

I am writing to ask your support for HB 401. My husband and I live in the footprint of the proposed Seneca Wind Farm in Seneca County. Hopefully you are already aware of the vocal opposition of many local residents, but I would like to highlight the following:

- Seneca County Commissioners have revoked the county's alternative energy zone status and publicly vowed to "oppose any proposed wind turbine projects to the maximum extent allowed by law";
- The Seneca County Park District has requested to intervene in projects requesting larger setbacks;
- The Seneca County Airport and Fostoria Airport are officially opposed to the proposed projects (with many local industrial companies supporting their position);
- Seneca East Local School Board of Education voted unanimously to intervene in opposition to projects proposed within the district;
- Public meetings hosted by the Seneca Anti-Wind Union have repeatedly drawn crowds in the hundreds;
- When a county commissioner position was recently vacated, all six candidates for the seat were opposed to industrial wind projects locating within the county;
- Sign-in sheets at local public hearings hosted by the Ohio Power Siting Board showed 90% opposition to the Republic Wind Project (182 out of 200) and 95% opposition to the Seneca Wind Project (145 out of 153).

In the words of David Zak, President & CEO of the Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership, "It is accurate to say that the County, the majority of the townships involved, the largest school district recipient, and the park district have judged [industrial wind] not in the public interest."

But all of that currently means nothing. The projects that are moving forward in Seneca and other counties answer only to the Ohio Power Siting Board, and the position of local government and weight of public opinion are not factors considered by that board. That is why a local referendum on these projects is so necessary.

Local control is not a new idea in this discussion. Participation (or non-participation) in the alternative energy zone program was intended as a means to accept or reject industrial wind projects at a county level. State Senator Matt Dolan stated in 2017 that through the AEZ, "The locals will have the ability to decide what is in the best interest of their community. The benefits and burdens, just like any industry, have been and will continue to be debated at the local level." (<http://www.ohiosenate.gov/senators/dolan/news/dolan-introduces-wind-energy-bill-to-promote-economic-growth> ) Although the AEZ is no longer effective as that vehicle of local control, it remains absolutely necessary and appropriate that local communities do have a voice in these projects. There are multiple reasons why a township level referendum is the appropriate route for that local control, but I will focus on just two.

First, industrial wind simply requires more land than other types of energy generation. For example, a natural gas power plant covers an average of 30 acres (<https://www.strata.org/pdf/2017/footprints-full.pdf>) while the Seneca Wind Project would cover over 25,000 acres (and that's only one of multiple projects proposed in this area). And while the 30 acre natural gas plant is self contained, the 25,000 acre wind project is imposed over a residential community.

Second, it is my hope that a referendum would motivate industrial wind companies to be a more cooperative partner to the communities they ask to host projects. S-Power, the parent company of the Seneca Wind Project, says it wants to be a good neighbor and community partner. But pretty words aside, the company acts more like a tyrant. S-Power has sued more than 30 local residents, forcing them to remain in expired leases against their will. S-Power has disregarded concerns about turbines being placed in close proximity to the Seneca East Local Schools campus. S-Power has ignored requests by the Seneca County Park District for a 2.5 mile buffer from local parks and nature preserves. S-Power continues to pursue AEZ status, despite the fact that the alternative energy zone program ended in Seneca County three months before the company's current application was filed.

S-Power is getting away with all of this because under the current system they can. They simply do not need local consent for their projects. I included a quote from Senator Matt Dolan earlier about communities weighing the “benefits and burdens” of industrial wind. Communities can currently weigh the sides to exhaustion, but without recourse to local voters the reality is wind companies in Ohio have no motivation to seek out those communities that would welcome the benefits of industrial wind, or to make their projects more palatable by lessening the burdens of their projects on those communities that are hesitant.

In closing, I am proud to call Seneca County home. I know there are deep pocketed corporations and lobbyist groups opposing this bill. Meanwhile, the residents who will be most impacted spend our own money hosting spaghetti dinners and hog raffles to continue our fight in a system that is built to exclude us. What is happening in Seneca County is grassroots, it is strong and it is not going away. It is humbling to be part of a group of people so united that others step in when you are weary. I am grateful to Representative Reineke and the other sponsors of this bill and pray that its passage will return a local voice to the siting of wind projects.

I anticipate visiting the Statehouse soon, and would welcome the chance to meet with you or a member of your staff to discuss this issue in more detail. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Kimberly Groth

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