

## **Wind Turbines and Local Zoning go Hand in Hand**

By Frank Young

The prospect of wind turbines in near proximity to mountain communities in West Virginia becomes more controversial nearly every month, it seems.

Local citizens by the thousands petition the state Public Service Commission to deny applications for wind farm siting permits. Some of them organize and spend thousands, perhaps tens of thousand of dollars on legal costs, etc. against wind farm projects. State legislators and others call for a “moratorium” on further wind power projects until strict siting rules are implemented.

But state agency level protests about esthetics and property value concerns seem like an inefficient way to address basic local effects and concerns of any industrial project.

It seems to me that there is a better way- already authorized in West Virginia law. It is called zoning- county-wide zoning- that can be implemented by the citizens and local officials of any county in West Virginia But except for in a very few counties, West Virginians, who more and more seem to abhor the prospect of wind turbines in their mountain communities, have traditionally eschewed any and all county zoning proposals. Why? Well, it seems that the cry of most every proud West Virginian is, “We don’t want the government telling us what we can do with our land”. Yet many still want to tell others what legal uses they do and don’t want made of and on their lands.

Can we have it both ways? Can we raise holy hell against certain industrial proposals, but reject the principle of local zoning? County zoning would enable locally pre-planned uses of lands- with local consideration of the costs and benefits of industrial, commercial, agricultural, forestry, residential and other land uses. Frankly, I believe that citizens can no longer afford to NOT have local land use regulations and local boards to implement and tweak such regulations. The most recent and perhaps the largest West Virginia wind farm protests are in Greenbrier County and Pendleton County. But I believe that the best way that Greenbrier and Pendleton countians could insure preservation of the value of their lands from unplanned and unwise development would be to institute formal zoning for their county. West Virginia state law already allows for local zoning. It is a county’s option whether or not to actually implement county zoning for purposes of planning and controlling land uses. There would still be technical and ecological matters for state agencies to consider in considering wind farms or other industrial permit applications.

But the effects of wind farms and other land uses for local esthetic and property value related considerations would be better addressed at a county level zoning in West Virginia.