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Windmill proposed to power Adirondack farmhouse

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ALBANY, N.Y. -- The Adirondack Park Agency is set to consider a homeowner's request to power her 1840s farmhouse near North River with a windmill 111 feet high.

It would be the second tall wind-powered residential generator in the Adirondacks, where the proposal to build even larger commercial windmills by Barton Mines in nearby North Creek has drawn opposition from several environmentalists. They don't have the same problem with the smaller home version.

"The only spot that it looks like it will be visible from is a local roadway," said John Sheehan of the Adirondack Council. "Given our desire to see renewable energy employed in the park, this is not a bad a project."

The APA in the late 1990s approved another residential wind tower, now powering a couple's home in Vermontville, and has a preliminary application for a third one, spokesman Keith McKeever said. Agency staff are recommending the APA board on Thursday conditionally accept Julia West's plan to put a windmill and 10-kilowatt generator in a field on her 16.9-acre property about 75 miles north of Albany in the town of Johnsburg.

"They don't have the mass, and I think they can be lower than commercial wind towers," McKeever said. "There's a potential for them to be substantially invisible and blend into the surrounding area."

Inside the 6-million-acre Adirondack park, APA permits are required for towers taller than 40 feet. West's proposed hillside windmill would be 100 feet tall, with 22-foot-diameter turbine blades, a 12-inch diameter pole and four guy wires.

"I live in a valley that kind of runs east west. It really funnels the wind," West said. "And I want to do what I can for the environment and reduce our dependence on fossil fuel." She said it would take her many years to recover the investment.

APA staff went to the site, raised a balloon 111 feet, then went to nearby locations and reported they mostly couldn't see it. Proposed permit conditions include no lights, solar panel, TV or radio equipment on the tower, painting it dark gray with matte finish, and cutting only four to six trees 20- to 30-feet high. Electricity would be stored in batteries, and any excess could be sold back to the power grid.

David Gibson, executive director of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, said it would apparently have minimal effect on the landscape, and at an estimated cost of \$38,000, it's

unlikely residential windmills will pop up all over the park. "The cost is a major impediment to most people," he said.

"We feel fine about them as long as they're unobtrusive," said Peter Bauer, executive director of the Residents Committee to Protect the Adirondacks.

However Bauer's group is divided over the Barton proposal to put 400-foot commercial towers on Gore and Pete Gay mountains _ which would be the first such windmills inside the Adirondack Park _ to sell electricity back to the grid. The APA has allowed Barton to install one smaller monitoring tower on former mining land, and an application for a second monitoring tower is pending.

Barton, a maker of garnet abrasives, says its proposed Adirondack Wind Energy Park would produce up to 27 megawatts of clean, renewable energy for the Adirondack region, reducing smokestack pollution from burning fossil fuels.

"Basically the argument comes down to: Does the wilderness value of the park trump our societal need for alternative energy, or does need for alternative energy trump the wilderness value of the park," Bauer said.

According to the Adirondack Council's Sheehan, hydropower from New York's northern mountains already provides about 230 megawatts a year, more electricity than the park consumes, and the Adirondacks already pay a price for that in habitats and fisheries. There are better places with steadier winds, like the Tug Hill Plateau west of the park _ where large windmills already stand and more are planned _ and on the plains north of the Adirondacks, he said.

"We don't have to create that kind of industrial wind station in order to have a sensible energy policy for the park," said Gibson, whose group wants Barton to file its full application for eight to 10 large wind towers before the APA approves another monitoring tower.

Instead, Gibson says the APA should require all new construction in the Adirondacks as tighter "energy smart homes" that are 30 percent more energy efficient than the "bird cages" most of us live in.

James McAndrew, project manager, said Barton's monitoring tower is about 170 feet tall, and they want to erect a second one and collect wind data to help evaluate how many wind towers and the best locations.