

Wind Plan Gets a 'No' from Kittitas County Commissioners, for Now

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Although Kittitas County commissioners on Tuesday turned down a proposal to establish land-use rules for large-scale community wind energy projects, they still like the idea and want to see more work on guidelines to make it possible in rural areas of the county.

Commissioners Alan Crankovich, Mark McClain and Paul Jewell made it clear the proposal is an opportunity for rural property owners to partner with firms like Cascade Community Wind Co. LLC for high-tech economic development.

They also recognized there is wide support for the proposal from rural residents and property owners.

Commissioners also said more safeguards are needed in the land-use rules for the proposal to make the tall turbine towers more safe and compatible with surrounding neighbors and rural land activities.

The towers, although proposed to be allowed in fewer numbers and with limitations on per-acre density, can be as large as the existing Wild Horse commercial wind farm east of Ellensburg.

After discussion, commissioners agreed to deny the proposal as it currently is written and as it was recommended by the county Planning Commission.

Yet they encouraged the applicant, a county landowner and an agent representing Cascade Community Wind Co. LLC to work with county planning staff to refine the proposal in the coming months.

After the Tuesday session, Jewell said county staff has been directed to form a working group and a work plan to cooperate with the applicant to resolve several issues including setbacks from roads, homes, property lines and other structures.

Jewell said the revised community wind proposal could be resubmitted to the county by June 30, 2010, to be considered by the end of that year in the annual amendment process.

The other option is the county can administratively agree to review a new proposal through public hearings much earlier as a change in its development and zoning regulations.

Terry Meyer, the principal in the Cascade Community Wind Co. LLC, said in letters to commissioners that proposed amendments for community wind energy systems are compatible with the county's comprehensive land-use plan and policies.

He earlier suggested that the proposal could be approved now by commissioners as a conditional use, and the county and Cascade Wind then could work on refining the proposal in the coming weeks and months.

Neil Caulkins, a county civil deputy prosecutor, said it is unlikely there is time to go through the public review process for such a change before the end of this year, and said development code changes like this and accompanying changes in the comp plan must be submitted and reviewed at the same time.

Comp plan changes, amendments

- For online information on the county's comprehensive plan compliance work and decisions to date go to: www.co.kittitas.wa.us/cds/compplan2009.asp
- For online information on the county's annual comp plan amendment requests and decisions go to: www.co.kittitas.wa.us/cds/compplan.asp#2009, then scroll down to "2009 Comprehensive Plan".