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SCOPING MEETING - DECEMBER 9, 2013 - 13-843
BEFORE THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
FOR THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Site Permit Application for a
200 Megawatt Large Wind Energy Conversion System for the
Odell Wind Farm in Cottonwood, Jackson, Martin and
Watonwan Counties.

MPUC DOCKET NO. IP-6914/WS-13-843

Windom Community Center
1750 Cottonwood Lake Drive
Windom, Minnesota

December 9, 2013

COURT REPORTER: Janet Shaddix Elling, RPR

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1 MR. RICH DAVIS: All right. We're here
2 for a draft site permit scoping and public
3 information meeting on the Odell 200 megawatt wind
4 farm.

5 I'm going to go through a quick
6 presentation kind of discussing, very briefly
7 discussing the project and also the process for
8 public input, public comment on the project.

9 Just to let you know, my name is Rich
10 Davis, I'm with the Minnesota Department of
11 Commerce, I'm in the Energy Environmental Review and
12 Analysis unit. We're the technical assistant side
13 to the Public Utilities Commission as they work on a
14 draft site permit and final site permit for the wind
15 project.

16 Just a real brief welcome. Thank you for
17 coming. The project that's proposed, as I said, is
18 the Odell 200 megawatt wind farm, which is pretty
19 much east and southeast of town here, for the most
20 part.

21 This is kind of a brief overview. I'm
22 not sure if everybody can see that or not, but I'll
23 be going over the process, how the state reviews the
24 projects, public participation.

25 I'm going to bring up a few documents

1 that I have sitting at the back as you came in the
2 door there. The first one that I put out right
3 here, it's actually a template of a draft site
4 permit. It's not the actual draft site permit that
5 will be issued for the Odell project, but it's a
6 template, basically, informing you of the structure,
7 the public, of the structure of what the draft site
8 permit will look like, what's the different parts of
9 it are. It's the document that has the red and
10 black text on it. So that's to help you guys, as
11 you're looking at the project, if you have concerns
12 or comments, it's to give you an idea of where in
13 the draft site permit that comment might fall or
14 what issues you might be looking at as the project
15 goes forward.

16 The second one that was back there has
17 colored print on it, it's an exact printout of the
18 presentation that I'll be giving. The reason I put
19 that in here for you guys to take, there's names,
20 phone numbers, e-mails, for important people to
21 contact if you'd like to submit comments or have
22 questions for the project developer, anything like
23 that.

24 The next one, a white sheet like this, on
25 the back of that sheet, actually it has my name,

1 mailing address, everything. If you want to write a
2 comment to submit to us on this project
3 specifically, please do so. Mail it in to me. It
4 will come straight to my desk and I can put it into
5 the process as we're doing our review.

6 The next one is this form right here,
7 it's got kind of a table on it. This is if you
8 would like to be added to the project mailing list.
9 And when you fill this out, make sure you have a
10 mailing address on there. I was told by our public
11 advisor that even if you check this little box on
12 the far left, or far right if you're looking at it,
13 but if you check that box you can get notified of
14 project documents via e-mail. But even to make it
15 on the project list, even if you get e-mail, you
16 still have to have your official mailing address on
17 here as well. I can't explain that, but I'm just
18 repeating what she told me.

19 This little green card right here is if
20 you would like to speak tonight and provide a
21 comment regarding the project. Fill one of those
22 out and bring it up with you. I'll have you come up
23 front here and give you a mike and you can make your
24 comment.

25 And this is really tough to see because

1 of the wall and I apologize for that. But basically
2 what this is is it's the project. The proposed
3 project is in the orange here. The yellow triangles
4 inside of that are proposed turbine locations.
5 That's not a final layout. And this is, actually,
6 at the time, Geronimo, the developer, was looking at
7 four different turbine layouts. This is one
8 specific turbine and it's the Goldwind 1.5 megawatt,
9 so there would be 133 turbines on that layout.
10 Those maps back there that Geronimo has printed off
11 is easier to see. This is to give you an idea of
12 where the project is at.

13 Right down here is Highway 71, it turns
14 to go northwest, 60 is right up on the top there
15 with the two purple blocks on it to the cities up
16 there. But, like I said, to get a better view of
17 the four different turbine layouts, you want to look
18 at those maps back there that gives you a better
19 idea.

