

August 1, 2011

To the Editor:

This week, I submitted my resignation from the Westport Energy Committee in protest of what I believe are thoughtless actions by a triumvirate of Westport selectmen. This is the letter that I have sent to explain my action.

"It has been an honor and a pleasure to serve as chair of the Westport Energy Committee for the past seven years. However, recent decisions by your board have caused me to reconsider my participation on this most important and worthwhile committee. Westport voters have repeatedly endorsed the committee's wind turbine project on town land, even at a time of money shortages. Voters understand that the sooner the town installs a viable turbine, the sooner we begin to earn money.

Westport voters have twice authorized studies of the wind turbine at the Town Forest behind the Fire Station. Two years ago, the voters authorized a "prefeasibility study" of the site. Based on the favorable findings of that study, the Energy Committee applied for a grant to examine the site in detail. The state agreed to a 75 percent reimbursement of the \$75,000 Town Forest study upon its conclusion.

A warrant article for this project was placed on the December 2010 Town Meeting. The project was opposed by a handful of people. Despite their strong objections, the Town Meeting overwhelmingly approved the project. Atlantic Design Engineers, a widely respected firm with great experience in wind turbine siting and construction, has now completed most of this research.

Last month, the new select triumvirate appointed the project's most strident opponents to the Energy Committee. At the Energy Committee's first meeting, three years of work by our consultant was attacked by our new appointees. They had not read the research and yet continued their attack on the project as if they had not been outvoted at Town Meeting.

The stakes are high. The research data is specific to this site and the immediate vicinity. If the opponents and their selectmen allies succeed in derailing the Town Forest study, the full contract amount will still be due and the town may be on the hook for 100 percent of the costs, not just 25 percent.

If, instead of blocking all public wind turbines, the opponents plan to propose a wind turbine on other public land, they will have to find new money, restart the data collection and hold new public hearings. Some of the grants may be unavailable by the time they restart the process. Furthermore, the delay would cost the town a minimum of three years of revenues.

If the opponents were to consider a public wind turbine on private property, the project would suffer the same delay costs. In addition, many of the public grants and assistance would be unavailable for private sites. The cost to the town would be even higher and the benefit to the town would be even less.

Perhaps the new committee members have other reasons for blocking or slowing the Town Forest turbine. If so, attacking the methods and credentials of the present design engineer will not lead to a balanced consideration of alternatives. Ignoring seven years of publicly funded research will not lead to energy savings. It may even lead to litigation costs.

In light of the selectmen's lack of support for this important public project, I am regretfully unable to continue as the Energy Committee's chair or even as a member. I hereby tender my resignation effective immediately."

David P. Dionne
Westport