

New Cape Cod wind farm plan drawing positive spin

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By David Ortiz

NEW BEDFORD, Massachusetts (Reuters) - Location. Location. Location. The axiom usually cited in valuing real estate could just as easily apply to offshore wind-power farms, it seems.

After a battle over plans to build the world's largest offshore wind-power farm within view of some of the wealthiest communities in Massachusetts' Cape Cod resort region, a new proposal for a rival project in view of more working-class areas is drawing stronger support.

Boston construction contractor Jay Cashman Inc. on Tuesday submitted formal plans to build a \$750 million offshore wind turbine project in Buzzards Bay near Cape Cod that could generate up to 300 megawatts.

It is gathering tentative support from those who oppose a \$900 million "Cape Wind" wind farm that would be visible from wealthy Nantucket Island and affluent Cape Cod towns such as Hyannisport, home to Democratic Sen. Ted Kennedy's family compound.

The new proposal is also being cautiously welcomed in the working-class towns along Buzzards Bay such as New Bedford, a fishing port about 60 miles south of Boston where many residents hoped it would reduce rising energy bills.

"The rod-and-reel fisherman is the same guy who's had the price of fuel going up 100 percent in the last few years," said Steve Cadieux, 54, sitting in a bait and tackle shop.

The South Coast Offshore Wind Project's turbines would rise from the shallow waters near Naushon Island and the towns of Dartmouth and Fairhaven and supply electricity for about 240,000 homes.

Its 90 to 120 turbine towers, which would reach heights of 270 feet and be located three to four miles (5-6 km) from shore, would save millions of dollars in energy costs and help alleviate U.S. dependency on foreign oil at a time of record-high crude prices, Cashman spokeswoman Elizabeth Isherwood said.

Kennedy and Massachusetts Republican Gov. Mitt Romney, who both oppose the Cape Wind project in Nantucket Sound, have voiced tentative support for the latest proposal.

"Governor Romney believes that wind is an important alternative source of energy. We think the proposed Buzzards Bay wind farm is an intriguing idea and we're anxious to learn more about it," Romney spokesman Eric Fehnstrom said.

Kennedy has tried to block the Cape Wind Associates project in Congress, saying it would amount to a government giveaway to a developer who would reap big tax breaks, hurt commercial fishing and damage an important marine sanctuary.

NO SURE BET

But approval of the Buzzard Bay project is no sure bet.

Buzzards Bay is also a playground for beach-goers and recreational boaters, and some residents fear the turbines will stifle tourism, damage the ecosystem in a region know for rare bird species and deflate waterfront property values.

"Since I don't live on the water and wouldn't be able to see it, I'm all for it," said David Boyce, 57, a freelance writer and museum curator in New Bedford.

Paul Andonian, 48, a real estate agent in New Bedford, said he thought the South Shore wind project stood a better chance of being built than the wind farm proposed for Nantucket Sound because it appears to face less political opposition.

Michael Cadieux, 35, owner of Dockside Bait & Tackle and the son of Steve Cadieux, said the wind farm proposed for Buzzards Bay was already fueling local debate. "There's a lot of 'not in my back yard'," Cadieux said.

"At the same time, there are a lot of people in town meetings up and down this coast complaining about gas and electricity costs. When you talk to people I think you'll find where people are on the socioeconomic level, that's where their opinions will be," he said.