

Windmill Myths

MYTH # 1: These wind towers aren't really THAT big.

Fact: The industrial wind towers planned for Cohocton are not the 100 ft windmills with 12 ft blades you've seen on family farms. They will be 400 feet high - nearly as high as Rochester's Xerox Tower and much larger than the ones many have seen in Fenner, NY - with even larger towers on the drawing boards. Their blade length is 139 ft with a total rotor diameter of 285 ft or over 90 yards, nearly as wide as a football field is long. These colossal machines will be visible for over ten miles, dominating the landscape with their sheer size by day and flashing aircraft warning lights by night.

MYTH # 2: These industrial machines don't make THAT MUCH noise.

Fact: At their loudest, they generate up to 105dB of noise, as much as a loud tractor or a jackhammer. While reflections off the ground reduce some of the noise directly under the tower (where nobody lives), the noise can be clearly heard (and felt) for 2,000 feet and beyond, and much farther based on local conditions. And except on a still day, the noise NEVER STOPS.

MYTH 3: What's the Big Deal? There won't be that many towers in town and they won't be that visible. The trees will hide them.

Fact: At present there are plans for 41 towers in Cohocton alone with another possible 60 or more to be built. According to the Draft Environmental Statement (DEIS) prepared for the town, the turbines would be clearly visible from Wayland, Avoca, Freemont, Howard, Wheeler, Prattsburgh, Italy and Naples. They will even be seen from Canandaigua Lake. How many 400 ft tall trees have you seen in Cohocton?

In addition, UPC Wind and its associates are seeking approval for over 100 towers in neighboring Prattsburgh, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation indicates that over 30 wind projects are currently seeking approval, with more lining up every month. Most are being planned for the hills of the Finger Lakes.

MYTH # 4: These industrial towers will be safe to be around.

Fact: The rotating blades have tip speeds up to 180 mph, with the potential to throw ice at high velocity over 1,600 feet, which can place neighboring property owners including snowmobilers, cross country skiers, and others at great risk. Wildlife will also be endangered.

MYTH # 5: Besides ice throw, which would never happen in the summer, there are no other potentially damaging health effects from close proximity to these wind towers.

Fact: At sunrise and sunset, shadow flicker can turn the 285 ft spinning rotors into giant strobe generators, which have the potential to cause headaches and other health problems in susceptible individuals. Also, research indicates that the persistent extreme low frequency noise wind towers generate can cause neurological problems. Some individuals even become physically ill in proximity to the turbines. According to

European health studies, the turbines need to be sited from 1.5 to 2 miles or more away from any dwelling. "Wind Farms Make People Sick Up to a Mile Away", Sunday Telegraph, January 25, 2004.

MYTH # 6: Our town has developed a "Windmill Law" to protect property owners.

Fact: That law has been found to be illegal as the town neglected to execute a "State Environmental Quality Review" (SEQR) as required by New York State Law. Further, according to town documents, that law was written with the help and input of UPC. The law would have allowed turbines as close as 1,500 feet from a dwelling, and 500 feet from property lines.

MYTH # 7: These industrial towers will be safely sited in an industrial park.

Fact: Unfortunately not. These towers should be sited in industrial parks, rather than in between the properties and homes of nonparticipating landowners. Neighboring property owners should have adequate setbacks to protect their health and safety and to allow them to live their lives in peace and quiet. However, if you live or own property in the project area - where the great majority of the landowners have not leased to the wind farm developers - this industrial park will be brought to you, and you and your neighbors will have to live inside it.

MYTH # 8: These wind developers will be fair to their neighbors.

Fact: Property owners in towns without zoning will be subject to a form of REVERSE ZONING. Without the protection of significant setback distances from these wind towers, sections of THEIR OWN property will become an "Unsafe to Walk in the Winter" zone, a "Come to the Country for the Industrial Noise" zone, or a "No One in Their Right Mind Would Build Here" zone. Even landowners willing to negotiate easements with the developers will find part of the value and usefulness of their property confiscated without compensation. Would you want this for YOUR property? And now some local officials state that Albany will designate wind projects as "unregulated utilities", granting them eminent domain and special rights over the property of landowners in their "project areas."

MYTH # 9: Residents of the town will receive free electricity or reduced electrical bills.

Fact: No. The electric power will go to the grid rather than local residents. There will be no reduction in electrical costs for anyone in Cohocton. No one will receive free electricity.

MYTH # 10: One thing Cohocton has is wind – Turbines in our town will greatly add to the nation's dependable power reserves.

