

Key permits OK'd for proposed wind farm

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The state's Energy Facilities Siting Board voted unanimously today to approve a bundle of permits for the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm, marking another milestone for the controversial project.

"Today's vote marks not just a successful conclusion to a seven-year state regulatory review of the Cape Wind project but the beginning of a new era of clean energy jobs and renewable power from the endless wind resources off our shore," Cape Wind Associates, LLC, president Jim Gordon said in a prepared statement released after the vote.

The board voted 7-0 to approve the so-called "super permit," after three hours of deliberation at Boston's South Station Transportation Center, siting board spokesman Tim Shevlin said this afternoon.

While there were some minor changes to the draft prepared by the board's staff, the decision is essentially the same as the tentative one reached by the siting board in March, Shevlin said.

Staff will now review the transcript from today's hearing and prepare a final decision for the board to sign off on as soon as tomorrow, he said.

The decision overrides a 2007 denial of the wind farm by the Cape Cod Commission. It also encompasses eight other local and state permits, including wetland and road opening permits for the towns of Yarmouth and Barnstable.

Notwithstanding inevitable legal challenges, the permits represent a majority of the remaining regulatory approvals required for the project. The decision can be appealed directly to the state's Supreme Judicial Court, something local officials have said they would do.

Cape Wind's plan calls for 130 wind turbines to be built on Horseshoe Shoal in Nantucket Sound. The turbines would be connected to the electric grid by cables installed beneath the seabed and roads in Yarmouth and Barnstable.

Cape Wind must secure a final "record of decision" from the U.S. Minerals Management Service, the lead federal agency to review the project and a division of the Interior Department. Approvals from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Aviation Administration are also outstanding.

Opponents continue to claim the project would be a danger to public safety, the environment and pristine views of the sound. Cape Wind's supporters contend the project has faced eight years of intense regulatory review and would play an important role in the fight against climate change.