

McDowell panel looks at energy efficiency

Legislators told savings could equal wind farm's

By JEFF MONTGOMERY, The News Journal
Posted Thursday, February 14, 2008

Delaware could trim a huge share of its energy needs and bills with a systematic push for conservation and efficiency, potentially wiping out the need for major new electricity supplies, a Senate panel was told Wednesday.

The savings estimates -- as high as 40 percent of building electricity use -- emerged during the second Senate Energy and Transit Committee hearing on issues surrounding a proposed \$1.6 billion offshore wind farm, tabled by state officials in December.

Sen. Harris B. McDowell III, D-Wilmington North, said legislative leaders asked him to hold fact-finding hearings after a stalled vote on Bluewater Wind LLC's 150-turbine proposal for an ocean tract east of Rehoboth Beach.

Delmarva Power would be ordered to sign a 25-year contract with Bluewater under a deal tentatively backed by the Public Service Commission and two state agencies. But a General Assembly delegate reported there was no consensus among lawmakers to support the deal, which required unanimous approval from all parties.

The House minority Democratic Caucus is supporting the project and called Wednesday for a polling of all caucuses and resolution of the issue, according to House Minority Whip Helene M. Keeley, D-Wilmington South.

Delmarva and some critics of the wind plan have argued that conservation could erase the need for the average 155-megawatt output of Bluewater's plant or any other generators. Energy-savings consultants already working in Delaware estimated that buildings and [households](#) could save 20 percent to 40 percent of power demands through already available methods.

"What you would say is: The more we can bring resources to bear on these things, we get a lower cost, we get more reduction in pollution, we get more renewability and also enormous savings for the consumer?" McDowell asked.

"I can unequivocally state that energy efficiency is your lowest-cost supply option," said Robert Obeither, vice president for New Jersey-based Applied Energy Group. Obeither added that conservation and efficiency programs, which are labor-intensive, can create a substantial number of jobs.

McDowell also co-chairs Delaware's new Sustainable Energy Utility, an organization formed to help consumers and businesses save energy and develop small-scale, user-based alternative energy such as rooftop solar panels. Studies prepared to support creation of the SEU last year also predicted dramatic energy savings.

Delmarva recently notified the PSC that it believes state law now gives the SEU a big role in helping manage state electricity demand.

Chad Tolman, who supports the Bluewater project, said conservation is essential but insufficient to meet a state and national need to curb reliance on fossil-fueled electricity supplies. Bluewater's backers argue that lawmakers already have ordered development of a new, clean, in-state electricity source to improve service reliability.

Senate Minority Leader Charles L. Copeland, R-West Farms, said legislation that resulted in Bluewater's proposal required Delmarva to consider more than just new electricity supplies to stabilize rates.

"It also said to look at what is the most efficient. I don't think that we've even discussed that," Copeland said.

Contact Jeff Montgomery at 678-4277 or jmontgomery@delawareonline.com.

STORYCHAT

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Posted by: delawareonlinecomment- Thu Feb 14, 2008 8:46 am

Dear News Journal: The next time you interview Chad Tolman, please ask him why a wind farm would be necessary anytime soon if the state substantially cut demand, say 20 or 30 percent. Unless you misquoted him, he seems to be arguing that the Bluewater wind farm, which would provide very little power during peak demand hours, and just 13% of our overall power, is still necessary.

If his answer is simply that lawmakers "have ordered development of a new, clean, in-state electricity source to improve service reliability", would not the same lawmakers be able to replace that order with an order to invest in efficiency/conservation? Should not those lawmakers value conservation more highly than power plant construction of any kind?

Delaware has the opportunity to show real leadership among states by implementing the nation's smartest energy conservation program.

Posted by: delpatriot- Thu Feb 14, 2008 8:41 am

For people who actually want news, here's the letter from the House Democratic caucus, calling for a yes vote on the wind project.

DELAWARE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE MINORITY CAUCUS

February 13, 2008

Russell T. Larson
Controller General
Office of the Controller General
Dover D580A

Dear Russ,

It has been almost two months since leaders from four state agencies tabled a proposal to bring wind power to Delaware. We, the leadership from the House Democratic Caucus, ask you to please reconvene the meetings on wind power with leadership from each of the caucuses in the General Assembly. It is time that wind power is brought to a vote.

In the final months of 2007, when our leadership group first began to discuss wind power, you felt that there were too many uncertainties to move forward. Since the tabling of the vote on December 18th, legislative leaders have had ample time to talk to their constituents and do their research. This research

shows that Delaware has a once in a lifetime opportunity to lead the nation on wind power. Not only will wind turbines off our coast bring at least 500 new jobs to our state, but Bluewater Wind's parent company, Babcock & Brown, has committed to making Delaware the regional hub for offshore wind development and maintenance. In a time when the economy is faltering, it would be irresponsible of us not to strongly consider a project that would bring jobs to our state. Our research also indicates that Delawareans overwhelmingly support windpower. Now that it is clear to everyone that wind power would be a positive asset to Delaware, a vote is needed.

This much needed vote should be made before the legislature returns to session. Once we return to Dover, wind power will likely consume much of our time, and while it is a very important issue, there are many important issues currently facing the state. We hope we can get together via conference call again, so that we can discuss a path forward for wind power. If we move quickly, we can make our decision and then the four agencies can reconvene and approve this before March 11th.

In Delaware, we stand by our motto, "It's good to be first." Let's remind ourselves how good it really is to be first by moving forward with wind power. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to working with you at our next meeting and voting in favor of a bright, green future for Delaware.

Sincerely,

Robert F. Gilligan
House Minority Leader

Helene M. Keeley
House Minority Whip