20 The applicant contact, Patrick Smith,
21 he's right up front here, he's with Geronimo Energy.
22 Again, one more reason to pick up that packet that
23 has this presentation in it, if you'd like Patrick's
24 contact information.

25 This is the site permit process, and it's

1 really grainy, I apologize for that, but this is the
2 process that a wind developer goes through, the
3 applicant goes through as they're trying to receive
4 a site permit for the wind farm and for approval
5 from the Public Utilities Commission.

6 This shows the basic steps. As we're
7 going through it right now, we're actually in that
8 second green rectangle up there on issues to
9 consider in the draft site permit. And from there
10 we'll go on to the draft permit issuance, which I'll
11 take comments from the public into consideration,
12 comments from other agencies, federal agencies,
13 state agencies, and we complete our technical
14 analysis and work out issues if anything arises with
15 the applicant as we move forward in that process.

16 There is also, I should point out,
17 there's also another public hearing, you'll see that
18 on another slide, another public hearing for a
19 comment period once the draft permit is issued, and
20 then there's -- you're welcome to go to the Public
21 Utilities Commission meetings as well, if you'd
22 like.

23 This is a breakdown looking at dates if
24 we stay on track with this project, as it is right
25 now with the process. You can see the top four

1 there, they are not the greatest color for the wall
2 at the moment, but the information meeting is the
3 third one down, that is where we're at tonight. The
4 comment period extends until December 27th. So,
5 again, you can e-mail me comments, write comments,
6 give me a phone call even, however you want to get
7 them to me, I'll take them until 4:30 on
8 December 27th. And the steps below, the proposed
9 draft permit, January 2014. I haven't stuck hard
10 dates on those just yet, we're working through the
11 process right now. The draft permit issued, we're
12 probably looking at early to mid-February, having a
13 public hearing following that, and then a site
14 permit decision May 2014.

15 The public participation, obviously, I've
16 kind of beat that to death, I think. Again, listing
17 the public comment opportunities, scoping and
18 information meeting tonight, or you can mail them in
19 to me.

20 The public hearing, which will come after
21 the draft site permit is issued. That'll be -- it
22 should be down here, I'm not sure that we've figured
23 out where we're going to have that just yet. But
24 there will be notification of that that will come
25 out. And Commission hearings, like I said, up in

1 St. Paul, which you can look on the Public Utilities
2 Commission website for listings of their meetings as
3 well.

4 Draft permit comments, this is kind of --
5 well, it's basically to give you guys some ideas of
6 things to consider that we -- that would be useful
7 comments to us or useful information to us as we're
8 completing the environmental review of this project.
9 There's a site permit application that's been
10 submitted for the project, it begins and is our way
11 of doing and completing environmental review for the
12 project.

13 What issues should be considered in the
14 development of a draft site permit for this project,
15 are there any unique characteristics within the
16 proposed site for the project that we should be
17 notified of or be considering when we're doing our
18 environmental review. We're talking with other
19 agencies about concerns or questions that they might
20 have. Is there anything that's missing from the
21 site permit application. I should say the site
22 permit application is available on our website and
23 on eDockets for the Public Utilities Commission.
24 There is a hard copy back there on the table, it's a
25 very large document, and you can always e-mail me if

1 you wanted an electronic version or I can steer you
2 to whichever websites you'd like to see it on. And
3 that kind of goes to the next part of it, is there
4 something that's missing or isn't characterized
5 correctly in that site permit application. And we
6 obviously want to hear that from the local people
7 that are out here 'cause you guys know the area
8 better than we do. Again, the draft site permit
9 comments, deadline to me is 4:30, Friday,
10 December 27th.

11 The website that's on here, again, it
12 doesn't show up all that great. That website will
13 take you to my agency's website, and that is -- that
14 website goes directly to the website for the Odell
15 Wind Farm project. And on that site it'll have any
16 important documents that we filed or that Public
17 Utilities Commission staff has filed, you'll be able
18 to find them there. It has my name, my e-mail,
19 phone number, mailing address, all of my contact
20 information. And, again, this goes back to, you go
21 on there and get ahold of me, or this form to get on
22 the project list. Our public advisor will be
23 maintaining that project list. Department contact.
24 Again, that's me.

