

Report on visits to Wind Farms in Fenner and in Madison, NY

by Claire Trask
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As a member of the Londonderry selectboard, I feel it is my duty to get as much information about whatever it is that I'm being asked to make decisions about as I possibly can. I have in excess of 11lbs. of papers that I have read so far on the subject of wind farms, peoples' opinions of wind farms, studies done about wind farms, news paper articles written about wind farms, etc. etc. etc. It seemed like time to experience a wind farm.

Early in August I had a telephone conversation with the Town Clerk of Madison, N. Y. I asked her how many windmills there are in her town, how people feel about them, if it is possible to get near them, how much controversy they have aroused and if property values or anything else were affected by them. She said there are seven windmills, there were questions from some people when they were first proposed, but there was no opposition after their questions were answered. She said the only effect of the windmills in the 5 years they have been there is an increase in tourists. I asked about local newspapers and letters to the editor and she said there were news articles as the project went forth, but not much in the way of letters to the editor.

In mid-August my husband and I went to see for ourselves what the turbines looked like, sounded like, felt like and what effect they had on the people who live with them every day. The country-side along New York Route 20 (a designated Scenic Highway since late 1999 or early 2000) is easiest described as "rolling", but it is more sharply up and down than I normally think of as rolling. There are a number of farms, hay fields, cornfields and soy bean fields strung out between villages and small towns. Madison is the site of the largest antique show in the Northeast with thousands of dealers coming for the weekend. We saw only the build up to the weekend so we saw only about 700 or 800 dealers' tents set up. Because of tourists and near by colleges there are motels and restaurants scattered about along rte 20.

We were able to drive up to the gate of the wind farm in Madison, but the gentleman who could have let us inside was away for a few days, just checking in by computer with the towers. He had taken advantage of the opportunity to rent his parking lot out to a maker of wooden toys while the antique dealers were in town. So we found ourselves about 150 yards from the nearest wind tower on a day with just a light breeze. Some of the time that we were there that afternoon none of the blades were turning, other times most of them (6 of the 7) were turning. We could hear crickets and much less faintly a slight wooshing sound. Conversation drowned out the wooshing. By the time we left a herd of cows had arrived and made their way along their fence line about 100 yards from the turbine nearest them. They paid no attention to the turbines at all. There was an informational sign erected near the gate that noted the towers are a total of 328 feet tall with 110 ft. of that being the blades, they are 1.65 MW towers made by Vespa, they produce enough electricity to power 10,000 homes, the power goes into the grid for everyone's use and they could possibly throw ice for 500 feet. It was also noted that for every MW of electricity produced by a wind mill 5 lbs. Of Sulfur Dioxide would not be produced, 2 lbs. Of Nitrogen Oxide would not be produced and 1000 lbs. Of Carbon Dioxide would not be produced. I assumed those pollutants are produced by coal fired plants producing the same amount of electricity. I noted that each tower had two lights attached to the rear of the nacelle, that is, at the other end of the nacelle from where the blades attach; one red and one white. They were flashing strobes and the white one was the one working during the day. Unless I was near the fence and looking right at the light, I didn't notice the flash in the bright sun. The towers and blades were painted a brilliant white. On Wed. we drove around the area at night to see what they looked like and I noted that all the towers were lit at night. Because they were in a cluster (or seemed to be from the part of the road where we stopped to study them) I could see all 7 lights at once in a seemingly small space and I did not like it at all. I had noted earlier in the day that the lights were not to the center of the nacelle and that there was no shield to keep them from shining down toward the ground. They were flashing about 3 seconds on and 5 seconds off. I also noted that almost all the trees in this part of the state are deciduous so these towers are visible from even more places in the winter. Also I was viewing them from a spot almost as high as the bottom of the tower.

