

Quincy considers new wind turbine rules

Ordinance proposed by mayoral task force would streamline permitting process

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QUINCY — A proposal that would both streamline and regulate the process for erecting wind turbines in Quincy is being contemplated by city officials.

A mayoral task force introduced the ordinance this week after a year of study, saying it would essentially bring the city's zoning code up to speed with 21st-century technology.

It outlines where wind turbines can be built, how they must relate to the surroundings and what process developers must follow. No one would be exempt from the ordinance – neither the city nor the state.

The planning board will hear the proposal tonight. On Monday, a city council subcommittee unanimously approved the plan after making changes, most notably to the required amount of space between a turbine and neighboring properties.

Christopher Walker, who acted as Mayor Thomas Koch's representative on the committee, called the ordinance "a first step toward harnessing wind power in our city."

"It was not written with any specific site in mind, nor ruling out any site," he said.

So far, two serious proposals have been made.

In August 2007, contractor Jay Cashman applied for a permit to build a 390-foot-tall turbine on property his company owns at the former Fore River shipyard, hoping to generate energy to sell to nearby businesses.

Three months later, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority announced that it was considering building a wind turbine at Nut Island to power its underground sewage pumping station.

The two proposals prompted the city's efforts to update its laws, and Cashman withdrew his application to allow for that process. Walker said the mayor's office has not been approached formally yet on either project.

Former Quincy City Councilor Larry Chretien, who is executive director of Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance and sat on the city's wind committee, said the ordinance is essential to ensure the city treats proposed projects swiftly and evenly. He said the committee's proposal is based on the model bylaw provided by the state.

The law would prohibit wind turbines in residentially zoned areas, unless the zoning board of appeals grants a variance. The planning board would be the permitting authority on all other proposals, and would either conduct a site plan review or more intensive special permit process depending on the size of the turbine.

The distance between a turbine and neighboring properties would have to be at least 1½ times the height of the turbine as measured from the ground to the tip of a blade in a straight-up position.

The ordinance has received wide support from Quincy's environmental community, many of whom spoke at the city council hearing Monday. The unanimous subcommittee approval gives the ordinance a good chance at being passed when it appears before the full city council for a final vote in coming weeks.

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