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Wind turbines causing turmoil among Marathon County residents

By Neal Hogden

Local residents expressed their concerns over a recent influx of interest in farmland to be used for harvesting wind energy in both Marathon and Clark counties.

The opposition to the turbines is being led by a group called "Farmland First" who hosted a town hall discussion on the topic on Tuesday night at Country Aire in rural Stratford.

Nearly 300 concerned residents of the county met to discuss what concerns lie with the turbines and the companies that are attempting to bring them to the region.

Invenergy's pitch

Representing Invenergy were senior analyst of renewable development, Dylan Lennie and senior project manager Cooper Johnson. Invenergy is a privately held developer of wind energy which has 110 projects total in their "queue." The company has already signed on an estimated 65 residents, encompassing 13,000 acres of land, in Marathon County to be a part of the wind turbine project.

Lennie started the dialogue by explaining where Invenergy was at in terms of the timeline of the project and some of the benefits of the project.

Lennie said Invenergy currently pays \$7.9 million to land owners annually through the use of land easement and other property agreements.

The rest of Lennie's presentation highlighted the amount of revenue not only the individual landowners would receive, but also the amount of tax revenue Invenergy would contribute to towns, villages, counties, the state or other governmental entities through tax payments made on improved sites. Lennie estimated the company would be giving \$36 million to families who agreed to be a part of the project in annual rental payments over the course of the 67-year lease agreement.

Lennie showed why the company has chosen to pursue a turbine project in Marathon County. He said the wind resource is the main reason. He also said the interconnection of running power to a main power line near Hwy. 29 helps ensure the energy is harvested without having to run lines through more acres of land than necessary. He said the company plans to install anywhere from 25 to



PACKED HOUSE - Nearly 300 residents of central Wisconsin attended a town hall meeting held by the Farmland First group at Country Aire on Tuesday. The crowd learned about the proposed wind turbine project and what it may mean for residents of Marathon County.

35 turbines in the county but that number has not been solidified as of yet. He said he expected the project to take up less than 100 acres of total land from the different sites involved.

Lennie estimated that the construction phase of the project would begin in 2026 with the operational phase of the project lasting two 30-year periods.

A project that was consistently compared to the proposed project in Marathon County was the Forward Wind Project which is located in Dodge and Fond du Lac counties in eastern Wisconsin. Invenergy was instrumental in building the wind farm located on 4,000 acres but the company sold the turbines to Wisconsin utility companies Wisconsin Public Service, Wisconsin Power and Light and Madison Gas and Electric prior to 2019.

Lennie admitted that the technology for wind energy has been constantly changing so his information about the size and capacity of the turbines might not be accurate come construction in 2026.

Lennie said the wind turbines are not yet a done deal as the company will need to apply for a permit through the state of Wisconsin after plans have been in-

spected to ensure Invenergy is adhering to state regulations.

To close out his presentation, Lennie answered a list of 12 questions that were asked of him prior to the meeting. However, Lennie could not answer whether or not the project had enough land currently to move forward with the project.

Concerns

The argument against the wind turbines was headed by members of Farmland First, an activist group that is composed of volunteers that have invested time and money into educating the public on the pitfalls of signing contracts with wind energy companies.

Jon Beran, a resident of the Town of Johnson which is located between Athens and Dorchester and is a heavily targeted area for Invenergy, spoke and laid out the reasons Farmland First was trying to educate landowners on the perils of the turbines.

Beran said on top of the eyesore that the turbines will add to the community, there are a number of health and safety concerns that range from the shadow the turbines cast on homes, roads or land to

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Galligan named new Colby superintendent

By Neal Hogden

Dr. Patrick Galligan will be serving as the Colby School District Superintendent after the board of education announced on Friday that its search had concluded.

Galligan has spent a majority of his administrative career in Wausau as he started as the activities/athletics director at Wausau West High School in 2016. He then took over as associate principal of Wausau West High School and then became the principal of John Muir Middle School in Wausau.



Dr. Patrick Galligan

Galligan received his doctorate from Edgewood College in Madison in Educational Leadership in 2022.

Galligan said he felt a connection when touring the schools during the interview process.

"I'm very excited about the opportunity to serve as the next superintendent of the Colby School District. I could not be more pleased to have been selected to work with this team," Galligan said. "The opportunity I had to tour the schools [during interview] and meet all of you was an extremely gratifying experience for me. To talk with each person, to see all the great work going on in the buildings, and especially seeing the students in their classrooms, was something that helped me understand that yes, this is a place that I want to be."