25 The Public Utilities Commission staff

1 contacts, Mike Kaluzniak, he is back there in the
2 corner in the yellow shirt if you'd like to talk to
3 him. Tracy is our public advisor, she wasn't able
4 to make it tonight, but she will be assisting and
5 maintaining the project mailing list and the
6 information list for anybody that would like to be
7 put on that.

8 That's pretty much the end of my talk,
9 other than, Patrick, were you going to -- did you
10 want to give your presentation?

11 MR. PATRICK SMITH: I'm happy to.

12 MR. RICH DAVIS: Okay. I'm just going to
13 run through this quick before I pull up Patrick's,
14 but once Patrick is done, we'll open it up for
15 comments or questions from anybody.

16 I want to keep it as orderly as I can for
17 our court reporter's sake. And so if you can come
18 up to the front, we'll have a microphone, I need you
19 to state and spell your name for Janet so that she
20 can get it all down. I don't know that limiting
21 people to five minutes is going to be too big of a
22 problem, hopefully. And please maintain respect for
23 others and focus comments on the Odell project, on
24 the draft site permit, that's all I ask.

25 And I'll turn it over to Patrick for his

1 and I'll pull his presentation up quick.

2 MR. PATRICK SMITH: Can everybody -- you
3 can probably hear that. I'll hold this down a
4 little bit more, it's a different battery
5 configuration on this, obviously, so hopefully I can
6 keep it together. I'll make my presentation brief,
7 but hopefully I can cover a few of the basic
8 highlights of the project.

9 My name is Patrick Smith, I am with
10 Geronimo Energy, and we are the developer of the
11 Odell Wind Farm, which is located, like Rich just
12 said, east of town here. We started working on the
13 Odell Wind Farm in 2008, actually slightly earlier
14 than that.

15 Like it says there, the Odell Wind Farm
16 is a wholly owned subsidiary of Geronimo Wind
17 Energy, that's the company that I work for. We are
18 working both wind and solar, we're calling ourselves
19 Geronimo Energy now, just to be clear. And the
20 project is a 200 megawatt wind farm, it's going to
21 be between 100 and 133 turbines in Cottonwood,
22 Jackson, Martin, and Watonwan Counties.

23 The project area is a little bit less
24 than 35,000 acres, and we expect that the total
25 investment of this project will be around 320

1 million.

2 We've got a power contract with Xcel
3 Energy. They are also the utility that we're
4 interconnecting with. And that contract lasts 20
5 years, it's been approved by the Minnesota Public
6 Utilities Commission. This permit is one of the
7 major steps in getting the project to a construction
8 ready status. But the number one thing that we
9 wanted to make sure we had in place was the power
10 purchase agreement and we're very excited to say
11 that we do.

12 So a little summary of what the economics
13 are for this project. The folks who are signed up
14 with the wind farm, once it goes operational, will
15 receive approximately \$1.1 million annually. That
16 will be for the whole of the people that are signed
17 up with the wind farm, not on an individual basis.
18 That amounts to approximately \$22 million over 20
19 years, which is our anticipated life of the project.
20 The county and townships in aggregate will receive
21 about \$850,000 on an annual basis, or 17 million
22 over 20 years.

23 We anticipate that when we go to
24 construction we'll need about 250 people working to
25 build the plant, it's going to involve all sorts of

1 technical folks, engineers, construction jobs.
2 That's a pretty broad cross-section of what we need.
3 And that job activity during construction, as many
4 of you know because there's been a lot of wind farms
5 built around here, that adds up in the community and
6 creates additional revenue in the local community.
7 You know, people buying sandwiches to hardware.

8 During operations we anticipate we'll
9 have between 10 and 15 full-time jobs. Those folks
10 will be skilled folks, maintaining the turbines, and
11 ensuring that everything is operating properly on
12 the wind farm.

13 In addition, Geronimo, as a practice for
14 all of our wind farms, sets up a 501(c)(3), it's a
15 nonprofit, it's run completely independent of
16 Geronimo, and during operation they get \$40,000 of
17 the revenue from this wind farm. And they will be
18 tasked with dispensing that money on an annual
19 basis. There will be a board of folks that will
20 hear proposals and then vote on what to do. They'll
21 have their own organization, we don't have anything
22 to do with that. And so they'll be from the
23 community, from landowners, you know, it'll be
24 generally a positive thing for the community.

