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OMB turbine hearing might take 10 weeks

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Although many issues are similar, there are enough differences of concern between Amaranth and Melancthon on wind turbines that the Ontario Municipal Board could sit for nine or 10 weeks to accommodate all parties and participants to the proceedings.

The hearing would determine whether the townships should approve Official Plan amendments and site-specific zoning for 88 wind turbines that Canadian Hydro Developers Inc. is proposing for its Melancthon II project - 23 in Amaranth and 65 in Melancthon, with a total nameplate capacity of 132 megawatts.

Hearing Officer Susan Schiller presided over prehearing conferences in both townships on Tuesday and Thursday last week, and was asked to set aside three days in April for motions and further procedural discussions.

One of those days, April 5, would deal with motions principally affecting Melancthon. The other two days, April 23 and 24, would be principally devoted to Amaranth. However, there could be some overlapping.

As she had done in Melancthon on Tuesday, Ms. Schiller reviewed the roles and responsibilities of "parties" and "participants" for as many as 120 residents who attended the Amaranth conference Thursday.

Again, she urged the parties with common interests to discuss jointly their positions, and possibly to consolidate those, presumably to avoid having the same issues addressed and the same witnesses called several times.

She also advised individual aspiring parties that motions before the Board must be prepared in the same fashion as those for the courts, and outlines of the "motion record" format were provided for the benefit of those who might not have been familiar with them.

On Tuesday, she had set aside a three-week "envelope" in August for the Melancthon hearing. On Thursday, this was set for July 30, and the time extended to four four-day weeks.

Also on Thursday, lawyer Jeff Wilker, representing Amaranth, estimated he needed as long as six weeks for the Amaranth part of the hearing. The first available date for the six four-day weeks he sought is Sept. 11.

All told, this would mean potentially 10 weeks plus four days of proceedings. However, it's possible - depending upon the outcome of the Environmental Screening Review - that the Melancthon part of the hearing would become redundant. That township has indicated it supports the project in principle, subject to the ESR and financial negotiations.

Amaranth has concerns that differ from Melancthon's. Apart from the turbines themselves, it has significant number of airstrips and a need for reconsideration of Official Plan setback provisions for what it defines as "airports."

It has concerns about location of the underground transmission line from Melancthon to the transformer substation at 15 Sideroad and the 10th line. The transmission line wouldn't be totally on the Eighth Line, but a portion of it would be. CHD wants on the west side of the road, but Amaranth wants it on the east - beside the existing power line, such as to accommodate future road widening.

The substation itself could figure into the Amaranth hearing, as Mr. Wilker said there is a site-plan objection to a second transformer there.

(The second transformer had been contemplated in the original zoning for the substation, and is illustrated with dotted lines on the site plan. However, outside the hearing, Amaranth Mayor Don MacIver said it hadn't actually been part of the site plan. As well, he said, would require a Certificate of Approval amendment.)

The Amaranth hearing is further complicated by what appears to have been a misunderstanding with respect to the number of turbines proposed by CHD, and by the current activities of other wind-farm proponents.

On the number proposed by CHD, Ontario Project Manager Geoff Carnegie was quoted at the hearing having told a public meeting there would be 21. This number was originally understood as the number properties, but there would be more than one turbine on some properties. Since then, according to the Amaranth CAO, there have been six additional site applications, and the total number proposed might or might not be as many as 29. This expected to be clarified during the hearing, if not before.

Mr. Wilker raised the issue of additional proponents during Thursday's hearing.

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