Galligan was chosen over fellow Wausau-area administrator Matthew Spets. Galligan will bring over 25 years of public education experience to Colby.

He will be training and learning more about the district with current superintendent Dr. Steve Kolden until Kolden's retirement this summer.

Galligan will begin his duties as superintendent officially on July 1.

The district welcomed Galligan in a statement that read, "The School District is excited to welcome Dr. Galligan to our outstanding district and looks forward to his leadership building on our vision of success."



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Wind turbines

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the sound and pressure concerns the turbine's blades can cause to residences that are near the structures.

Beran also brought up the fact that the turbines can cause harm to wildlife in the area, especially bats and birds. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates tens to hundreds of thousands of bats are found dead around wind turbines each year.

Beran dove into aspects of the contract which showed the turbines were required to be 1,250 feet away from any home of a non-participating resident. However, the turbines can be placed 1.1 times the distance away from a participating landowner's residence, according to Beran.

Clark County Supervisor, Fred Schindler, spoke on the governmental side of the debate. He said the Wisconsin Public Service Commission's state statutes were outdated and not applicable to today's wind energy standards. Clark county submitted a resolution to the state, asking if the PSC would revise its wind turbine laws to meet today's standards. Schindler told the crowd that as a business owner, he needs to be bonded to ensure that unforeseen circumstances could be covered in a financial aspect. He called for the county to be able to be bonded in the event that the turbines break or are old and need to be decommissioned. He said current state laws prohibit the county from being bonded in this instance.

He said the best thing people can do other than not signing the contracts with Invenergy is to contact state officials to ensure that the PSC statutes are updated in a timely manner.

Audible groans could be heard when Johnson was pressed to give a yes or no answer to multiple questions about the project including if the company had enough land to begin construction on the project.

Johnson eventually said the company could go ahead with the project with the land that is currently under contract but studies would have to be done to confirm that.

Attorney Martin Machtan was the final speaker of the night. He said, "The job I gave myself tonight is to basically expose this project as a sham."

"If you listen to Dylan and Cooper talk, I don't think

they answered anything that is really important out of our questions," Machtan said.

He said the major issue with the project has been how the project has been conducted in secrecy. He said the company has come in and talked to individual landowners without a bulk of the community knowing this was coming.

"The whole sales process has been incredibly deceptive," Machtan said.

Heated debate

Although Johnson and Lennie were professional and respectful the entirety of the night, emotional debate from those opposing the "big city" company riddled the latter part of the meeting. Attendees chastised Johnson and Lennie for not being able to provide answers to specific questions about the project. Ryan Lasee, another instrumental member of Farmland First, pressed Johnson on how many lawyers Invenergy had on staff. Johnson initially said he didn't know but then said they had approximately 12 lawyers on staff at their Chicago office alone. Lasee made the point that if Invenergy truly cared about the money they were helping rural townships and counties make, they would not be spending millions of dollars on lawyers.

Throughout the night, the two Invenergy spokespeople said the project is still in the development phase. They said they had to conduct years and years of studies to ensure the area will be viable for the project. One crowd member questioned why the company would be making payments to landowners if they didn't know if a wind project was guaranteed to work. Johnson reiterated that the landowners were signed up because the company believes the project will go ahead as planned but the company needed to study the logistics of how much wind could be harvested and what facilities it would take to do so.

The meeting wrapped up as a resident pressed Johnson over the ability of landowners to get out of the agreement. The resident wanted a straight, yes or no answer as to whether the landowner could get out of a signed agreement if they got cold feet and no longer wanted to

be a part of the project. Johnson said the company would take a look at the circumstance and try to work with the landowner to come to a resolution. The crowd groaned as they wanted a yes or no answer. Johnson said, "Maybe," to which a member of Farmland First said, "So is that a yes?" Johnson responded with, "Maybe yes." No other clarity was provided but what was clear was Invenergy was unwilling to commit themselves to saying they would allow landowners to get out of their 67-year contracts if they so chose.

The next Farmland First meeting will be held on March 27 at 7:30 p.m. at the Curtiss Fire Hall. RWE Renewables will be hosting its own open house that night at 7 p.m. at the Abbotsford City Hall.



From the Attorney's Desk

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Cons of Beneficiary-Controlled Trusts

Some states' laws provide exceptions that preclude beneficiary-controlled trusts from being used to protect trust assets from claims by certain creditors, for example, a former spouse's claim for alimony or a claim for child support.

