

Community Conversation about Wind Turbines in Vermont

Summary statements:

We want more information and education that is valid, credible, complete, unbiased, and transparent.

This includes wanting to know, who is benefitting from particular solutions.

We are concerned about who has the power, and who should have the power, when it comes to decision-making.

This includes questions about what is the right mix of levels for decision-making to happen: local, regional, national.

We are interested in the potential of community members creating local solutions together.

Of course, we only scratched the surface of this conversation, and we have many unanswered questions still. Here are the details of what we explored thus far:

How to place wind turbines where they will do the least damage?

How do we figure out if and how it makes sense to pursue wind power?

Background data / information

1. Many projects in Vermont, clear-cutting mountain tops for wind turbines.
2. Wind turbine projects not currently economically viable, are receiving major subsidies. Current electricity costs 8-14 cents per kw hour, while developers of turbine projects being paid approximately 30 cents per kw hour.
3. Wind energy can bring jobs.

Concerns

1. Concern that developers of turbine projects are in it for the money, rather than for community well-being.
2. Wind projects may pave the way for future housing on mountaintops.
3. Concerns about having big government and big corporations in charge of wind turbine projects.
4. Putting something right on the top of a mountain, is against native tradition.

5. Concern about impact on tourism, of developing mountain tops.
6. Concern about transmission lines needed to connect wind turbines to grid.
7. Concerns about health issues with regard to transmission lines.
8. Living next to wind turbines can be noisy.

9. Concerns re viability, practicality, efficiency, grid overload.
10. Wind energy is not consistent, and that can create problems.

11. Concern about whether the jobs that are generated, will be for local people.
12. Concern about the quality of the jobs generated.

13. Concern about increasing smog, if we *don't* develop clean energy substitutes.

Possible solutions

1. Put industrial things in industrial areas, to not disturb nature or people.
2. Have more transparency about intentions, including the possibility of further development, and also the larger picture of environmental effects.
3. Have more community education, about who is funding this, what turbines will produce, what the larger context is.

Responses to possible solutions

1. All industrial places were originally wild places.
2. There are geographical limitations with regard to *where* wind-turbines can be placed; it's a form of energy that is site-specific.

3. Some of us feel that we don't need the power that wind turbines generate.
4. Some of us feel that we need sustainable, locally produced energy.

5. Sustainable energy is still in development, so some of what is taking place may be necessary for research purposes.
6. If we delay experimenting with new sustainable technologies, then we won't be able to successfully solve the new problems that we are facing.

7. In Denmark, Copenhagen has their harbor lined with a curve of wind turbines. It has become a symbol of their attempts to generate energy in a less harmful way than fossil fuels.
8. Power lines have become "invisible" part environment, so prevalent we hardly notice them. Yet when something is new, we do notice it.

9. How do we know if the concern about housing is real (wind turbines on mountain-tops paving the way for future housing development)?
10. How do we know who to trust, and where people are coming from?

11. Concern about cap and trade, and tax credit off-sets. Are we building "clean energy" here, only to have someone buy it as an "offset" for their "dirty energy" projects? If so, overall amount of "dirty energy" is not decreasing.

How do we design our energy future?

How do we create a "master energy plan" that makes sense?

How do we balance our energy needs, with our concern for the environment?

Background data

1. The various sustainable energy options include hydro, solar, geothermal, wind, and biomass.
2. Many of us feel attempt to explore new forms of sustainable energy is good.
3. It can feel odd to think about all the 'energy relics' we are leaving behind for future generations, including shut-down nuclear power plants.

Proposed solutions

1. Develop multiple sources of energy.
2. Continue to experiment to learn more about sustainable sources of energy, including wind energy.
3. Understand what the *uses* of the new energy are... how it will be *spent*... in order to figure out, how to best generate it.
4. Have more education, about how much energy we use in simple things, to help us figure out how to make these larger decisions.
5. Invest even more in efficiency and conservation initiatives.

Responses to proposed solutions

1. Change is hard. We are taking chances whenever we experiment with new technologies. We fail a lot. The jury is still out on whether wind turbines will be helpful or not.
2. Concerns about quality of existing energy retrofitting programs.

How do we increase local input on decisions that affect our communities?

How do we limit the risks of experimenting with wind energy?

How do we balance local power, with need for wider coordination?

Background data

1. The political process of determining where to place wind turbines, is so cumbersome that it feels very unsatisfactory to many people.
2. It is hard as citizens, to stay fully informed on all of the issues.
3. It seems there is randomness regarding where turbines are being located.
4. Many of us feel wind turbines may be a good idea, but "not in my back yard."

Possible solutions

1. We need more transparency, education, local control. Create a larger map that shows all of the places where wind energy is potentially viable.
2. Create a better process to spread the risks and benefits.

3. We need to learn from other communities. How did they decide to create wind farms? What have the benefits and costs been?
4. Malone area has a lot of turbines. Would be useful to learn from their experience.
5. We need to develop sustainable energy at smaller scale, so we don't lose so much energy in transmission.
6. We need to try small experiments, so if they go wrong there will be less negative impact.
7. Create smaller wind energy sites, with community agreement re location.
8. Have more community local control over proposed wind projects.
9. Instead of "wind energy – yes or no", we need to have people decide on a local level. This way they can come up with more nuanced answers.
10. We need to try out local alternatives. Have communities work locally to figure out how we can be less harmful to environment. Some communities might choose to emphasize conservation, others to build wind farms, etc.
11. If each community was responsible for generating a certain amount of power, then that would create empowerment and buy-in, for whatever local solutions were created.
12. We need a greater balance between local control and state control.
13. We need to figure it out as a community, otherwise the big guns will win.

Responses to solutions

1. People are already asking a lot of questions about wind power and wind turbine projects – also about energy, and who gets to decide.
2. Some small communities *are* taking more power, regarding energy issues.
3. Could be helpful to find out what are the "guns behind movement". Story about recent loss of community fight against new Walmart. Lawyers and money won out, eventually won enough popular support for project. There is still grief in community about this.
4. Stowe Mountain has been highly developed (though not w/wind turbines.) This has created jobs for transient workers, power lines. There is grief in community about this, also.
5. When local people wanted to put wind power on their land at Essex junction, the local authorities were "hands-off". (They can do whatever they want to as it's their private land.)
6. If we just have local control, it could happen in a non-coordinated way. How do we weigh self-interest, with the larger impact?