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What's To Debate?

Southold Sees Support For Alternative Energy Sources

By T.J. Clemente

With energy prices at high levels and the countries dependency on foreign oil creating endless conflict, other local municipalities are exploring alternatives.

With nuclear power still a taboo, one source being discussed in Southold is wind power.

However, opinions are strong and run in all different directions. Town officials have begun to discuss parameters to allow modern windmills. It was reported that the town of Southold is considering to allow turbines up to 150 feet tall and only on lots of seven acres or more. According to expert Roy Rakobitsch, a wind consultant for Go Solar of Aquebogue, the height will depend on where the turbines are located. Turbines with lattice poles were once widely used in wind power experiments but birds often nested in their framework causing major problems. The monopoles of today are made of steel and are projected to have a life span of fifteen to twenty years, with salt air factored in. They are anchored in about nine feet deep and the base is about 30 by 30 feet. Maintenance is projected to be extremely minimal. With this present design, a 12 mile an hour wind is necessary to turn the props that catch the wind. It must blow at that level for at least three minutes. Today they are building turbines with tales to catch the prevailing winds. As technology improves, the logistics of building the wind turbine are getting simpler. But at the moment there is no national movement sponsored by the federal government to move in this direction like there was to put a man on the moon back in the 1960s.

At the moment, LIPA does not discount or rebate for wind power as they do for solar energy. However this may change. LIPA did create an experimental wind power park in Calverton (Windy Acres Park) but the design used was not efficient and many mistakes were made. In fact LIPA official Mark Dougherty reportedly said, "We learned what not to do in

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Calverton." The price of a 150-foot turbine being proposed by Southold would cost in the forty-five thousand dollar range.

Mr. Rakobitsch, who is affiliated with a solar energy firm, believes that wind power pays back the initial investment much more rapidly than solar. The state has some incentives in terms of tax savings against the cost but at the moment they do not truly help raise the money to actually purchase and build the turbines.

Some local North Fork residents were questioned about the proposal of using wind power and the responses were all over the place. Paul Szpara of Southold was reported to have said, "I am not really in favor of wind farms as an alternative power source because I just don't think there is enough space for them. I'd think we be better off looking into other ideas such as tidal generators or solar towers."

Carol Nuccio, of Mattituck seemed to voice a more popular opinion when she reportedly said, "I would be in favor of anything that leads us away from LIPA and their outrageous charges, but I don't really have a strong opinion yet because I just don't know enough about it."

Not to many people who were asked about the proposal thought that steel turbine windmills would be pleasing to the eye.

So what it comes down to is how much experimental seed money should be spent on existing technology in order to foster ever better, more efficient technology and get the country sold on turning away from foreign oil and turning to alternative energy sources like solar and wind. The town of Southold is opening the door to this solution by talking freely and openly about it. They must weigh the prudence of spending money on an experimental project. The old wise saying is if you don't ride the crest of the wave of change you will get crushed by it. The jury on the North Fork is out on the use of wind power, but they are being poled for their opinion in Southold.

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