

Guest Editorial

Time for Debate on Wind Turbine

By Laura Griffin
Times Staff

As of May 15, the town had spent more than \$1 million on the wind turbine project and a quarter of that or \$246,000 has been for legal fees.

There's another \$5 million in the kitty that can still be spent on a wind turbine or the selectmen can decide the town has dodged a bullet and shut down that bond.

But who knows? The answers, my friends, are blowing in the wind.

In the last six months, all discussions of the wind turbine have been shrouded in mystery. Despite questionable legality, Selectmen opted for executive session discussions of the turbine's future after a judge's decision significantly reduced hours of operation and potential income.

The preliminary decision was issued Oct. 31 and the final on Jan. 31. Board members have repeatedly refused to post that binding arbitration decision on the Wind Energy Committee website or even to share it with members of that committee. Times readers can access the decision on our website, www.milontimes.com.

The Wind Energy Committee is now down to one member as the other four either resigned or declined renewal of their appointments.

One committee member, an expert in green energy, labeled the turbine project "ill-fated." Several sounded unhappy with the lack of communication from the board.

Now, time's running out and the bond money is dribbling away, a couple thousand here and a couple of thousand there. Again in secrecy, selectmen may

be considering a shorter turbine or a different site but who knows?

Of course, they could drop the project and spend \$5 million dollars on the infrastructure improvements sought at Town Meeting with another bond. Those improvements would not only impact the environment in a positive way but save bundles of money for the town and water and sewer ratepayers.

Once it seemed a great idea - raise a 450-foot wind turbine atop the old landfill as a symbol of Milton's commitment to green energy and a cash cow that would feed some \$800,000 annually into town coffers for 20 years. Of course, that bonanza was simply gross income as the \$6 million bond plus interest would have to be paid.

At the time, few questioned the projected investment because commitment to wind energy and to the environment meant saving the world one town at a time and earning money.

Those few who dared were shunned and scorned. In fact, anyone dining or having a fund-raiser at Quarry Hills Golf Course was viewed as a traitor as the course's owners, Quarry Hills Associates, Inc., had filed the legal action to shut down the turbine project.

It is possible there's a viable plan for a turbine, but it's also possible that the judge's decision has spared Milton from losing many more millions in the future as lawsuits about health and noise are dogging turbine projects across the state. Falmouth even considered dismantling its turbine.

Litigation costs more than wind power earns, so the lost time and the litigation may have worked in the town's favor. What's needed is a public discus-

sion and that's never been the case with the wind turbine.

Even the judge in the arbitration, the Hon. Gordon Doerfer, chided the town for shutting down discussion.

Judge Doerfer stated that the creation of the Wind Turbine Overlay District eliminated the special permit process "...in which the impacts of the project would be reviewed and abutters given an opportunity to object."

Just last week, Selectman Tom Hurley said the arbitration decision has not been filed and is, therefore, not finalized.

Actually, Judge Doerfer didn't have kind words for the town's preparedness as evident on page 25 and he rejected all of the town's counterclaims which may explain some reluctance to publish Doerfer's very readable 27-page decision.

As for the court filing, that has no impact on the arbitration decision, according to Jeffrey Tocchio, attorney for QHA, Inc.

In an email response to questions about the decision, Tocchio wrote, "Also, so that you know, the Arbitrator's Order is binding and enforceable in Massachusetts regardless of whether it is filed with the court. Given the remaining length of the Lease Term, we thought that it would be 'cleaner' to have it entered in court. Any suggestion that the Town is not bound by the Order, would be incorrect."

The questions now: Where does Milton go from here and will the public have a voice in that decision?

Selectmen Chairman Denis Keohane said last week it's time to address the issue. That's a good first move.