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Wind turbines prompt debate

By **KATHY MELLOTT**
The Tribune-Democrat

BEDFORD — One need look only to the counties east, west and north of Bedford County to realize it is just a matter of time before wind turbines will be dotting the local landscape.

But many months before any windmills are in place, the subject has officials taking sides regarding local regulations and county influence.

Township officials in Bedford County generally support wind energy, and many are willing to host such businesses in their municipalities.

Yet they think they are hearing from the Bedford County Planning Commission that turbines may not be such a good idea, said Robert Stanton, a West Providence Township supervisor.

"We put (turbines) up there and they bother no one. If we can, we should use this good, clean air to produce electricity," Stanton told planning-commission officials and about 30 local leaders last week in Bedford. "Mountain ground is pretty much waste ground that can be used for something like this."

But county officials said they are only trying to get local officials to think about wind energy's impact.

"It's up to the township to do the land-use management. But it's up to us to give some guidance," county Commissioner Steve Howsare said. "I'm not against (turbines). I think they're better than coal or nuclear power, but if we have some regulations, they can fit in better."






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Wind meters already are atop the Brumbaugh-Evitts mountain range. PPM Atlantic Renewable Energy of Portland, Ore., and FPL Energy of Juno Beach, Fla., expect to know within two years if the wind velocity will meet their needs.

The Brumbaugh Mountain area is especially attractive to wind-energy companies because it runs adjacent to a major power transmission line, said Jeffrey Kloss, executive director of the planning commission.

Charles Swartzwelder of East Providence Township, which encompasses the heavily congested Breezewood area, thinks the high ranges there soon will be a target for renewable-energy companies.

"If it's done right, it makes sense. It's free. It's out there," Swartzwelder said.

"We're trying to be as objective as we can possibly be about this. These are local decisions, and we respect that," Kloss said. "We look at wind turbines as another land use, and that brings its own special needs."

Kloss wants township officials to consider including turbines in their land-use planning and perhaps adopt or alter nuisance ordinances spelling out where the turbines can be placed and details regarding their operation.

He has offered copies of an ordinance developed by lawyers from Cambria and Blair counties with input from turbine maker Gamesa Corp. of Ebersburg. The ordinance has been enacted by four townships in those counties.

The rules spell out host fees that Gamesa will pay the townships, along with setbacks from homes and acceptable noise levels.

Howsare said he never before considered what will happen to the turbines once they are no longer being used.

Kloss said the windmills can stretch 400 feet high.

"People need to be aware of what can happen," Howsare said.

Another area of concern is the potential damage turbines may cause to birds and bats in the area, Kloss said. The creatures could be killed by the turning blades.

A mountain range through the county has been designated the Greater Tussey Mountain, an important flyway starting in Maryland and running into Centre County.

In a one-year count, 6,500 raptors and 150 golden eagles were spotted flying along the mountain range.

"We're not talking about starlings, here. We're talking about some serious birds," Kloss said.

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An equally important bird area is along the Bedford-Somerset county line, officials said.

Kathy Mellott can be reached at 539-5328 or kmellott@tribdem.com.



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