

The Martha's Vineyard Times

Wind is focus of Aquinnah energy DCPC

By Nelson Sigelman

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Proponents of an Aquinnah District of Critical Planning Concern (DCPC) want quick action when the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) holds a public hearing May 8 on a proposed menu of regulations focused on wind turbines.

The Martha's Vineyard Commission has scheduled the hearing on a procedural amendment to the DCPC boundaries and the regulations. The hearing will begin at 7:30 pm, May 8, in the MVC offices in Oak Bluffs. It is one of the last steps in a process that began last December, when the MVC accepted the energy district nomination.

The town then had one year to craft regulations and bring them back to the Martha's Vineyard Commission at a public hearing. If the MVC approves the regulations, the final step in any DCPC application process is a vote at town meeting, where approval requires a two-thirds majority.

The Aquinnah energy DCPC regulations will be presented to voters at the Aquinnah annual town meeting on Tuesday May 13, less than one week after the scheduled public hearing.

The short timetable could present some complications if the commissioners, who will be discussing the regulations for the first time, decide they want to revise or reject proposed regulations. The regulations would then need to be amended on the town meeting floor prior to a vote on the entire package.

The package that will be presented at the public hearing and to voters is only the first part of a more comprehensive set of regulations that town leaders expect to add later. They decided to push ahead now because of the recent interest in wind energy.

A DCPC designation provides for special regulations that are enforceable by the town and backed up by the powerful permitting authority of the Martha's Vineyard Commission. The proposed DCPC regulations would encompass all land and waters in the town, except those of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah).

DCPC regs

The purposes of the proposed DCPC are broad and reflect the town's energy concerns. "The goal of this by-law is to reduce the overall consumption of fossil fuels through energy conservation and the local generation of energy from renewable sources, while minimizing any negative impact on residents and visitors and while preserving and protecting the cultural and natural environment of the town ... This includes the unique natural beauty and the rural and visual character of the landscape, the significance of the land for the people of Gay Head/Aquinnah, historical values and reverence of coastline."

The first priority, the DCPC states, "is to reduce the overall consumption of fossil fuels by improving efficiencies and reducing wasteful practices, especially by using building construction and renovation practices that optimize energy efficiency."

The new regulations include requirements for a professional energy audit before the issuance of a building or special permit and a call for solar or geothermal heating of pools and hot tubs.

Only one wind tower would be allowed per lot. Groups of homeowners would be allowed to pool their resources to erect a wind tower.

The regulations restrict wind facilities in specific areas of town, including the Moshup Trail and Cliff DCPCs, but allow for placement depending on the public benefit of the facility.

Siting guidelines are intended to minimize intrusion "on the enjoyment of the town's open spaces as viewed from any public way and to not interrupt or fragment important views..."

Tribe, town gulf

Even as the town seeks regulations governing wind turbines, a town group calling itself the Aquinnah Wind Energy Committee and the Wampanoag tribe are on separate tracks to erect wind turbines.

Almost two years ago, the tribe unveiled an ambitious plan to harness the prevailing winds that sweep off the Atlantic to produce electricity for the tribe's needs and the Vineyard community. The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC) provided a \$50,000 grant.

The first step was to erect a 150-foot meteorological tower to measure the wind and collect other relevant data over a six- to nine-month period on tribal property. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) agreed to lend a tower. The plan, stalled for more than one year, is now moving forward.

At the same time the town energy committee received a grant to study possible sites for a wind turbine. The group has identified land behind the old town hall and the town-owned parking lot near the Gay Head cliffs. The next step would be a tower study.

There appears to be little communication or cooperation between the town and tribe over efforts to harness wind power.

Camille Rose, chairman of the three-member board of selectmen, told The Times that she is unaware of the tribe's plans. Jeff Burgoyne, town administrator, said he is also unaware of the tribe's plans.

The town officials did not know that within weeks the tribe will erect its long planned meteorological tower. According to an MTC spokesperson, the tower will be erected on May 21 or 22.

Yesterday, Richard Randolph, associate tribal planner, told The Times, "The tentative date is late May."

Told that Ms. Rose and Mr. Burgoyne did not know about the tower, Mr. Randolph said, "Those two individuals have chosen not to work with the tribe."

In a telephone call late yesterday, Mr. Burgoyne disputed that notion. "That's certainly not the case," he said.

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