



Representative Bill Reineke

Sponsor Testimony HB 401

November 13, 2019

Chair Vitale, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Energy & Natural Resources Committee: thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 401. This legislation would grant local townships the ability to decide whether a wind development project is a good fit for their area via a referendum vote. Currently, once the Ohio Power Siting Board process for these projects begins, it is a long, uncertain, and costly fight for the constituents in those areas that don't believe they warrant being constructed near their property. Many times, constituents remain unaware of these projects' very existence making it even more difficult to make their opinions known. Via this legislation, a referendum would give more local control to our townships and allow the residents, themselves, to decide what is and is not a good fit for their areas.

HB 401 would make it so that any certificate, or amendment to an existing certificate, for a wind development project issued by the OPSB would only become effective after 90 days. During this 90 day interim, the local electorate in the township(s) that the project encompasses would have the ability to file a petition for a referendum with the local board of elections. After the petition gathers the signatures of qualified electors numbering at least 8% of those who voted in the last gubernatorial election in that township, the decision regarding the project will be put before the voters in an up-or-down vote on the next primary or general election.

This legislation became important to me, as a result of the overwhelming, let me stress overwhelming, constituent outreach that I received regarding this issue. Constituents had a multitude of fears regarding these projects, from detrimental effects on property values to safety concerns. It has become apparent to my office that this is a complex and emotional issue. Many of my constituents have contacted my office expressing concern for how these projects will affect their property rights. With some of the dangers that turbines represent, how will they be able to safely develop their land that falls within a turbine's footprint? Should they just give that piece of the property up as lost?

To quote Shanna Price, a constituent of mine, "There's no other utility or thing that can happen in your community that transforms it into an industrial zone and you have no say in that process." The turbines that are slated to go up in Seneca are almost 600 feet tall. Twice as tall as the

Statue of Liberty or Perry's Monument. For those of you residing in Columbus, that's taller than the Huntington Building. These behemoths are going up in our backyards, and, currently, there's very little that residents can do to ensure they get a say.

It has not been lost on either my constituents or myself that the main supporters for these projects, and for wind energy development in general, seem to come from major metropolitan areas, or from out of state. It's easy for people in Columbus, Cleveland, or Cincinnati, places that will never see a turbine within their populated areas, to promote and push for more wind development in Ohio. It has even been insinuated that the "greater good" of these projects and the "green energy" they provide outweighs the consequences to the local community. My constituents and I, however, find it unfair that people from outside of Northwest Ohio get to foist these turbines upon us without our input.

Opponents of this bill will say that this bill will greatly restrict wind development in Ohio. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, wind turbines only have an average of 37% capacity, or the percentage of time that units are actually producing electricity. My local constituents struggle to see how it is worth disrupting the agricultural community over 37% capacity? In coming weeks, testimony will most certainly be provided regarding the effects that the construction of wind turbines have on our land, and will help everyone understand why our communities have called into question the "benefits" of wind projects.

Our commissioners have analyzed the financial misinformation that was the original catalyst for wind development in Seneca. The "economic windfall", pardon the pun, is masqueraded so that it disguises the real estate value devaluations that can and do occur.

Additional reasons for our constituent's not embracing wind are the associated health risks, such as light flicker and noise reverberations, and the effects on our local animal population. Our population of eagles is back and thriving, and we have a large bat presence in the community as well.

Let's discuss safety. Our airports and medical flight providers are concerned about these issues as well. Even where there are successful commercial wind turbine applications, such as in Hancock County, the airspace concerns are real. In fact, ODOT has an air aviation area of responsibility specifically to deal with these types of concerns. Once these turbines are up, air space and local navigation will never be the same.

Having alerted you to reasons why our residents are more than concerned about wind turbine development, the thrust of this bill is that it is permissive in nature. If enough support for the projects exist in the local area, then a petition may not even get enough signatures to go to ballot. In these cases, I am nothing but supportive of those projects, as the community itself has decided that the project is a good fit.

Further testimony will provide factual information on successes of other developments, notably that the farther away the operation is from populous locations, the higher resident satisfaction is. In northwest Ohio, there are side-by-side counties where one is endorsing wind development, and the other fervently disputes their viability.

Local entities should decide if wind turbine development brings value to their community. If there is a majority, either silent or vocal, for or against these projects, then there should be a local vote!

Personally, as the Representative of my community, I am greatly distressed at what has and is occurring in our area with regard to wind turbine development. This issue has literally divided the community and the families within it. This issue is too impactful, too divisive, and too disruptive for outsiders to decide on behalf of our local communities. I am asking you to consider how you would feel if these 600 foot towers were in your BACKYARD, knowing that you and your constituents could do nothing about it.

This bill does not, I repeat, NOT, prevent wind projects. It holds the developers to the same safety standards that the manufacturers recommend, and it facilitates community involvement and input. This legislation makes it so that, ultimately, the decision rests with those most affected, our constituents, at a point where the facts regarding these projects are clear and concise.

Chair Vitale, members of the committee, I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.