25 We've been engaged and working on doing

1 environmental reviews on this project since the
2 beginning of it. This figure here is from the site
3 permit application, which you can look at back there
4 in more detail if you want. It covers the unique
5 and natural features and that includes cultural
6 features and provides what our turbine layout looks
7 like on top of that.

8 We've done very significant avian and bat
9 surveys on the project over the past year and we've
10 been continuing to coordinate with the Minnesota
11 Department of Natural Resources and the United
12 States Fish and Wildlife Service on that survey, the
13 protocol on identifying good ways to minimize what
14 impact we will have on flying animals. We've also
15 been coordinating with the state preservation office
16 on cultural and geological resources that might be
17 in the area and we'll be continuing to work with
18 those state agencies as we go through the site
19 permitting process and go into construction and
20 operations.

21 Really quick, I thought that it might be
22 useful, since this is a scoping meeting, to go over
23 the parts. In particular, construction, because it
24 gives you an idea of the different facilities that
25 we're proposing for this project. Generally, that's

1 access roads, turbine foundations, the delivery of
2 equipment to the site, erection of turbines,
3 collection systems, substation, and then to
4 restoration and repair of the project area. It's
5 not exactly in sequence of how the construction
6 goes, but it is generally from a high level what
7 happens.

8 You know, you start with the access
9 roads, and here, if folks haven't gotten to see one
10 of the wind farms in the area, the Lakefield the Elm
11 Creek projects, you get a high level idea of the
12 picture to the right is just a grubbed out cornfield
13 that basically has cleared it so that they can go
14 and lay down gravel. And the picture next to it is
15 freshly graveled, it's a little bit wider than what
16 the final road will be, they'll reduce that width.
17 During construction they have a wider road to allow
18 for delivery of larger components.

19 The next item out there will be the
20 foundation. The foundation is usually between 55
21 feet and 60 feet wide. It's made up of a lattice of
22 rebar and then what they do is they pour cement into
23 it. It's usually about 7 or 8 feet deep, it'll
24 depend on the actual soil conditions at the turbine
25 location, and we'll be doing individual testing at

1 each turbine location to determine what the
2 appropriate design, the foundation for the project
3 are. These are two pictures where you can see the
4 lattice rebar and then how it gets built with
5 cement. They're generally rectangular in shape.

6 This is just a picture of delivery of the
7 components, you've probably seen them coming through
8 town here before. This is a turbine section, and
9 what we'll need to do for the project in certain
10 locations as determined really by the turbine
11 manufacturer, where the intersections wouldn't allow
12 these trucks to turn, they'll need to add a little
13 gravel into the ditch and provide them with a live
14 turning radius. In some more extreme situations in
15 the wind farm boundary itself usually, they might
16 need to put in a temporary road to allow the trucks
17 to make a turn.

18 We get to erection, there's usually a
19 couple of cranes, they'll assemble a couple parts on
20 the ground and then they'll get a really tall crane
21 and a couple of shorter cranes to help balance the
22 equipment as it goes up into the air.

23 This is the collection system, and with
24 the amount of drain tile in the area I'm sure folks
25 are going to be interested in the collection system

1 installation. We'll be using a trenching system,
2 but they'll have an open trench and then they'll
3 compact it and lay in the cable. They may do some
4 temporary damming around some of the ditches or we
5 may need to bore under them depending on conditions.
6 To the left here is a photo of what a temporary dam
7 looks like for the collection system installation,
8 as well as what the cable issuance will look like.

9 There will be a substation, a wind farm
10 substation for this wind farm. That'll step up the
11 energy to a transmission level voltage. All of the
12 cabling will be underground and there will be an
13 above ground transmission line that will be
14 permitted through another process. And the project
15 substation will be graded out flat, there will be a
16 grounding grid laid in underneath it so that if
17 there's a lightening strike or anything, the entire
18 thing gets absorbed and dissipates rather than
19 disrupting the substation operation. And really
20 ongoing throughout the project is restoration of the
21 site. There's two things that I highlighted here in
22 particular for this project, which the first one is
23 drain tile, the second one is hydro to it so there's
24 control of erosion and quick receding of
25 disturbances. The first one, this photo is actually

1 from a project we built in 2012. What we did is we
2 flew the site with a color infrared aerial photo,
3 and we were able to use that photo, combined with
4 drain tile maps, to identify both recently installed
5 tile and really old tile that was still functioning.
6 And then what we did is we provided the construction
7 crew with a map of that tile and they went through
8 the process of, as it got damaged or as it was about
9 to get damaged, they would be able to identify it in
10 the field where it was and have somebody there to
11 replace it right away.

