

People weigh in on proposed wind farm in Leroy Twp by Brittany Flowers (2021)

This is a news article that talks about a proposed wind farm project being considered in rural eastern Ingham County. The project spans five townships; Ingham, Leroy, Stockbridge, Wheatfield, and White Oak and is called the Kalamink Wind Project. Apex Clean Energy is tentatively looking to build 60 wind turbines in this area. Citizens weighed in on the project during a Leroy Board of Trustees meeting on Tuesday, February 2, 2021. Opinions were mixed, one saying “I was in drastic opposition to them myself when I first heard about them. I did not want one of those noisy ugly things on my farm, but I went and listened at a wind farm north of us and I came away with a whole new perspective.” Another said “They make a buzzing sound and then there’s light flicker that happens and then they’re worried about wildlife. At the tips they say they go 180 miles an hour. In our area we get ice and so that could throw the ice a long ways and so that’s another big concern that I’ve heard.” The project is in early stages and no decisions have been made. The article links to the Apex Windmill Project presentation.

Understanding support and opposition to wind turbine development in Ontario, Canada and assessing possible steps for future development by Tanya Christidis, Geoffrey Lewis, Philip Bigelow (2017)

This research paper is about wind turbine development in Ontario, Canada. The authors performed a constant-comparison case study, based on in-depth interviewing of politicians and community members about their experiences and opinions of wind turbines. The goal of the research was to determine which characteristics of development led to acceptance or opposition towards wind turbines, and which changes in policy and/or decision-making processes might improve community acceptance of the turbines. The authors found that perceived inequalities at many levels is at the root of opposition. Residents living among wind turbines see themselves on the losing end while the ‘winners’ are neighbors who chose to develop on their property and benefit financially. Also, there is a perceived division between rural and urban Ontarians and Conservative-voting and Liberal-voting Ontario. The researchers found among opponents that there existed an acceptance of daily risk that did not extend to wind energy infrastructure. Opponents living near a nuclear facility or land-fills accepted those risks but would not accept the potentially lower risks of wind turbines. Findings suggested that future wind turbine development may be more amenable if partnered with more compensation and/or community ownership.

Synthesis

For a while now I’ve been noticing yard signs popping up around my family home in Wheatfield Township in eastern rural Ingham County saying “NO TURBINES”. It seems my hometown is in the midst of a classic NIMBY battle over a proposed wind farm development. The specific project is called Kalamink Wind. Opponents, see destruction of their rural landscape and decreased property values (Flowers, 2021). Proponents see a renewable energy

source and economic benefits. I am curious as to how other communities have dealt with this type of development and what lessons can be learned from them?

In 2009 the Ontario government created the Renewable Energy Approvals (REA) policy which removed municipal authority over wind turbine development as a reaction to obstruction from local governments. As a result there has been significant wind turbine development in the province (Christidis, et al., 2017). Researchers set out to capture the experiences and opinions of both community members and politicians on wind energy in order to identify which aspects of decision making led to acceptance or opposition.

A key finding was negativity due to inequitable distribution of costs and benefits at many levels. Large land-owning community members versus those with smaller holdings, growing high-energy-use urban areas versus shrinking rural areas, and small communities versus large corporations. The Kalamink Wind project says it will implement an “innovative, community-based lease that spreads some of the financial benefit from the project more broadly among signed landowners and residents, regardless of acreage” (Kalamink, Apex, 2021). This sounds positive, an attempt to make the project more equitable, but is it for real? Another finding from the Ontario study was that people did not trust outside corporations. They don’t trust them to prioritize their welfare and they believe they are ruthlessly driven to make a profit at their expense. Electricity generation has traditionally been a public venture in Ontario and residents were uncomfortable with the province allowing foreign companies to install and operate infrastructure. One participant said “I do think there would have been a lot less squawking (...) If it was still Ontario Hydro, ‘If Ontario Hydro says they’re putting a big power line down our road, they’re putting a big power line down our road and we can’t do anything about it’”. In Europe, where local ownership has been an essential characteristic, wind development has occurred for years without inciting large-scale opposition. Finally, results were mixed on local control. Some believed local government should have the power to decide whether development occurs and if it had been so then there would be broader acceptance. Others believed decision-making needed to occur at the provincial level in order to meet larger goals (Christidis, et al., 2017).

In Michigan, local approval is required, for now. But what about the future? How will we as urban planners manage the challenge of this energy transition? To be sure we must be equitable. We will need to integrate these new developments into the community with employment opportunities and benefits and create trust, familiarity, and acceptance of the technology. So, am I for or against the Kalamink Wind project? I have definitely gained new empathy for NIMBYs and those living amongst locally unwanted land uses. I do not like the idea of massive windmills churning away outside my window, but I am a supporter of renewable energy and I know we must move forward with the transition.

Research Question

How can we make large scale projects like wind farms fair for everybody? Should measures for equity be built into the zoning ordinance? Ideally local control is desired but what

do we do if no communities accept the development? Who should be developing and operating the new energy infrastructure - for-profit corporations, non-profit cooperatives, or government entities and what are the advantages or disadvantages of each?

