

From LaFayette Advisory Conservation Commission

Town of LaFayette fights to protect residents from large wind energy project

In the Spring of 2024, when the LaFayette Town Board heard of a large wind energy project being planned in the towns of LaFayette, Tully and Otisco consisting of up to 27 giant wind turbines along the western ridge of the Tully Valley from Route 20 to Kettle Lakes, it has taken steps to protect the Town's residents and environment from the project's adverse impacts.

Evaluated potential impacts – The Town Board requested the LaFayette Advisory Conservation Commission (LACC) to evaluate the planned wind turbine project's conceptual design and assess if there would potentially be adverse human and environmental impacts due to the project. The LACC also reviewed wind energy projects recently permitted by the New York State Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES).

Assessment conclusions – The LACC concluded that there are likely to be, at a minimum, seven different adverse impacts associated with the planned project, including: landslide risk, endangered wildlife, nearby creek water quality, visual, noise, shadow flicker, and property values.

Learning this, the Town Board developed a strategy to best position the Town to prevent the planned project's adverse impacts. These are the actions the Town took since the Summer of 2024:

Resolution – In August 2024, the Town Board passed a resolution objecting to the planned project, while explaining the types of impacts expected to be adverse.

Expert legal advice – The Town Board retained an attorney with expertise in representing municipalities regarding large solar and wind energy projects. The attorney has provided insight into the State process and the Town's options to influence the project developer to modify its design so impacts are not adverse.

Updated local law – The LACC, Town Attorney, and expert attorney worked together over the Fall and Winter to update the current local law regulating large wind energy systems (§290-25.1). In February 2025 after a public hearing, the Town Board approved an updated law.

Collaboration with other towns – The Town Supervisor and Deputy Supervisor met with the supervisors for the Towns of Tully and Otisco as well as a representative of the Onondaga Nation. They held detailed discussions of the potential impacts and developed consensus on which impacts would be of most concern to all. There was also agreement to make our common concerns known to our elected officials.

Meetings with elected officials – In the Spring of 2025, meetings and discussions were held with Onondaga County Legislators Dave Knapp and Rich McCarron, State Senator Rachel May, and State Assemblyman John Lemondes. All were empathetic to our concerns and willing to speak up for us locally and in Albany.

Tracking the developer's activity – At the time of the writing of this article, the project developer has not yet decided to formally proceed with the project. The Town monitors the State online depository of documents the project developer is required to submit prior to formally notifying the State about its intent to file a permit application. The project developer has submitted a few more documents lately, indicating the project is still active.

Currently, the project developer has not secured leases for properties needed for a transmission line. That may have delayed the developer such that the project will not be eligible for federal production tax credits before law sunsets. Neither of these points mean the project is dead. But the Town is prepared, along with our neighboring towns, the Onondaga Nation and our elected officials, to fight such a large project and the potential adverse impacts to our residents and environment.

—Mark Distler