For beneficiaries who are not skilled at managing money or have poor judgment, a beneficiary-controlled trust may not be the best estate planning strategy. Although the trust document will specify the beneficiary's responsibilities as a fiduciary, a beneficiary-controlled trust provides the beneficiary with considerable control over their inheritance. If you are concerned that a beneficiary will not be able to handle the responsibility of also being a trustee for a beneficiary-controlled trust, other estate planning solutions may provide you with more peace of mind.

Call to schedule an appointment to learn more.

OBITUARIES

Geraldine Geiger

Geraldine A. "Gerry" Geiger, age 91, of Colby, formerly Dorchester, passed away with family by her side in the early morning hours of Thursday, March 9, 2023, at Colby Senior Care, with care provided by St. Croix Hospice.

A Mass of Christian burial will be celebrated at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, March 22, 2023, at St. Louis Catholic Church in Dorchester with Rev. Timothy Oudenhoven presiding. She will be laid to rest in Dorchester Memorial Cemetery. Family and friends



are invited to gather for a time of visitation at the church in Dorchester on Tuesday from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. and again on Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. until the time of service. A Rosary service is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Tuesday at the church. The honor of pallbearer belongs to Mike Geiger, Matt Behnke, David Behnke and Andrew Geiger.

Gerry was born on January 19, 1932, in Taylor County, Wisconsin, to Lester and Marie (Ludwig) Beyer. She graduated from Medford High School. On August 6, 1949, she was united in marriage to Norbert Geiger at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Stetsonville. She and Norbert owned and operated a dairy farm. Outside of operating the farm, Gerry was also employed at Meadow Farms, Mr. B's Egg Plant, The Olde Saloon, McDonald's and Clarkson's Bar, which was owned by her sister. She raised eight children and sewed the majority of the girls' clothes.

She was a member of St. Louis Catholic Church in Dorchester as well as a member of its PCCW.

Gerry enjoyed doing crossword puzzles, playing cards and bowling. She loved to test her luck at the casino and spending time with her family.

Those who will cherish her memory include her children: John (Elfriede) Geiger of Colorado Springs, Colo., James (Charlene) Geiger of Spencer, Steve Geiger of Owen, Kathleen (Dennis) Reynolds of Dorchester, Sandra (Dave) Behnke of Dorchester, Kurt (Jennifer) Geiger of Potter and Pam (Kirk) Kalepp of Dorchester; 22 grandchildren, 41 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

Gerry was preceded in death by her parents, Lester and Marie Beyer; her husband, Norbert, her son, Timothy, in infancy, her son, Daniel Geiger; her brother, Allen Beyer; her sister and brother-in-law, Ardis and Les Clarkson; her grandson, Jeremy Behnke and her great-grandson, Trent Geiger.

If desired, the Geiger family is accepting memorials in Gerry's name for a charity yet to be determined.

Gerry's arrangements are under the care of Life Tributes Funeral Home-Spencer. To share a memory or offer a condolence, please visit www.lifetributesfuneralhome.com.

Paid obituary 133512

Lorraine Hofmann

Lorraine L. Hofmann, age 80, of Colby, passed away surrounded by her loving family on Saturday, March 11, 2023, at the Colby Senior Care under the tender care of St. Croix Hospice.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 19, 2023, at Zion Lutheran Church in Colby. Rev. James Groleau will preside. Family and friends are welcome from 1 p.m. until the time of service at the church. The Maurina-Schilling Funeral Home in Abbotsford is entrusted with the arrangements.

Lorraine was born on December 15, 1942, the daughter of Fred and Emma (Flater) Stegeman in Owen. She graduated from Colby High School in 1961. Lorraine loved her family and God. She dedicated her whole life to raising her children and worshipping her Lord. She was avid about helping in charities.

Lorraine is survived by her three sons: Kevin Hofmann of Medford, Mark (Heidi) Hofmann of Spencer and Jeffery Hofmann of Thorp; four grandchildren: Alyssa (Cody) Bender, Justin Hofmann, Hailey Hofmann and Greg Hofmann; two great-grandchildren: Lukus and Brynlee; sister, Carolyn (William) Egoske of Iron Mountain, Mich., and brother, Tom Stegeman of Fort Bragg, Calif.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

Family and friends may express condolences online at www.maurinaschilling.com.

Paid obituary 133478

Obituary Policy

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A **free death notice** will only include the individual's name, age, city, date of birth, date of death and service/visitation information. A photo is *not* included. Funeral home names may be included, but not their web addresses.

Any **paid obituary** will be charged a rate of \$6 per column inch. Call our office at 715-223-2342 for more information.