References

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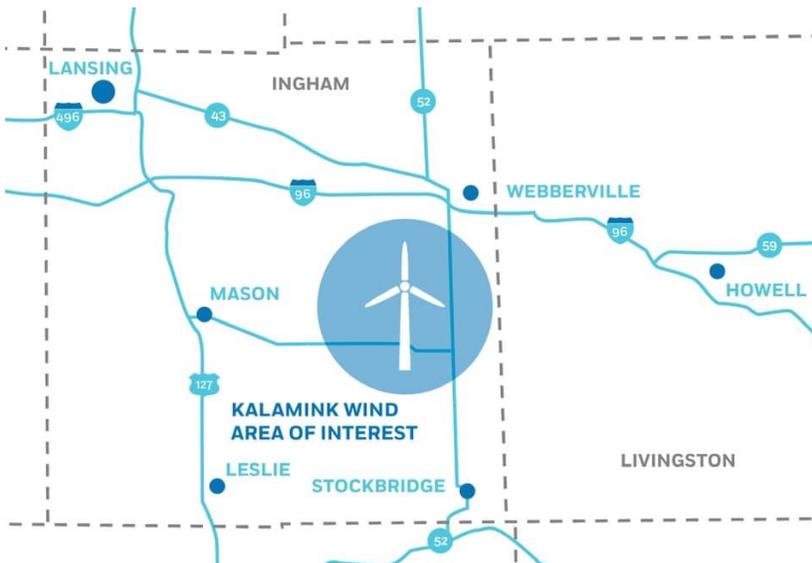
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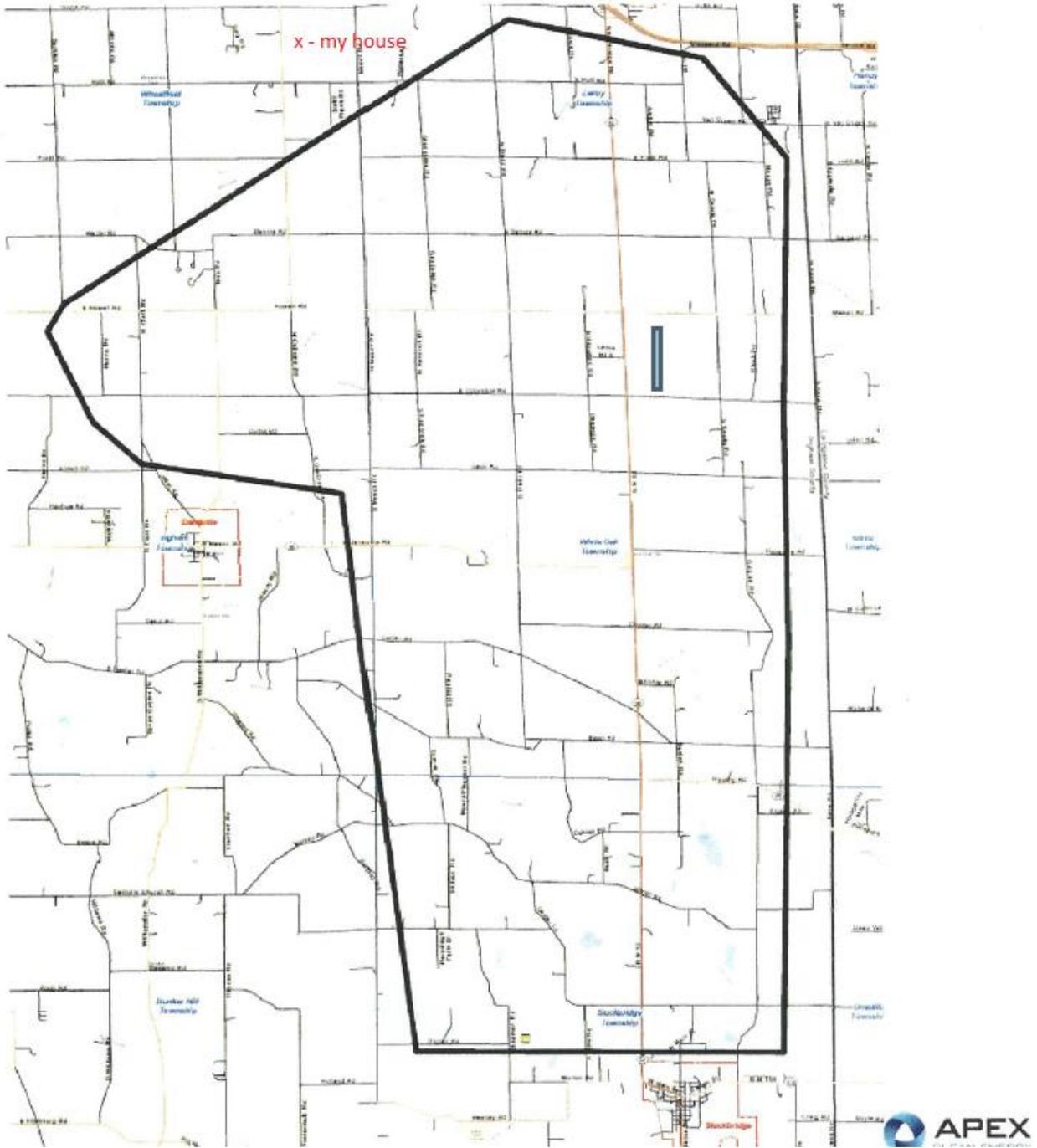
Figures



Yard signs (source: Ingham County Citizens United stopturbines.com)



Proposed area for the Kalamink Wind Project (source: Flowers, 2021)



Detailed area of interest for Kalamink Wind Project (source: Apex Windmill Project, 2021)