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Beachwood to consider using wind power

Rising cost of electricity cited

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Municipal officials have faced the facts that electricity bills will continue to rise, and have begun following in the steps of neighboring Ocean Gate to consider switching their municipal electricity to wind power.

Borough Councilman Steven Komsa organized the Beachwood Wind Initiative public information session Monday night to inform residents about the pros and cons of wind power, to discuss the positive aspects of using wind power and to dispel common myths about wind turbines.

The four-member panel included Ocean Gate Mayor Paul J. Kennedy; Ocean Gate resident James H. Fry, a retired Navy engineer, wind-power advocate, and charter member of NJ Small Wind Working Group; Ralph Avallone, CEO of Green Energy Council; and Michael Mercurio from Island Wind.

"Who here has noticed their electricity bills going up?" Komsa asked a room of about 40 people. "Who's happy about it? Nobody. We're not happy about it (either). We have a very large electricity bill in Beachwood, and that's why we're here today: to do something about it."

Komsa described how wind power has been used since 5000 B.C., dating back to the ancient Egyptians. The borough has been working with Ocean Gate's Mayor Kennedy and Fry, who were instrumental in starting the long process to constructing wind turbines, including wind assessments, soil borings, passing ordinances, and putting bids out to contractors.

"We've made a lot of mistakes," Kennedy said, explaining to the audience how the small borough had no examples to follow and had to learn as they went, but they are expecting at least one turbine to be completed by Sept. 1, after more than a year of working on it. "It's a positive thing to look forward to."

Avallone, a Bayville resident, explained how the world's population has nearly doubled since the 1940s.

"Whether you believe global warming is real or not, more people use more energy," he said. "Reducing greenhouse gases is no longer optional, it's essential. When faced with insurmountable odds, our country has always risen to the challenge. The issue is as local as a neighborhood, and as global as a planet."

The proposed locations in Beachwood for the three anticipated turbines include behind the Municipal Complex, and at the old recycling landfill, according to Komsa.

Turbines range in size depending on the type of power needed, and the Ocean Gate turbines are expected to be about 145 feet high, which is lower than the borough's water tower. A turbine's life expectancy is about 35 years, and Ocean Gate is expecting to pay theirs off within 7 to 10 years, Kennedy and Fry said.

Turbines are a source of renewable energy and would help provide energy independence for the Municipal Complex, with the option of selling back unused energy credits for a profit. The money saved after the initial investment is paid off would help with tax stabilization and would allow the borough to conform with state renewable energy mandates, which is 20 percent by 2021, Komsa said.

Mercurio spoke about how generating wind helps provide freedom from foreign sources of energy, and New Jersey communities such as Beachwood, Ocean Gate, Brick and Galloway have at least started looking into using it as an alternative source of energy for municipal purposes.

During the questioning session, residents asked about federal grants for alternative sources, about the benefits of wind versus solar, whether wind power can be applied to residential housing and what the payoff is in the long run.

Jim Fry, who started the wind turbine movement when he moved to Ocean Gate full-time several years ago and wanted to "go green," urged Beachwood residents to encourage their mayor and council to make the issue a priority.

"Your carbon footprint for a wind turbine is basically zero, and it's easy to do," he said. "You're just using the atmosphere, not putting anything in it. If you don't start it today, it's never going to happen."