

PRESERVE GREY HIGHLANDS Citizens Group
PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL – DEC. 8th, 2008

- I am Larry Close and I live on 35 Sideroad on the east side of Lake Eugenia.
- Our delegation is here today to address the issue of wind turbine electricity generation and we would like to thank Council for receiving us.
- The delegation is a group of citizens who have come together under the name of Grey Highlands Wind Action Group and we are dedicated to the cause of preserving Grey Highlands, thus we are also known as Preserve Grey Highlands.
- We are all property owners in Grey Highlands and have a stake in our community well beyond simply land ownership. We understandably want to protect that stake.
- We are preparing a document that summarizes, from our perspective, all of the important issues concerning wind turbines and the paper provides documentation related to those concerns. It is at the penultimate draft stage and we hope that members of Council and staff will find time to review that paper when we submit it.
- We have garnered considerable documentation from members of the Province-wide coalition of 30 groups similar to our own called Wind Concerns Ontario as well as from a broad range of domestic and international sources.
- Although it may seem odd at first mention, we have also accessed considerable information from wind turbine developers and advocates.
- While the core members of our group make no claim to being experts, a number of members of the broader group we rely on do have a considerable degree of expertise. For example, I am sure that most of you have heard or read reports by Bill Palmer and Allan Lewis who have spent countless hours of research amounting to years on the topic.
- In this regard, we readily recognize that the members of Council have been at this topic for over four years along with members of the municipal public service; we appreciate not only the work you have done in preparing Amendment 10 and the Zoning By-law but also fully respect the expertise that you have developed and bring to the matter.
- We also acknowledge that you are the representatives of the entire population, permanent and seasonal, and therefore must balance the needs of all including those who have signed leases with wind developers. But we are not prepared to accept that anyone, including ourselves, has the right to develop our properties in a manner that impinges upon the financial investments that others have made or to impair their rights to enjoy their properties.
- If we as adjacent and nearby property owners are going to lose considerable amounts of our capital investments, nothing the developer can do is going to mitigate those losses.
- We are told that this is not a land use planning issue. However, it would be the direct result of a permitted land use by the Grey Highlands; in the words of a very recent Assessment Review Board decision just south of us in Amaranth Township “Having heard the nuisance (noise), apparently sanctioned by the Municipality, the Board accepts Mr. Thompson’s testimony that the stigma of noise contamination has a negative impact on the value and marketability of the property....”

- While this noise nuisance refers to the noise of transformers used to tie wind turbines into the grid, the noise levels are similar to that of turbines themselves.
- I can only imagine that the holder of that Amaranth Township's liability insurance coverage is getting a lot nervous.
- To make matters even more serious, and although the developers cloak their leases in secrecy, we have several of them. In one such lease the developer actually makes the property owner responsible for obtaining liability insurance to cover against any adverse effects caused by the developer's own wind turbine.
- Surely our Municipality of Grey Highlands can not proceed with any projects under these uncertain circumstances as to liability.
- Furthermore, the Board ruling leaves the state of municipal revenues in a precarious position. Our paper provides estimates of the net loss of local government revenues in Grey Highlands (Municipal, County and School) due to wind turbines and we are much more modest in our estimates of property value loss than the 50 % reduction awarded to Mr. Thompson. The potential losses, as you shall see, are very, very large.
- And again, the developers try to downgrade this problem by making the preposterous and unsubstantiated suggestion that adjacent and nearby properties will in fact increase in value.
- More uncertainty!
- I remind Councillors that we are starting from the position that the Province issued an edict directing that municipalities shall permit these land uses for alternative energy without even establishing the economic case for them. We know that wind energy is twice as expensive as conventional sources, that our electricity bills are already increasing measurably due to the bringing on line of alternate energy facilities. Especially in a time of deep recession this will seriously impact upon the competitive position of our businesses and industries. Furthermore, wind energy is not the "green" solution it is touted as being since it requires almost 90 % back-up by conventional more dependable means, primarily gas-fired thermal; thus the Province is going to tear down coal-fired plants that are well beyond their life expectancy anyways (e.g., Lakeview) and replace them with other fossil-fuel plants.
- In fact, earlier this fall, Mr. Smitherman cancelled the Ontario Energy Board's hearings on the Integrated Power System Plan wherein the Board was to examine the Plan with regard to cost effectiveness and economic prudence.
- So we as taxpayers in Grey Highlands are being forced to accept these turbines without due diligence on the part of the Province.
- Furthermore, we are being asked to accept them subject to an Environmental Assessment process that, in the words Ontario's own Environmental Commissioner, "is broken". Councillors are well- informed about the lack of objectivity in this proponent-driven self-assessment process and we believe it is unconscionable to ask us to subject our futures to such a broken process.
- So we are uncertain about the economic viability of wind turbines and we are uncertain that the ESP can objectively serve to protect us against the negative impacts.
- Now, allow us to turn to other Adverse Effects and the issue of the Province downloading heavy responsibilities on municipalities leaving them in precarious and uncertain positions without showing substantive guidance or leadership.