Fact: Because wind power output is highly variable (it only works when the wind is blowing), it must be backed up by fossil fuel electric generating facilities in order to ensure dependable power delivery. And unlike the wind farms in the desert west or ocean offshore, where wind blows hard during the day and during the summer (when there is a need for the peak power), wind power in Upstate New York blows hardest

during the winter and at night. For just 5% of the US energy needs to be met by wind, it would take 132,000 turbines operating at least 27% capacity. Our turbines are expected to normally operate at 10 to 15% capacity. Wind power does NOT free us from dependence on conventional electric power generation. .

MYTH # 11: Wind power will help free us from foreign oil for generating power and will save us from global warming.

Fact: Both claims are highly misleading. Less than 3% of US electricity is generated by oil because the oil we import goes to fuel our cars, not generate power. The US Department of Energy projects that wind power won't even represent 1% of all US electricity generation 20 years from now - in 2025. Forever damaging the character and natural beauty of our hills is NOT a solution for either problem.

MYTH # 12: These industrial wind projects will generate A LOT OF JOBS.

Fact: UPC has acknowledged that at most four permanent jobs will be created. These will be minimum wage, low-skill jobs.

MYTH # 13: The prospect of being surrounded by hundreds of industrial wind towers won't affect the attractiveness of the area for buyers of property and new homes.

Fact: Realtors in towns threatened with wind towers indicate that the negative impact on property values and property sales has already started. Long term, the potential flight of landowners and reductions in the value of recreational, vacation home and retirement property could also have a severe negative impact on tax revenues. If Albany and the developers have their way, within several years, the tops of the ridges throughout the Finger Lakes and Western New York will be covered with a web of these colossal machines. Villages, wineries and establishments dependent upon unspoiled scenic beauty as a draw for tourism will be surrounded by - or swallowed up inside - vast industrial parks. While a few curious individuals might drive by to see them at first, who really thinks this is healthy for our tourism?

MYTH # 14: With no fuel costs, wind farms make good financial sense. Besides, wind turbines are safe for the environment, and by supporting this project I'm doing my bit to go "Green."

Fact: Unfortunately not. Factoring in all the costs, wind power is nearly TWICE as expensive as fossil fuel electric power generation. Wind power is made financially viable - and, short term, highly profitable for wind farm developers - through multiple tax incentives, Empire Zone deals, power production credits, power purchase guarantees, and NY-SERDA cash transfers, and this financial burden is transferred to us, the taxpayers. And the electrical utility can pass on higher prices to us, the ratepayers. The green from this "green" power goes to the developers, who often sell off the projects within two years to large corporations for their value as tax shelters, like the Fenner Project they've showcased. And when the tax breaks and handouts expire and maintenance costs rise, will these towers be abandoned, like several thousand already have been in California?

MYTH # 15: Windmills are safe for the environment.

Fact: Inappropriately sited and constructed towers can negatively affect the water table, can cause sedimentation of ponds and streams, and can cause soil erosion and create wildlife hazards. At the Tug Hill wind farm site landowners have reported a 50% decrease in deer populations and an almost 100% decrease in wild turkey, as well as several large fish kills during the construction phase.

MYTH 16: This project will bring the town substantial revenue.

Fact: The project is expected to generate between \$200,000 and \$250,000 annually. In similar locales, non-leasing adjacent landowners have experienced a significant drop - in some cases 20-40% - in property values. The potential flight of landowners and reductions in the value of recreational, vacation home, and retirement property could have a severe negative impact on local tax revenues. And now there are concerns that the State would also reduce payments to towns and schools, claiming we'll no longer need the money. Local Realtors have already lost a sale on Pine Hill due to the proposed project. If property values decrease and the State reduces payments to the town and school, how much of a real gain will there be?

MYTH 17: Your complaints are just “SOUR GRAPES.” Those opposed to the project are jealous because they aren’t making any money.

Fact: Not at all. We are opposed to the ways in which the Town of Cohocton has handled this project. We further believe that the town has not done adequate research on ALL aspects of this project, and that they have not properly considered how this project would impact ALL Cohocton landowners. If this project is important for Cohocton, why not take the time to make sure it is done right? As far as we are concerned, leaseholders are entitled to make money from their property. Our argument is not with them.

MYTH 18: If we don't go ahead with this project on our own terms, New York State will force us to have wind turbines without compensation.

Fact: This will never happen. Each Town has every legal right to determine what kind of industrial development it will permit and where. We just need to enact appropriate legislation.