

SUB. HOUSE BILL 6
PROPONENT TESTIMONY
WALT POFFENBAUGH
HURON COUNTY, OHIO
June 19, 2019

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Committee. My name is Walt Poffenbaugh. I live in Norwich Township, Huron County. My family moved to rural Huron County 21 years ago, after the State Highway Patrol sent me there to be the Post Commander of the Norwalk Post. I retired from that position several years ago.

I would like to share my story about the Emerson Creek Wind Farm, which, as currently proposed, would place over 60 industrial wind turbines in Huron County, turning the western third of the county into an industrial scale electric generating plant.

My family has developed many friends and acquaintances since moving to Huron County, which by the way is an area not unlike the area where my wife and I grew up in rural Crawford County. We were aware there were two wind projects being proposed for neighboring Seneca County so my wife and I went to a community informational meeting in late May 2018 held at the Attica Fairgrounds. It was here that we learned for the first time about the Emerson Creek project being planned for Huron County.

I've spent the majority of my adult life not jumping to conclusions about any issue. I know there are two sides to every issue, and a logical decision cannot be made about anything until the claims of both sides are thoroughly vetted. As a result, I travelled to the office of the wind developer in Bellevue the following day to begin investigating the other side of the story.

I was met by one of their representatives who treated me cordially, and answered all questions I had, although I admit at this time I didn't know what questions to ask. I questioned him about how it was possible the project had been signing up leaseholders since 2010, and no one had bothered to come to my house, or mail me any notification about the project. I was told that since I only owned six acres of property there was "no reason to contact me", because my home and property wasn't "big enough" for the wind developer to need me for any reason. I didn't matter.

I have since learned that the planned placement of the Emerson Creek 655-foot industrial wind turbines in my rural residential area will mean that I can stand on my deck at the rear of my home, turn 360 degrees, and will be able to see wind turbines in all directions. I can understand why the developer felt there was "no reason to contact me".

In some communities outside of Ohio where non-participating homeowners are especially burdened by surrounding turbines, the developer finds it reasonable to offer a property value guarantee. I understand the London School of Economics found wind farms decrease property value by up to 12 per cent if the home is within about a two-mile radius. I have to assume there will be some loss of value on my property.

As we began to weigh the benefits of a tax abatement known as a Payment in Lieu of Taxes or PILOT, and the project in general, we were told by our county commissioners that they had heard nothing negative about the project from the public. That is because the wind developer only approached local school boards, township trustees, county commissioners and others dangling the carrot of increased revenues to those who could help them sell the project. As for the people who had signed leases, they were subject to confidentiality clauses and prohibited from talking about the project.

When our commissioners were presented with hundreds of signatures of local voters who signed petitions opposed to tax abatement, and were shown the figures compiled by our county auditor and the wind developer which proved the county and subdivisions would benefit more without the PILOT than with it, they reversed their previous course and denied the PILOT.

The wind developer had been threatening for months that if there was no PILOT, there would be no project. The county commissioners in both counties affected by the Emerson Creek Project rejected the wind developer's request for a PILOT in early 2019. But contrary to their threats, the Emerson Creek Project is still being pursued by the wind developer.

During interaction with local elected officials we discovered that some of them are leaseholders who will financially benefit if the project goes forward. One township trustee is actually an employee of the wind developer. How this is not a conflict of interest under Ohio Ethics Laws is a mystery to me.

Research conducted during the PILOT discussion show that in Huron County, in the five townships within the Emerson Creek Project, .07% of all voting householders are leaseholders. Of these 111 leaseholders, 44 of them do not live in the footprint of the project and 18 of them live outside of Huron County. Some reside out of state. The vast majority of the people who actually live in the project area gain little or no benefit from the project while assuming all the risks and burdens.

How is it that so few people can impact the character of the community for generations to come? If the local people had an opportunity to vote on accepting or rejecting a project, I would be willing to accept the outcome. Perhaps if I had a say in the matter through the vote, the developer would come to understand that I DO matter.

I am asking you to support the Reineke Referendum. Do not strip it out of the bill to address another day. We deserved a place at the table in 2009 and have been waiting for ten years to have a meaningful voice in local wind development.

I believe strongly that when the public is presented with all the objective facts on both sides they will come to the right conclusion for their community. I put my faith in this concept for years, every time I testified as a witness to a case in a jury trial.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak to this issue today.