

Representing Citizen Rights Against Wind Energy: The Best Winning Strategy

When citizens first hear about a proposed industrial wind project in their community, they typically do some investigating into what their local project (and wind energy in general), are all about. They quickly find out that this is a very complex (and controversial) technical matter.

One of their several challenges is to decide on what grounds they should make a stand. What most citizen groups do is to adopt a shotgun approach – i.e. try to cover a wide variety of issues. Although it might be counter-intuitive, the most successful groups instead choose to have a rifle tactic – i.e. keep their arguments narrowly focused.

But with the multitude of issues involved, exactly what area produces the most bang for the buck? The evidence says that the answer is to focus on **local economics**. There are many reasons why fighting industrial wind energy on the basis of local economics is the best winning strategy. Some of these are:

- 1) Because it's an issue already brought up by your opponent.** When a wind developer comes to your community, their number one sales pitch is *always* that their project will be a financial windfall. They well know that human nature is such that it's very hard to resist a polished solicitation for easy money. Greed is so problematic that it's officially one of the [Seven Deadly Sins](#) – and wind developers repeatedly push that button.
- 2) Because most local legislators buy into the wind developer's economic arguments.** This isn't surprising, because most communities are short on cash *and* because they are not getting that many financial offers. Even though local legislators have all heard “there is no free lunch,” they hold out hope that this will be the exception to the rule.
- 3) Because economics are relatively easy to understand.** As initially stated, industrial wind energy is a highly complex matter. The benefit here is that the economics angle is among the simpler parts to be able to genuinely grasp.
- 4) Because it will bring more citizens into the tent.** The more people supporting the Citizen Rights side of the issue, the more likely there will be success. E.g. arguments about health effects to nearby citizens will be dismissed by those not in the vicinity. The local economics angle involves *everyone* in the region, so it has broad appeal.
- 5) Because it allows multiple other facets to be brought up.** Even though it seems narrow, the local economics argument actually involves at least [ten areas of concern](#) – ranging from environmental to military. As such, tackling local economics will still enable citizens to address a wide variety of serious wind energy related concerns.

6) Because it's amenable to getting multiple people involved. Most communities are composed of citizens with diverse interests and expertise. Focusing on local economics allows those experiences to be utilized, as there are many facets to local economics.

7) Because there are numerous studies available from credible experts. Citizens are fortunate that a wide variety of independent experts have already weighed in on the wind energy matter – and many of their studies and reports relate to local economics. See the collections on the *Key Documents* page of WiseEnergy.org for a good sample.

8) Because the amount of original research needed is low. Some work *is* needed to be done, but it's minimal: determine the annual local economic benefits that might come from the project. This should be easy as the developer is usually boasting about this.

9) Because it's very likely you have a winning case. We have yet to see a community where a *comprehensive* and *objective* financial analysis was done, that the wind project did not result in a NET negative number. How can local legislators (or anyone else) then support a project when it's an economic liability to the community?

10) Because no one else is doing it locally or in your state. It would be nice if some local organization (e.g. an [IDA](#)), or state agency (e.g. Commerce Department), would do a proper financial assessment, but that is unlikely to happen. So sophisticated concerned citizens can see that *real* local economics is a very fertile, unplowed field.

Basic Game Plan:

- a) Determine what the local *annual* economic benefits might be from the proposed wind project. Then (to show how fair you're being) round it up. In other words, if the number is \$1.5± million a year, be magnanimous and say you'll assume that it may be \$2 million a year. (Note: publicly using this tactic this will minimize opponents from subsequently undermining your negative financial numbers.)
- b) Assign at least one person to each of the [ten \(10\) potential economic liabilities](#). Choose a person who has some expertise and/or interest in, each of these topics.
- c) Come up with a *defendable, conservative* NET **annual** financial number. Round the economic liabilities down (and make a point of that). For example, where the Tourism study says that 80% of tourists will not likely come back to an area where turbines are visible, make it 50% (which should still be a helpful number).
- d) Post your conclusions on a website, for all to see. Here is an [example](#).
- e) Have the *Net Number* (e.g. **\$5± million a year loss**) be the primary focus of EVERY conversation, public hearing talk, media interview, social media post, website, etc. The simple message is: how can local legislators (or any other regional citizen) support a project that's likely to be an economic burden (a millstone, an albatross)?

Be thorough, be careful, be focused, be persistent, be creative!