On Wed. morning following instructions to "Drive toward Fenner until you see them." We took route 20 to Fenner N.Y. (about 10 miles as the crow flies) to see a wind farm with 20 G.E. windmills. We stopped once to ask which back road would get us right to the wind farm, and met the only two people we encountered on the

trip who did not like the windmills. Two men at an auto body shop said they looked like skeletons in the wintertime and they chase the deer away. But they gave us good directions to a road running through the wind farm that let us get within 100 yards of a tower and from where we could see thirteen wind turbines at once. There was no fence around these turbines, but they were placed in hay and alfalfa fields. One of the farmers was haying near by and as we stood there looking at 13 moving wind turbines and wishing he would turn the tractor off so we could hear the turbines, he did just that. We stayed and talked for about 30 minutes. With the tractor off we could hear the faint wooshing that we had heard at Madison, the songbirds and the sea gulls. The temperature seemingly wasn't right for crickets that day. There was a fairly stiff breeze and according to the farmer the blades were turning as fast as they ever do, which I noted wasn't very fast. When the breeze did pick up, the breeze made more noise across my ear than the turbines and I couldn't hear them at all. When I asked about complaints to the town re: view shed, noise, property values etc. he said that people with larger homes on the next ridge who could see the turbines had complained before the turbines went up, but since they have been up (three years) the same people have told him they don't have a problem with the turbines. He noted that he has been offered twice what his farm is valued at, but has no wish to sell. When asked about wild animals and bird kills, he said the deer graze under the turbines and he hasn't seen any dead birds; he thinks that latter fact is because the blades move so slowly the birds can avoid them. Asked about height of turbines, the farmer said they were about 350 ft. tall to the top of the blade. He also noted that anyone who has come to the farm to see for themselves how terrible wind mills are have left feeling good about them. What amazed me was the feeling of serenity that I had there. I could, by just turning my head, see 13 moving wind turbines and the slow movement was not intrusive. Leaving him to his work we drove further down the road, and found a place where we were about 75 yards from a tower. At this distance I could hear a hum coming from the nacelle, but still a sound that was much fainter than our conversation. The nearest house was about 200 yards from this tower. These towers were also painted a brilliant white, but I noted that as a cloud shadowed them, they appeared grayish and so blended into the background. I noted the same arrangement of lights on the towers as in Madison, and still feel that should and could be handled differently.

About two miles from the towers we happened to pass the Town Clerk's office for the town of Eaton and stopping in we were able to talk with the Town Clerk, the Town Supervisor and an assessor for 4 of the surrounding towns. They have received one complaint about the windmills. One man complained that when he opens his windows in the summer, he can hear a windmill. The towers have been up for three years and the town has seen no impact on land sales, property values etc. because of the towers. The wind developer does pay the school and the town about \$30,000 each per year. There is a wind farm developer who wants to put 27 turbines up on a ridge that runs through 4 towns, and some people feel that a total of 54 turbines in the area might be too many, but most people have not shown any concern. Asked about higher end properties, the Supervisor referred us to Cazenovia, N.Y. just a bit down the same route 20. Cazenovia is about 15 miles as the crow flies from the 20 turbines in Fenner and according to the town assessor (what we call a lister) the turbines can be seen from Ridge Rd. in Cazenovia, but have no effect on the people or properties in Cazenovia. Asked what the high-end value of residential property is in Cazenovia the assessor said about \$650,000. The town itself reminded us of Manchester before the outlet stores moved in (There were lots of stores, but no chain stores.) with the beautiful 3 story "painted ladies" from Atkinson St. in Bellows Falls added in.

Another stop that we made was in Hamilton, N.Y., which is about 4 miles from Madison. Before leaving home I had talked on the phone with a woman from The Mid -York Weekly, an area paper much like The Message is for Londonderry and the surrounding towns. I had asked specifically about Letters-to-the-Editor concerning the wind turbines in Madison before and after they went up. She said there had been one or two letters before the turbines went up asking some questions about them, but that was all the letters they had gotten. The editor did say that she would gather what stories they had run for us to see. We came away with four front page articles (9/20/00—The ground breaking ceremony, 8/17/00--- pictures of a tower going up, 9/14/00---A picture from the air with an announcement of a community open house and ice cream social at the wind farm on 9/16 with buses for transportation and 9/21/00---pictures taken at the open house) and no Letters-To-The-Editor.

I think anyone with questions or doubts should go and visit these sites. Bob and I took three days and two nights in the area and can attest that even if you hate wind farms, the friendly people and beautiful countryside will brighten your day. It isn't every town where you find yourself working on crossword puzzles with the locals at the next table in a restaurant.

Any comments or questions you have for me can be sent to Claire C. Trask, P. O. Box 157, Londonderry, VT 05148. I'm referring you to my home address since these are my personal observations, not the observations of the Londonderry selectboard. It is because these are my personal observations that this report is not on the Town of Londonderry website.