some point the board should vote on the matter and stop sitting on the recommendations that came to the commissioners from the Planning Board in April.

Winborne said he thought

the matter should be tabled since commissioners had just seen the petition for the first time at the meeting.

Womble noted that the commissioners would not be able to vote on the Planning Board's recommended text amendments at Monday's meeting, since the text amendments would require a public hearing.

What the board could consider, she said, would be setting a public hearing on the proposed text amendments.

The board tabled the entire consideration of the matter to a future meeting.

During the meeting Monday, people on both sides of the issue offered emotional pleas to the board.

Liz Alons, a supporter of the proposed amendments, expressed concern about the proximity of large-scale wind turbines to people's homes, the potential cost of decommissioning the turbines, effect on property values, and health effects of noise.

But Gil Burroughs said it would be "kind of ridiculous" to restrict the turbines' sound level to 35 dBA when a radio or TV in your home would generate 70 dBA.

Bill Whichard said the county needs jobs and revenue, but 600-foot wind turbines could do more harm than good.

"Let's not sell ourselves down the river for the money," Whichard said.

OUTREACH

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involvement will mean they can tackle larger projects, like porch repairs. Spaugh and others have to investigate what projects it can handle and what projects it cannot.

"We're not nearly as capable as the Baptist Men when it comes to construction. We're not doing disaster relief. We're doing stuff that regular folks can't or won't do."

"Somebody may say the porch needs to be redone but you get in there and the entire house needs rebuilding. We're not set up for that. We're staying away from plumbing and electrical because those things have to be inspected, but we can fix

a porch to be better than it was."

The combined Youth Workcamp Home Repair Initiative will include adult and youth volunteers from the surrounding area that will perform such work as porch repair/construction, step repair, exterior painting, interior painting, wheelchair ramp repair and construction, mobile home skirting, and yard clean up.

"Last year it was a labor thing. This year we'll have Baptist Men involved and Forest Park and Fountain of Love Church in Elizabeth City involved," Spaugh said.

He said the group has worked with both Hertford Town Manager Brandon Shoaf and Perquimans County Manager Frank Heath.

Spaugh and Phil Johnson, another "Love PQ" organiz-

er, went out driving around to look at potential projects last week. No new projects are being accepted, but volunteers and donations are needed.

Last year "Love PQ" drew 70 volunteers. They spent about 1,200 hours working on 22 homes. Some spent the entire week working. Some spent just one day. Some of the volunteers still had to work that week, but they pitched in one night at the Albemarle Food Bank to help sort food.

"My concept — my idea — for Love PQ was to make it for more than just one week," Spaugh said. "This year we held a five-on-five basketball tournament, a free event, as a way of loving on the community. That was a Love PQ event. It's all about loving your community."

"If we had the money we



STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Pastor James Spaugh of Bagley Swamp Wesleyan Church (right) and others cut down tall grass along a railroad line in Hertford last year as part of Love PQ Week. The event will be held this year starting July 27.

could pay carpenters to do some work, but then the average person wouldn't be able to love on the commu-

nity in a tangible way." Anybody interested in volunteering this year, is invited to call the church at

426-2792. "We're going to get dirty and we're going to help some folks," Spaugh said.

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BUDGET

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Stallings in the lurch. "We're in limbo," he said last week. "We know what we're getting locally but on the state level there are some big holes."

One of those deals with the fate of teacher assistants. The Senate budget plan would cut back the number of assistants in favor of more funding for certified teachers. The Senate plan would cut 8,500 TA positions over two years.

"The message the politicians are sending is, 'Y'all have a happy Fourth of July! We're going to the beach! Maybe we'll fire you when

we get back,'" said Melinda Zarate, state secretary of the North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants at a press conference in Raleigh.

Stallings said with the future in question, he's been leaving teacher assistant positions unfilled when someone retires. There were 20 TAs in the local school system last year and three have retired.

Unlike tenured teachers who have a reasonable expectation that they'll have a job, teacher assistants don't have the job security. The school system can and has used a Reduction In Force (RIF) policy to eliminate jobs, including teachers. In 2011, 19 Perquimans em-

ployees were told that May not to expect to be back next school year.

Teacher assistants are used almost exclusively in classrooms with younger students. A few are used with older students in special needs classrooms.

"We would not replace them with another full-time position," Stallings said. "We're trying to stay ahead of having a RIF. We try and be good stewards of the positions we have."

Funding for driver's training is also in limbo, but Stallings said that is less an issue because the next class isn't scheduled until September.

The school system does have some local money to make building improve-

ments next year, but Stallings said the items that will take priority would be those that involve safety like lighting and sidewalk repairs.

It also has federal funds available that can be used to enhance the Wi-Fi reception in schools. All the schools had Wi-Fi, but there were areas where the signal wasn't strong enough. That became apparent when the school system rolled out a one-to-one initiative last year that put iPad computers in the hands of every child from third grade through 12th.

New teachers this year are scheduled to report on Aug. 11 for three days of orientation. All teachers are scheduled to start working on Aug. 24.

REGATTA

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Ace in the Hole from Pasquotank finished second and Tuff Mary from Osprey took third.

In the non-spinaker Class B division, Barbara Jean III from Edenton finished first, Autumn Wind from Osprey was second and Ember from Edenton was third.

In the cruising Class C division, Tax\$ea from Osprey was first, Iolar from Edenton was second and Carillon from Osprey finished third.

Colinton is scheduled to hold an event on Sept. 26. The Pasquotank River Yacht Club will be hosting a regatta on Oct. 3.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Bruce Hobson, Fred Levine, Micki Levine, members of Osprey Yacht Club boat Tax\$ea, pose with Osprey commodore Buzz Savage. Tax\$ea was the winner in the cruising class during a recent regatta at Albemarle Plantation.

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CORRECTION

Due to incorrect information supplied to the Perquimans Weekly, Daniel Signorelli's name was not included in the ninth grade A Honor Roll at Perquimans County High School.

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