- We know that you have heard these concerns before so I will go through them very briefly but emphasizing the fact that the more we are learning about them, the more certain we can be about their damaging impacts and the less certain we can be about any possibility of mitigation.

Health Impacts

- As early as 2002, medical studies were emerging from Europe and the US concerning the adverse health effects of wind turbines and the evidence is accumulating at an alarming rate.
- Just recently three doctors, including the medical officer of health, in Kingston, Ontario have raised concerns about the impacts of noise, shadow flicker, strobe lights and stray voltage on peoples' health
- We have a growing number of people in western Ontario who have been diagnosed by qualified physicians as suffering ill effects and we have seen more than one household being forced to move out.
- On Nov. 6th, an Assistant Deputy Minister in Energy and Infrastructure stated officiously that that Ministry does not have a mandate to investigate such complaints yet they blithely continue to force turbines on Ontario citizens.
- So, who does have that mandate?; the Ministry of the Environment!; the Ministry of Health?; the fact is no Ministry is doing it!
- The Council for Dawn-Euphemia Township has had the foresight just this past week to pass a resolution asking that the Province declare a moratorium until a study is completed concerning health effects.

Environmental Impacts

- While Ontario is rushing in and jeopardizing our natural environment and Grey County and Grey Highlands are extolling the virtues of our natural heritage, personnel in the Ministry of Natural Resources admit they are now learning a lot about the impacts of wind turbines on fauna and watersheds. Shouldn't we know these things before we leap?
- Meanwhile, the developers are proposing to put turbines in the areas of the Saugeen watershed and the Eugenia Lake drumlins and wetlands;
- Birds and bats are killed in considerably greater numbers than the developers will admit to and in more than one Environmental Screening Report developers consider that the counting of carcasses is a mitigation.
- The destruction of the natural environment is completely in conflict with the desire to promote tourism where people can enjoy hiking, horseback riding, hunting and angling
- The same Provincial Policy Statement that tells us we have to permit turbines also tells us to avoid "development and land use patterns which may cause environmental or public health and safety concerns."
- Would the Province please tell us which directive we should follow?

Quality of Life Impacts

- The University of Guelph study commissioned by Grey Highlands states, “A sense of logical order is inherent in both nature and man-made landscapes. Patterns of settlement and the associated surrounding countryside have distinct characteristics that form part of a deeper understanding of landscape, contributing to *our* area’s “sense of place”.
- The introduction of industrial wind farms will contribute to a loss of emotional and sometimes spiritual connection with this beautiful Grey Highlands.
- Yet because of a poorly formulated and politically motivated Provincial policy, we are willing to hand our future over to developers who have no lasting connection to our place.
- The experts talk to us about absorption as if 400 foot turbines will somehow disappear into the scenery; they won’t and given the large but uncertain number of turbines to be constructed, we would ask, “When does the so-called absorption stop and the saturation begin, what Smitherman calls visual pollution?”
- So, we finally get to the point, “what do we want our Grey Highlands Council to do about all this uncertainty?”
- We want Grey Highlands Council to pass a Holding Provision By-law under Section 36(1) of the Planning Act that the environmental screening report for wind projects be held in abeyance until the Province of Ontario undertakes independent studies and resolves the issues of property value loss as it affects individual property owners and local governments, a “broken” environmental assessment process, serious and growing problems with human health, liability coverage for damages, and certain remaining issues relative to environmental effects and the impacts on the quality of life of human beings.
- The Municipality has done this before on November 13, 2007 in regards to noise impacts; there has been some progress by the Ministry of the Environment in this regard but it is not complete; the consequential standards for setbacks have yet to be established and remain controversial.
- In light of the uncertainties that continue to exist and are growing around wind electricity generation, we, as a Municipality, can do it again.
- Sooner or later, the Provincial Government will realize that we the citizens of rural Ontario are not going to accept an ill-conceived edict to destroy our lives.
- Mr. Smitherman himself has, on Nov. 24th “agreed that Ontario can likely do “way better” in providing guidance on where renewable energy projects make “the most sense”. He pointed to questions such as how much distance there should be between a wind turbine and roads, parks or homes. “Instead of having that discussion in 50 different places in the province at the same time, but with different participants, let’s try to make sure on a leadership level that we create more of the conditions to where wind farms really, really make sense.”
- Let Council, acting on behalf of its voters and ratepayers, hold him to this.
- Thank you for your time.

Email : preservegreyhighlands@gmail.com or info@gwag.ca

Website : www.gwag.ca