

# Chowan County Planning Board Update

4/1/15: John Woodard for the *County Compass*

The Chowan County Planning Board held a workshop meeting Tuesday night to review and discuss the proposed Wind Ordinance that they are considering submitting to the County Commissioners next week.

The County Commissioners had given the Planning Board 30 days (until March 31) to come up with a suggested Ordinance that they could consider. The planning Board appointed a subcommittee of its members to review the various topical guides and submit recommendations. The subcommittee members appointed by Chairman Lou Sarratt were Patti Kersey, Jim Leggett and Jim Robison.

At this meeting, Mr. Robison submitted a PowerPoint presentation to the rest of the planning Board which outlined the various issues that the subcommittee thought needed to be incorporated into the County Ordinance. Those guides included protection of property value, adequate setbacks, proper acoustical limits, environmental tests, decommissioning rules, and sufficient escrows provided by the developer.

As Mr. Robison started his presentation, Board member Marvin Hare began asking clarifying questions which seemed to be intended at disrupting Mr. Robison's comments. Further, all the questioning came from Mr. Hare and hardly any other Board members, spoke at all. Mr. Hare questioned every conclusion, on every subject that was discussed. His comments were stated as seeking to clarify the information presented, but clearly, since he was the only person asking questions, another motive seem to be apparent.

Mr. Robison stated his belief that the subcommittee was given insufficient time to adequately address the issues of concern to the citizens of Chowan County in regards to protection of their Health, Safety and welfare. But, they had to deal with the time element required of them by the County Commissioners. Therefore, they reviewed the wind ordinances of Carteret County and the town of Newport in North Carolina. In addition they reviewed Madison Ohio; Montville Maine; Bethany New York; Trempealeau County Wisconsin; Eddington Maine; Sumner Maine and Jackson Maine. Mr. Robison stated that these towns were selected because they were similar in size and composition to Chowan County. Again, Mr. Hare disputed the basis of the selections of these areas.

At one point in the presentation, Board member Leggett made a critical remark about the subcommittee having consulted with noted critic, John Droz, an Environmental Expert who had communicated with several Chowan County residents in order to provide them with information from the "other side of the story" which they had not heard before from the Wind Developers.

This meeting was open to the public, but the only members of the public that attended, were Richard Bunch and his colleague who are favorable to wind energy, and of course this writer. Mr. Bunch has more than a passing interest in wind energy. He was originally employed as Marketing Director for the North East Commission before it was disbanded and merged into another organization, which did not include Mr. Bunch. Prior to that time, Mr. Bunch had supported wind energy as an Economic Development matter, so in his new role as an Independent Consultant, he is promoting the interest of the Wind Developer. As such, he had more than a passing interest in the activities of the Planning Board.

Once Mr. Robison concluded his remarks, and comments from the other Planning Board members began to come forward, it was clear that the majority of the Planning Board membership is favorably disposed to allow Wind Energy to proceed. They see this project as an Economic Development matter which will benefit the County because of the taxes that the developer will pay, which will offset additional property taxes paid by County citizens. However, most of those Planning Board members have never corresponded with John Droz and are completely unaware of his point of view regarding the negative effects of Wind Energy. All they have ever heard was information from the developer.

There are numerous people who are aggressively working to undermine the anti-wind energy forces, and divide the citizens. The developer has engaged people with no firsthand knowledge of wind energy, to write papers which are then submitted to the Planning Board as a furtherance of this strategy of division. The Commissioners appear to have appointed Mr. Hare to the Planning Board (despite apparently having more qualified candidates), strictly because they wanted a Pro Development person to “stack the Planning Board” as a means of taking the political pressure off of the County Commissioners.

If the citizens of Chowan County do not come to the Planning Board meeting on Thursday and the Board of Commissioners meeting on Monday, and let their voices be heard, this project will take a giant leap forward.

Chairman Sarratt stated in last night’s meeting that he was resigning from the Planning Board once he submits their recommended ordinance to the Commissioners. By all accounts, he has attempted to conduct these hearings in a manner that was fair to both sides, regardless of his personal preferences. However, it has been said that he is leaving the Planning Board because he is tired of the controversy and its various elements.