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Amaranth appeals Melancthon II ESR decision

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Amaranth council has effectively appealed a Ministry of Environment decision not to order a full environmental assessment of the Canadian Hydro Developers (CHD) 88-turbine Melancthon II wind-farm project.

Director James O'Mara of the ministry's Approvals Branch, in a letter dated March 9 to the 15 persons who had requested elevation of the ESR to "an individual environmental assessment," noted the rationale for acceptance of each aspect of the report to which the requesters had objected.

"The issues and concerns raised by (the requesters) were extensively reviewed. I am satisfied that the issues and concerns have been addressed by the work done to date by (CHD), or will be addressed in future work that is required to be carried out, and to which commitments have been made by (CHD) in its ESR and other Project documentation," Mr. O'Mara said in his letter.

Although the decision was taken March 9, it was not technically released until March 19. This gave the requesters until April 2 to seek a ministerial review.

At its meeting on March 21, Amaranth council instructed Thomson Rogers lawyer Jeff Wilker to request a review. As of last Friday, Melancthon Township had not made a similar request, had not called a special meeting, and does not meet until April 5 - three days after the deadline for appeals.

Although the director's decision indicates that the project may now proceed, "subject to any other permits or approvals required," the matter is before the Ontario Municipal Board, at least with respect to Amaranth. (At the OMB pre-hearing recently, Melancthon indicated it could proceed with zoning upon approval of the ESR.)

And it might be noteworthy that four First Nations chiefs, including Chief Allan MacNaughton of Six Nations Confederacy and Chief David General of Six Nations Band Council, were copied on the decision and the reasoning.

It has been a long road to ESR approval, but CHD officials were pleased with progress.

Said executive Vice-President Ann Hughes: "We are very pleased that the approval process is working. The Director took all submissions into consideration in making a balanced decision on this key step in the Environmental Screening Process. Canadian Hydro will fulfill its environmental commitments with respect to the Melancthon II Wind Project, as outlined in the ESR and in other project documentation."

She added her opinion that CHD expects the decision will assist at the OMB hearing, as both townships had expressed their interest in the outcome of the ESR review.

Some of the specific concerns raised by the requesters, and the director's reasoning after consideration, included:

+ The reliability of wind energy, and why the townships were chosen: "The detailed siting process involved the completion of environmental studies, including avian and terrestrial studies, noise modeling, wind energy and wake-loss modeling, visual simulation studies, electrical transmission and interconnection models, and the use of local knowledge from the farmers who have cultivated the land. (CHD monitored wind data for 48 months. (It) has considered hazardous weather events and has chosen turbines with safety mechanisms to ensure the turbines are safe and reliable;

+ A screening checklist. "Ministry staff reviewed the project documentation, and am satisfied that (CHD) has included a transparent and traceable evaluation in the ESR of the negative effects. I am satisfied that (CHD) has consulted with the appropriate agencies (to their satisfaction).

Other concerns raised and reviewed included noise, impacts on agricultural land, impact on property values and visual impacts, public consultation, decommissioning, setbacks, impact on birds, potential for fire, tower failure and spills, and impacts on tourism.

Director O'Mara said, in effect, that CHD had complied with provincial regulations in all respects, and had documented things such as tourism and property value impacts of existing wind farms elsewhere.

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