

Orleans Legislature wants survey before weighing in on wind project



Photos by Tom Rivers

David Callard, chairman of the Orleans County Legislature, says he doesn't like a siting board determining if the wind project will happen in Yates and Somerset. He wants to hear from Yates residents in "bona fide survey" before the Legislature takes a public stance on the project.

By Tom Rivers, Editor Posted 27 August 2015

ALBION – The Orleans County Legislature, under pressure to publicly renounce a wind energy project in Yates and Somerset, will wait to see the results of a survey of residents, Legislature Chairman David Callard said Wednesday.

He addressed the issue after several residents and members of the Save Ontario Shores citizen group spoke against the project that could bring 60 to 70 turbines, peaking at 570 feet tall, to the two towns.

"They would be far more detrimental to the health and safety than any financial benefit," said Yates resident Cynthia Hellert.

Deb Holt, a resident of Murray, said the big turbines are in a major migratory bird path. She worries about the impact on birds, wildlife, and also with nearby residents due to shadow flicker and low-frequency sound.

The Somerset Town Board and Niagara County Legislature have both gone on record opposing

the project by Apex Clean Energy of Charlottesville, Va. Those boards voted following a survey of Somerset residents that showed strong opposition to the project.

Yates officials announced on Aug. 13 the town would survey residents about the project and would establish a committee including a representative from the Town Board, Apex and Save Ontario Shores.

“We’re waiting on a bona fide survey from Yates so we can see what the people say,” Callard said. “We want to find out what people say before we make a determination.”



Yates resident Cynthia Hellert speaks against a proposed wind energy project during Wednesday's Orleans County Legislature meeting.

Callard said Yates has the more direct role in the project. He didn't want to “tell the town what to do” just like he doesn't like it when the state dictates how the county should respond to an issue.

Although the Legislature hasn't formally weighed in on the project, Callard noted the Legislature has been consistent in supporting home rule, the right for a local community to welcome or oppose a project.

The state has taken home rule away with the wind turbine project by giving a state siting board the final vote on the project, Callard said. That seven-member board only includes two representatives from the local community, he said, giving the local towns a minority vote.

Besides the two local representatives on the siting committee, the seven-member group is chaired by the state Department of Public Service and includes the leaders of four other state departments: Department of Environmental Conservation, NYSERDA (New York State Energy Research and

Development Authority), Empire State Development and the Department of Health.

“It’s tilted to the state,” Callard said.

Apex officials are working on a scoping documents that identify potential issues in 41 categories, including health and safety issues, state and local law compliance, wildlife and numerous other issues. The company told town officials on Aug. 13 the document could be ready within two months.

Agnes LaPorte of Somerset urged Orleans officials to push back strong against the project.

“In Somerset we’re constantly bombarded with this windmill thing,” LaPorte said.

Some of the Somerset landowners are refusing to lease land for the turbines, which LaPorte said will push more turbines to Yates and Orleans County.

“They will come to your area,” she said. “It will destroy the area.”

Callard said Niagara County and Somerset officials welcomed Apex, assuming the community would want the project. Then the survey results came out.

“They did a 180 when they realized the people were against it,” Callard said.