

In the works: An overview of three major wind projects at various stages in our area

filed: February 3, 2019 • Ohio

Credit: Vicki Johnson, Staff Writer | The Advertiser-Tribune | Feb 3, 2019 | www.advertiser-tribune.com ~~

Three proposed wind farm projects are in the works in Seneca County – Seneca Wind Farm, Republic Wind Farm and Emerson Creek Wind Farm. If approved, each of the proposed projects would place wind turbines in the eastern part of the county designed to generate electricity using wind power. Each of the three projects is in a different stage of requesting a certificate from the Ohio Power Siting Board that would allow construction to begin.

Seneca Wind

Seneca Wind is the project furthest along in the certificate process. Seneca Wind (case number 18-0488-EL-BGN), is a proposed project of Seneca Wind LLC, a subsidiary of sPower, short for Sustainable Power Group. sPower is a joint venture of AES Corp., of Arlington, Virginia, and Alberta Investment Management Corp., of Alberta, Canada.

The OPSB website, www.opsb.ohio.gov, lists Seneca Wind Farm as in the “staff investigation” stage. An application has been filed and OPSB staff members are conducting an investigation into the proposed project. The project would be constructed entirely within the county on about 25,000 acres of privately-leased land, using up to 77 turbines, said Dan Williamson, spokesman for Seneca Wind.

Turbines would have an electric-generating capacity of up to 212 megawatts. Turbines would be placed in the townships of Scipio, Reed, Venice, Eden and Bloom.

Seneca Wind sent its first pre-application letter to OPSB in April 2018 and filed an application for a certificate of environmental compatibility and public need for a wind-powered generating facility in mid-July 2018.

In mid-October, OPSB filed a notice that the application was complete, and on Dec. 7 OPSB set a timetable for an investigation and hearings. The 1st public hearing was listed on the website for February, but earlier this week Seneca Wind requested an extension until April.

The delay request stemmed from delays in getting needed information due to recent federal government shutdown.

The new timetable sets a tentative date for the public hearing during the week of April 22, and the final hearing “no sooner than April 30.”

Prior to Seneca Wind’s request for a delay, the company filed suit Monday in Seneca County Common Pleas Court against 30 landowners alleging breach of leases. The lawsuit seeks a court order to allow company representatives onto the properties.

Tuesday, Seneca County Park District filed a motion of intervention with OPSB requesting buffer zones of 2.5 miles around all county parks where wind turbines would not be placed.

An intervention means the park district has requested the right to participate as a party of record in case proceedings. Interveners are served with all documents in the case, participate in the adjudicatory hearing, and may file for rehearing or appeal a board decision to Ohio Supreme Court, according to the OPSB website. The Ohio Revised Code grants intervention rights to individuals, organizations and government entities if they meet specified criteria.

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Requests for intervention previously were filed by many local residents, the county commissioners and the trustees of affected townships as well as Seneca East Local Schools, Black Swamp Bird Observatory, of Oak Harbor, and the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

Republic Wind

Another wind turbine project is Republic Wind Farm (case number 17-2295-EL-BGN). The OPSB website lists the project as in the “pending” stage. The project is proposed by Republic Wind LLC, a subsidiary of APEX Wind Energy, of Charlottesville, Virginia.

The project would erect up to 50 wind turbines on 24,000 acres of leased private land in Seneca County’s townships of Adams, Pleasant, Reed, Scipio and Thompson, and Sandusky County’s York Township. The electric-generating capacity would be up to 200 megawatts.

Republic Wind Feb. 2, 2018, filed an application for a certificate of environmental compatibility and public need, and the application was accepted on May 28, 2018. Republic Wind filed a motion Aug. 29 to halt the process, which was granted Sept. 4, and an amended application was filed Dec. 26 asking the OPSB to set a hearing within 90 days. The request to schedule a hearing by March 26 was denied due to the scope of the changes made to the project.

The amended project is under review by OPSB. Hearings are to be scheduled if the amendment is accepted. Intervention petitions had been filed by several groups of Seneca County residents in June 2018 to include the county commissioners and township trustees of affected townships in Seneca and Sandusky counties, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and the Ohio Environmental Council and the Environmental Defense Fund. There have been judgement entries denying the petitions of some residents, citing their distance from the proposed project site. The most recent activity has been new intervention petitions filed by the county commissioners after the amendment was filed, withdrawal of an intervention request by Pleasant Township trustees because the project no longer affects that township, and an intervention petition filed by the Seneca County Park District.

Emerson Creek

A third wind project in the planning stages is Emerson Creek Wind Farm (case number 18-1607-EL-BGN) proposed by Firelands Wind LLC, another subsidiary of APEX Wind Energy. The OPSB website lists the project as being in the pre-application stage. On January 31, 2019 APEX filed for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need to Construct a Wind-Powered Electric Generation Facility in Huron and Erie Counties, Ohio (“Facility”). The project, proposed for Erie and Huron counties, includes a few proposed turbines on the edge of Seneca County, according to information from the website.

The completed Project will encompass about 32,000 acres of leased land in Groton and Oxford Townships (Erie County) and Lyme, Norwich, Richmond, Ridgefield, and Sherman Townships (Huron County). Of the 41,000-acre Project Area, only 1,000 parcels totaling approximately 32,000 acres are owned and/or under lease by the Applicant for the proposed Facility. The Facility presented consists of up to 87 wind turbine generators¹, each with a nameplate capacity rating of 4.2 to 4.5 megawatts (MW). The Facility will not exceed 297.66 MW. The number of turbines will range between 66 and 71, depending on the model of turbine selected (i.e., if a 4.2 MW turbine is selected, it is expected that up to 71 turbines will be constructed; if a 4.5 MW turbine is selected, it is expected that up to 66 turbines will be constructed).

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Other Area projects

Although not directly related to Seneca County, there are two other open wind farm proposals in neighboring counties.

The Black Ford Wind Farm in Crawford and Richland counties is listed in the “staff investigation” stage on the OPSB website. The original application was filed March 10, 2011, and OPSB approved the project Jan. 23, 2012. Intervenors appealed the OPSB board’s decision to the Supreme Court May 24, 2012, and the Supreme Court affirmed the OPSB decision Dec. 18, 2013.

Black Fork submitted an amendment to its application Sept. 12, 2014, which was approved by OPSB Aug. 25, 2015, with objections from intervenors.

OPSB approved an extension of the certificate from Jan. 23, 2017, to Jan. 23, 2019.

Black Fork then submitted an application to amend its certificate to use different turbines and extend its certificate to Jan. 23, 2020, and OPSB approved the application Dec. 7, 2017.

Intervenors then requested a rehearing Dec. 27, 2017, which OPSB denied June 21, 2018. Intervenors then appealed to the Supreme Court and the case is pending.

Another project called Greenwich Windpark in Huron County was approved by OPSB in Aug. 25, 2014, after an application was filed in April 2013, according to the OPSB website. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court and has been in the appeal process, apparently since September 2017.

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