

Jeremy Kitson
Van Wert County
Proponent Testimony - Senate Bill 52
Senate Energy & Public Utilities
March 9, 2021

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Committee, My name is Jeremy Kitson and I am a rural resident of Harrison Township, in Van Wert County, Ohio. I testify today in strong support of SB 52 allowing townships the right to gather signatures and hold referendums on wind projects. My community has been through a lot regarding wind energy and we currently host the largest industrial wind project in the State of Ohio, the Blue Creek Project. This bill affirms three key things rural Ohioans overwhelmingly support: equitable property rights for all; true local control; and protection of our huge capital investment in our homes.

I would like to focus my remarks on the issue of property value. I really don't think anyone needs a lot of studies because common sense could serve just as well. Exhibit A to my testimony are photos of wind turbines which are 1,000 feet or more from homes. Just looking at these photos one could easily conclude that the value of the home is likely to be less than what it was prior to wind development. One might also conclude that there is little likelihood the homes will appreciate in value at a rate equal to homes in other areas.

Numerous studies prove that homes in or near the footprint of an industrial wind project lose value. The data from such studies estimate from 20 to 40% depreciation. In Van Wert County, an extensive analysis was done by collecting home sales from the Van Wert County Auditor's website. The data includes home sales from two different periods, 2006-2011 and 2006-2018.

The first time period was established as a period when people began to know an industrial wind project would be built, the second is the overall time frame to date through 2018. Sales were analyzed for Union Township, the only entire township in the Blue Creek Project against overall County data as a comparison. If you look into the document (Exhibit B) you can clearly see home devaluation in Union Township of almost 10% when compared to the rest of the County.

The rest of Van Wert County homes sales appear to be essentially stable where it is clear the sales in Union Township show a loss since the construction and operation of Blue Creek. When analyzing that on a larger scale, how much tangible property tax has fallen due to this project? Are those devaluations overall offset by the annual PILOT payment the County receives from Blue Creek? This is my second major concern.

Exhibit C of my testimony is intended to show what choice a homebuyer is likely to make when choosing to buy a home in a community with wind turbines versus a community without wind turbines. My example is the Manager of the Blue Creek Wind farm in Van Wert who chose to live 30 miles away in Fort Wayne, Indiana rather than in Van Wert. Fort Wayne is in Allen County where the local government has banned all industrial wind turbines.

Since then, that manager has purchased property further North of Ft. Wayne, a nice lake-front property mind you, and even farther from the nearest wind turbine. I think the Blue Creek manager's choice of where to live and raise his family is one of the best arguments supporting the fact that industrial wind developments are an incompatible land use in a rural residential community. He voted with his feet while the rest of us are stuck without the right of referendum that would be granted in SB 52.

Our home is a part of our nest egg and retirement. We have significant equity in our home. Our capital equity in our home is over 40% of what our debt liability is. We are not prepared to take a property and home value hit that dramatically affects our future retirement. I have seen extensive studies on property values and the relation to industrial scale wind. These cited sources were sent by me last year to many officials here in the Statehouse. And there are many other studies that confirm what this Van Wert data is telling us. Wind turbines do adversely affect property values.

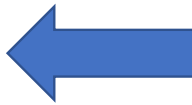
Last year, a State Representative challenged my position in making reference to a significant property value study conducted by Ben Hoen for the Lawrence Berkeley Lab. In referencing this report, the Representative took the position that proximity to industrial wind turbines has no real impact on home values. The Hoen study was based on more than 50,000 homes in 27 counties in nine states. The homes were within 10 miles of 67 different wind developments and only 1,198 of the sales studied were within 1 mile of a turbine (2%). Given that only 2% of the properties in the study were within a mile of a wind development, it is not hard to believe Hoen found no statistical impact.

More compelling, perhaps is a recorded interview with Hoen where he also said the following:

"You know we are very cautious about what happens close to the turbines. We really don't know what's going on there (e.g., 1,250 ft from turbines). I just spoke in Illinois about this. You might know about a Property Value Guarantee. It's a dicey situation and complicated, but I think homes that are very close, there is just too much unknown right now; that seems reasonable. I think one of the things that often happens is that (wind) developers put our report forward and say look property values aren't affected, and that's not what we would say specifically. On the other hand, they have little ground to stand on if they say we won't guarantee that. I think for homes that are close we have a lot more ambiguity and real issues. If we are talking about views that's one thing, if we are hearing it or shadow flicker that might be really regular, the kind of things that happen at night.."

I go back to just using common sense and the reason for zoning – to separate incompatible uses. Enjoying a quality of life in a rural residential community is incompatible with living inside of an industrial power plant. You really don't need a fancy study to demonstrate that. And if a community believes the benefits outweigh the costs, so be it. By giving the people the right of referendum, people will be much more willing to accept the trade-off if the voters want wind or solar development.

Exhibit A



This photo depicts a home outside of Findlay, OH



Wind turbines as seen in WINDFALL, a film by Laura Israel. A First Run Features release.

EXHIBIT B Van Wert Wind Farm Valuation

	Total Purchases	Purchases that Decreased in Value	% of Purchases that saw decrease	Average Change in Value	Median Change in Value	Purchase Price Average	Purchase Price Median	Current Valuation Average	Current Valuation Median	Average Valuation Change	Median Valuation Change
Homes Purchased in Union Township, Van Wert County from 2006-2018	77	46	59.7%	(5,055.79)	(7,150.00)	96,390.73	85,000.00	91,334.94	82,120.00	-5.2%	-6.3%
Homes Purchased in Union Township, Van Wert County from 2006-2011*	32	20	62.5%	(3,753.63)	(7,655.00)	84,220.50	82,828.00	80,466.88	76,090.00	-4.5%	-8.9%
Homes Purchased in Van Wert County from 2006-2018	4995	2419	48.4%	1,618.74	1,070.00	77,089.42	67,500.00	78,708.16	68,190.00	2.1%	1.5%
Homes Purchased in Van Wert County from 2006-2011*	2111	1065	50.5%	654.01	(217.00)	74,026.57	65,000.00	74,680.58	63,700.00	0.9%	-0.4%

*June 2011 was when Blue Creek Wind Farm's amended permit was filed with OPSB. Commercial Operation began in June 2012.

** Values based on Van Wert County Auditor's Current Valuations

Blue Creek Wind Farm is in 3 townships in Van Wert County and 3 townships in Paulding County.

Blue Creek Wind Farm is constructed throughout the entirety of Union Township, but only in parts of the other 5 townships. This is why Union township was chosen for research.