

Wind farm Round 3: Mild sparring

Courtesy, respect mark hearing on Nantucket hosted by Corps

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NANTUCKET – Residents of this far-flung community took their turns at the microphone last evening and voiced deeply held views on the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm.

But despite sharply differing opinions, civility and respect reigned during the third public hearing hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps is the lead federal agency overseeing permitting of the

proposed project.

"There's nothing wrong with saying not in my back yard. The concerns about changing the landscape are valid concerns," said Barbara Gookin, a member of the Nantucket Energy Commission, a panel appointed by the local board of selectmen. "The only problem with calling it NIMBY is it's not in our back yard, it's in our front yard."

Gookin was one of a number

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RON SCHLOERB/Cape Cod Times

Cape Wind President James Gordon and Audra Parker, assistant director of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, debate the implications of the wind farm project prior to the hearing on Nantucket last night. Ernie Corrigan of the Alliance listens in.

Wind farm: Hearing on Nantucket subdued

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of residents who expressed concerns that the project's 130 turbines would mar the sound's horizon line. Each windmill would be taller than the Statue of Liberty.

Under the plan proposed by Cape Wind Associates of Yarmouthport, the closest turbine would be 13.8 miles from the mouth of Nantucket harbor, farther than from the Cape or Martha's Vineyard.

More than 250 locals and others attended the event. Sentiment was mixed, though speakers opposing the project clearly received louder ovations from the audience. Nearly every speaker during the first hour opposed the project.

Some argued the turbines would pose a safety hazard to boaters and commercial air traffic. Others said they feared the 40,000 gallons of oil that would be housed on an offshore platform could cause environmental catastrophe in the sound.

Major distrust

And one local said he simply did not trust a corporate developer with a valuable and irreplaceable natural resource.

"I'm Ted Anderson and I'm just an angry old man," said the speaker to laughs.

"Big business, even if it has all the proper paperwork done ... especially those big businesses in the power business don't exactly have a stellar reputation for honesty," he added later. "We have been lied to too often about too many things."

But others came to the Cape Wind proposal's defense, occasionally even chiding their neighbors for shortsightedness.

"Turning away from the problem is no solution at all," said

Grant Sanders, the first Nantucketer of the evening to voice support for the project. "We need to look at the future and see that this path that we're on, our energy policy path, is not one we can sustain for long.

"I wish we could create clean energy with invisible machines, but that's not the situation."

As during Tuesday's more raucous hearing in West Yarmouth, few of the speakers specifically addressed findings in the draft environmental impact statement.

Instead, they focused on the project overall and their feelings about the Sound.

Compared with Tuesday evening's hearing in West Yarmouth, the Nantucket event was a relatively subdued affair.

Perhaps the sharpest exchange of the night took place in the hallway outside the auditorium just prior to the event's start when Cape Wind President James Gordon and the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound Assistant Director Audra Parker staged an impromptu debate over the economic and geopolitical implications of the project. The alliance is one of the groups spearheading opposition to the wind farm.

Parker charged that Gordon overstated the wind project's potential for weaning America off imported oil.

"It's a drop in the bucket," she said.

"You've got to start somewhere," Gordon retorted.

The Corps will hold a final public hearing on the wind farm project next Thursday, Dec. 16, on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. The Corps will continue to accept written statements from the public until Feb. 24 both on paper and via e-mail.