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Forum highlights wind power's local limits, possibilities

By Kerry O'Brien
 Published On Wednesday, March 23, 2011

LEOMINSTER — Municipal officials, students and others gathered for an educational overview and legislative update on the expanding wind energy market during a wind turbine siting workshop held by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, Tuesday.

As the demand for renewable energy increases in the region, the planning commission held the program to give legislators and town officials with experience in the process a platform to explain the many facets and pros and cons of wind energy generation.

Officials from Athol, Sterling, Westminster and Fitchburg were in attendance, all stating that their main point of interest would be reviewing the town of Savoy's zoning bylaws regarding wind turbines. Each town is in the process of drafting such bylaws to accommodate wind turbines.

Don McCauley of Minuteman Wind noted that challenges exist to utilizing wind power.

"Its not a natural resource intrinsic to New England," Mr. McCauley said "You have to be wary to adapt a model that fits into the physical and political reality of your town, and consider how it impacts your neighborhood and communities."

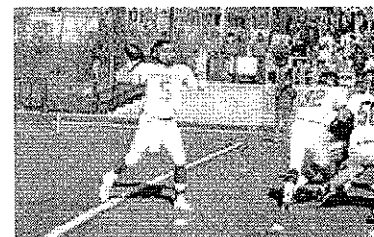
Mr. McCauley went on to detail the ongoing battle Minuteman Wind has had every step of the way in the creation of what he called a "wind garden." Even though approximately two-thirds of Savoy residents were in favor of erecting wind energy turbines in town, Minuteman still faced strong opposition from the town's planning board, which refused to draft needed bylaws.

In addition, getting National Grid to purchase the energy that the wind turbines generate is difficult in the natural gas and coal driven market.

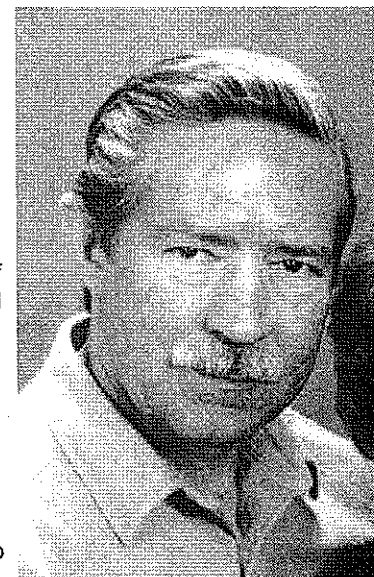
Besides difficulties within town government and community impact, state Rep. Dennis A. Rosa of Leominster went on to explain that the legislation which will support the energy source is only at its beginning stages. There are currently 166 bills before the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy, and many have been continued from years past and will most likely be continued for years to come.



John Frederick Nolan



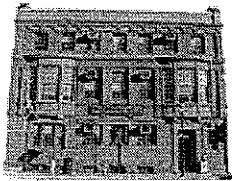
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"If you don't discuss and debate the issues thoroughly enough, you end up with a bad bill," Rep. Rosa said.

However, he also assured his continuing support for the evolving market.

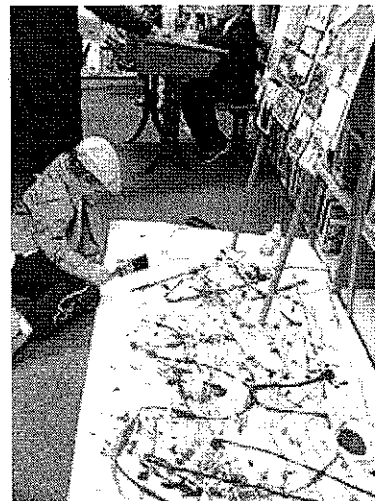
"This is the future," Rep. Rosa said. "This is how we're going to save and create renewable energy."

The event concluded with a presentation from Jonathan Fitch of Princeton Municipal Light, showing an accelerated video of wind turbine construction.

The educational event was hosted by the planning commission to address the growing interest in renewable energy throughout the region.

"Renewable energy has a vital role in the Montachusett regional planning area," said Glenn Eaton, the planning commission's executive director. "The decisions we make will greatly influence our future."

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Making an impression



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