12 The other one, they're spraying out some
13 of that seed, it's green in color, it's kind of
14 ground up paper, it lands on the ground wet and
15 expands and holds the dirt in place, the paper is
16 filled with seeds and it fills up and basically
17 grows very quickly and repairs ditch edges to
18 eliminate erosion. There might also be straw
19 bottles or silk fences or all sorts of other things
20 that will be out there to try and prevent or repair
21 damaged soil and keep the water base clear.

22 That is sort of the high level review of
23 what goes into building a wind farm and a review of
24 where the wind farm is. And I think Rich is here to
25 answer -- take any questions that you guys might

1 have and so I'll pass it back to him.

2 MR. RICH DAVIS: All right. Thank you,
3 Patrick.

4 I'm going to pull this back up just to go
5 back over a little bit. As a reminder, for comments
6 and questions I'd like everybody to come up here.
7 You've got about five minutes. One speaker at a
8 time, state and spell your name, respect one
9 another, and focus again on the scope of the project
10 from a draft site permit side of things.

11 So if anybody would like to come up?
12 I've got a mike, don't be scared. And if you filled
13 out the green cards, if you want to just bring them
14 up here.

15 MR. AARON BACKMAN: Aaron Backman, that's
16 A-A-R-O-N, B-A-C-K-M-A-N. I'm the executive
17 director for the Windom Economic Development
18 Authority. We work with businesses, both new and
19 existing.

20 The Economic Development Authority of
21 Windom and its Board of Commissioners fully support
22 Geronimo Energy's efforts in the construction of
23 approximately 100 to 130 wind turbines in the
24 Cottonwood, Jackson, Martin and Watonwan Counties as
25 part of the first phase of the Odell Wind Farm

1 project.

2 And as a point of reference, the center
3 of all those turbines will be approximately eight,
4 eight and a half miles to the east of where we're at
5 right now, so it's fairly close to the community
6 here.

7 The construction and operation of the
8 Odell Wind Farm will provide a significant number of
9 jobs, construction jobs for the area's work force
10 and draw additional skilled workers to Southwestern
11 Minnesota. I think the figure was upwards of 200
12 construction employees, in addition to the full-time
13 employees afterwards that would be maintaining and
14 operating the system. These employment
15 opportunities will create long-term positive
16 economic effects for the entire area. And we, along
17 with the Cottonwood County commissioners, applaud
18 Geronimo Energy for its effort in development of
19 this wind energy generation system in Southwest
20 Minnesota through the Odell Wind Farm to make it
21 become a reality.

22 So just on behalf of the EDA, I would
23 like to mention that we are very much supportive of
24 this and look forward to seeing it move forward
25 during the 2014, 2015 time frame.

1 MR. RICH DAVIS: Thank you.

2 Anybody else with comments or questions?
3 You're all that shy?

4 MR. BILL JANZEN: My name is Bill,
5 B-I-L-L, Janzen, J-A-N-Z-E-N. And I am a landowner
6 located within this wind project and I want to
7 support this project as a landowner. I see it as a
8 good thing for the Mountain Lake/Window region. We
9 are very dependent on agriculture, our economics are
10 very dependent on agriculture production and to have
11 some diversity, economic diversity is a real plus
12 for the region. And as a landowner it's an
13 opportunity to generate some income off of land that
14 we own and we personally don't have to make an
15 investment to generate this income.

16 We have worked with Geronimo over the
17 last year or two with a met tower, and the working
18 relationship with Geronimo has been very well, they
19 communicate well, they ask for input, and they've
20 been a good company to work with.

21 MR. RICH DAVIS: Thank you.

22 Any more comments or questions?

23 All right. Well, seeing that we don't
24 have anything else, I just want to thank everybody
25 for coming out and remind you that you can go ahead

1 and take a look at those maps that are back there
2 for the various turbines arrays that are being
3 considered. On the table on your way out there's
4 additional information to pick up that I mentioned
5 before the talk. I also want to point out my
6 business card is back there that has all my contact
7 information on it. And don't be shy and please get
8 ahold of me if you have any questions or comments on
9 the project.

10 Thank you.

11 (Meeting concluded.)

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