

Voices strong, but split, over wind farm plan

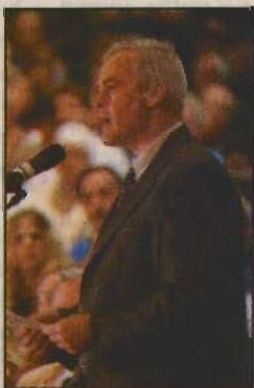
By Craig Salters
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Democracy may be the best form of the government ever devised, but it isn't the quickest.

A public hearing by the Army Corps of Engineers over a proposed wind farm in Nantucket Sound lasted close to six hours Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning, drawing close to 1,000 Cape residents wishing to speak their minds on the controversial project to the Mattacheese Middle School in West Yarmouth.

Aside from a few cat-calls, the tone of the hearing was respectful and informative, but the hearing also highlighted a fact most already knew: Cape Codders are starkly divided over the wind farm, and passionately so.

Never was that division more obvious than in the beginning of the hearing when Gov. Mitt Romney, a vocal opponent of Cape Wind Associates' plan to construct 130 wind turbines



Yarmouth Selectman Dan Horgan, who emphasized that he was speaking on his own behalf, spoke in favor of the plan to construct a wind farm in Nantucket Sound, a position opposite to that of the board's official position. "Can you understand what is necessary?" Horgan asked the Army Corps of Engineers, adding that strong leadership was needed to solve the nation's energy problems.

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Staff photo by
Merrily Lunsford

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in a 24 square mile area on Horseshoe Shoal, strode to the podium to thunderous applause and a standing ovation from a majority of the audience, with a significant minority of that audience remaining in their seats.

"Nantucket Sound is a national treasure," said Romney, arguing that, in this case, the unique quality of the Sound "must trump" the needs of the developer and America's efforts to develop renewable energy, which he said could be developed elsewhere in Massachusetts and across the country. "It is a heritage given to us by God and we must not trash this incredible resource."

Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas Reilly also voiced strong opposition to the project. Joining him in opposition were Mark Forest, spokesman for U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, and Cape and Islands District Attorney Michael O'Keefe. Despite the political firepower, however, the night belonged to Cape residents who wanted their comments entered into the public record.

Many, including Cliff Carroll of Yarmouth, took issue with the developer's right to the public land.

"The last time I checked, you had to own something to build some-



The Mattacheese Middle School in West Yarmouth was filled to capacity Tuesday night as roughly 1,000 Cape residents attended a public hearing on a plan by Cape Wind Associates to construct 130 wind turbines in Nantucket Sound. The hearing was the second of four such hearings sponsored by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the lead permitting agency for the project.

Staff photos by Merrily Lunsford

thing," said Carroll.

Others, like Joseph Turnbull of West Yarmouth, spoke just as cogently in favor of the project, arguing that seeking alternatives to costly and environmentally unfriendly fossil fuels is "a moral imperative."

"What does it benefit to save our Sound if we lose our planet?" asked Turnbull.

Suzanne McAuliffe, chairwoman of the Yarmouth selectmen, emphasized that the selectmen's agreement with Cape Wind Associates over access to electrical cables was intended to protect the interests of residents in the event the project becomes a reality. But she reaffirmed the board's position against the project.

Moments later, however, Yarmouth Selectman Dan Horgan, emphasizing that he was speaking only for himself, chided the lack of leadership on renewable energy and said that one "precious resource" not getting enough attention was "the men and women who put themselves in harm's way because of this nation's insatiable desire to have more energy."

Horgan then reminded the audience that the hearing was on the 63rd anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, pointing to that time as a time of strong leadership. "Can you understand what is necessary?" Horgan asked the Army Corps of Engineers.

Jack Clark of the Massachusetts Audubon Society said "key data gaps" concerning birds needed to be filled before the Corps' Draft Environmental Impact Statement could be considered complete. He also urged that any federal leasing structure for offshore wind farms, which opponents say is not in place and therefore a key obstacle to proper permitting, be applied to the project retroactively.

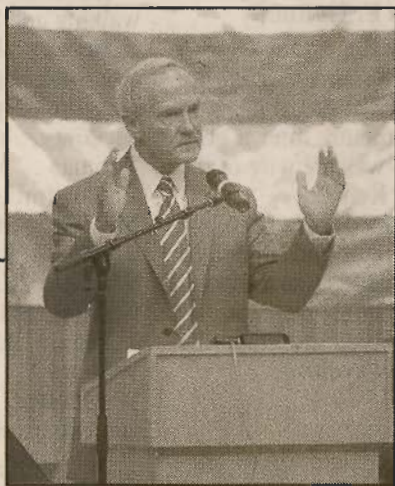
But Dr. Kilaparti Ramakrishna, deputy director of Woods Hole Research Center, used the public hearing as the opportunity to come out in favor of the project. "The staff and trustees of the Woods Hole Research Center have concluded that the proposal is sound and offers every basis for proceeding with the project," Ramakrishna said.

Pam Hardy, a Yarmouth Port native now residing off-Cape, spoke in favor of the project but said that the two sides have one important thing in common.

"At the core of this debate is a common sentiment: a passionate love for the Cape," Hardy said.

The comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement ends Feb. 24. After that, the Corps will address the issues raised by public input to create a final draft.

Once the final draft has been completed, the Corps will have three options: deny the project outright, accept the project or accept the project with conditions.



Massachusetts Attorney General Tom Reilly attended Tuesday night's public hearing on the proposed wind farm in Nantucket Sound to voice what he called "strong opposition" to the project. "There is a right way and a wrong way and this is the wrong way," said Reilly, who challenged the Army Corps of Engineers' legal authority to issue a permit.