

South Bruce Peninsula council says no to wind farms

Owen Sound Sun Times

September 18, 2012

By Scott Dunn

Citizens opposed to industrial wind turbines on the Bruce Peninsula urged South Bruce Peninsula council on Tuesday to pass a resolution opposing them in that municipality, as nearly 90 Ontario municipalities have done to one degree or another in theirs.

Council obliged and agreed to notify the provincial government of the decision.

About 50 people packed the council chamber, many there to support the request made on behalf of a group represented by former town councillor Ana Vukovic. Petitions opposing wind turbines were left with the councillors. "At one point I had people lining up to sign it," Vukovic told them.

Fire regulations limit the council chamber capacity, Mayor John Close announced, and so about 20 people weren't allowed to enter the council chamber. Regulations allow 60 people in the room at a time.

Vukovic cited possible negative health effects, reduced property values and municipal tax assessment, threats to tourism and possible harm to the Niagara Escarpment's plants, animals and area aquifers if wind farms were to be built here. Members of the public stood and applauded after the vote and a brief recess was called to allow people to leave.

At least two companies have announced plans to erect wind turbines on the Bruce Peninsula.

Tribute Resources has said it wants to put up 125 turbines in South Bruce Peninsula. Preneal Canada hopes to put in up to 75 turbines in Northern Bruce Peninsula. Vukovic said the total number of turbines proposed is more than 275.

Though the Green Energy Act took away municipal control over placement of wind turbines and left it to provincial authorities, municipal support for projects counts in an evaluation process when assessing which projects proceed first.

Before the vote, a member of the public asked Close if the town had been approached by Tribute or any turbine companies about wind farms. Close said none had. The man then asked if Close personally had meetings.

"I have been informed of the project, yes," Close said, "And I was informed before I sat in this chair of the project. Because I am very interested so I sat down and wanted to know what extent this is. So yes."

Coun. Janice Jackson, who said she "can't see anything that's beneficial" about wind turbines, asked Close if he gave his support or indicted the town was generally supportive of wind farms to those he met with. Close repeatedly replied the meetings were for "information purposes."

Asked by a reporter who he met with and regarding which project, Close responded without specifics. He wouldn't call them a "proponent" but rather "citizens" and "provincial" people, "farmers" and "people who have signed contracts."

"I can't tell you if they were company (officials), I don't know where their credentials are, they didn't identify themselves as companies."

Close also observed during the meeting that proponents of wind farms don't have to consult municipalities until the province consents to project proposals. Close asked the audience if consultations were ongoing with local native groups and someone said they were.

Close responded to a reporter's query after the vote about whether he personally supported the motion against wind turbines.

"I support wind turbines but I do not honestly have enough information . . . I am anxiously waiting for the federal government's report to come out on the health issues to see exactly where I stand on that."

The federal government is undertaking a study of the possible health effects caused by proximity to wind turbines to address concerns they may be harmful. Many municipalities and Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound members of provincial and federal parliament have called for moratoriums on wind farms until the health question is settled.

The Bruce Peninsula lacks a sufficient power transmission corridor to bring wind farm power to the provincial electricity grid. The Ontario Power Authority has confirmed there are no plans to build a new power corridor on the peninsula, so it would be up to the wind farm proponents to do so.

That corridor of transmission towers would be equally unsightly as industrial wind farms, Vukovic argued, marring the natural beauty of the area.