

# The winds of public opinion: Turbines in Brome-Missisquoi

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A proposed plan for a wind farm at the western end of Brome-Missisquoi has been modified, but the community remains divided on whether it should exist at all.

Several of the 300 people who packed into Bedford's community centre Monday night called for a moratorium on windmills, or a referendum. While a number complained of a lack of transparency, others commended Groupe SM International and the municipalities on their efforts to inform the population.

"The support of the municipalities and the MRC will be helpful in getting the project approved by Hydro Quebec," said Arthur Fauteux, warden of the Brome-Missisquoi MRC. He said the MRC will take a final position on the windmill issue at the end of August.

Groupe SM's David Cliche, who once sat as the Parti Quebecois' environment minister, gave a presentation of the revised project: Instead of 51 1.5 megawatt windmills located at least 500 metres from the nearest homes, Groupe SM is now looking at 30 larger windmills of 2 mw each. The new windmills will have bigger rotors, but will have no gearboxes, in order to reduce noise. They will also be no closer than 650 metres from the nearest residences in Stanbridge Station, Bedford Township and Pike River.

"There were many comments concerning the density of the windmills," Cliche said of the earlier public meeting. He said the final version of the project will be presented to Hydro in early August. Then if accepted, it would be

submitted to Quebec's farmland protection board (CPTAQ) and possibly the provincial environmental hearing board, the BAPE.

"There are still a lot of green lights needed before we can go ahead," Cliche said.

But the region has what Groupe SM is looking for: Decent potential for steady, strong winds coming off the St. Lawrence Lowlands and the proximity to high tension transmission lines.

Yves Hennekens, one of two engineers hired by the Brome-Missisquoi MRC as consultants on the issue, said the project would provide \$700,000 a year for municipalities and farmers, and pump \$17 million into the regional economy.

"Overall, from a global point of view, the advantages are superior to the disadvantages," he said.

However a number of area residents didn't see it that way. Luce Brault of Notre-Dame-de-Stanbridge was the first, but not the last speaker of the night to demand a moratorium on the idea.

"This takes into account only the money," she said. "It doesn't take into account the BAPE, or the population of the MRC."

Michel Lavoie of Stanbridge Station suggested a referendum. "If the result is positive, then we go ahead with this adventure, if it is negative then we put it to rest," he said.

Pike River real estate developer Maurice Raymond said the windmills will have a negative impact on property values.

"We won't know for 10 years what percentage of value they will lose," he said. "There are no positives, only negatives."

Not all comments were negative.

"People are afraid of change," said Chantal Brodeur. "I think our region is privileged to be able to consider such a project."

Another woman said more information should be made available about the impact on health and quality of life. She

suggested windmills should never be closer than 2.5 km from the nearest house. Susan Muir also suggested a 2-km setback.

“I think this is an effective use of our territory,” said Andre Pion, one of the farmers whose land is being considered for a wind turbine. “There are a lot of positives.”

Erin Meyer, who studied the environment at Trent University, said the world is facing an energy crisis, and anything that doesn’t pollute should be seriously considered. “I encourage people to look at the good and the bad and come to a conclusion that is good in the long term,” she said. For Meyer that means supporting wind power.

“When you buy a property you don’t buy the right to control your neighbour,” said one woman, who said opposition was a case of “not in my back yard.”

Yet another speaker suggested windmills might not be as effective as other, less visual forms of renewable energy. She suggested that alternatives such as geothermal heating and solar energy might be a better option.

“We must look at other forms of energy before we mortgage the western end of Brome-Missisquoi,” she said.

The decision-making process is far from over: Groupe SM’s project, which has already been reworked multiple times, will be presented in its final form at a public meeting on Aug. 2. A week later there will be public meetings on the content of the MRC regulation, with the final position of the Council of Mayors made public by the end of August.

Brome-Missisquoi Director General Robert Desmarais said information on the project, and the MRC’s efforts to regulate wind power, are posted on the MRC’s Internet website at [www.brome-missisquoi.ca](http://www.brome-missisquoi.ca).

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