

Wind farm rules to be updated

As commercial turbines blow into Indiana, Marshall County to bolster ordinances.

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PLYMOUTH — Wind farms have begun appearing in Benton and White counties in northwest Indiana, and Marshall County could be next.

Looking ahead to that possibility, the Marshall County Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing at 7:30 p.m. Thursday on proposed ordinance changes for wind energy conversion systems and to raise the fee for commercial wind farm permits from \$50 to \$20,000.

Marshall County planning director Ralph Booker said wind farms have shown interest in locating in both northern and southern Marshall County.

"Meetings have already taken place with a wind farm company actively pursuing locations," Booker said of the northern Marshall County location. "They've met with farmers four times in the area to talk about signing acreage over for two years on a temporary basis."

EOSOL Energy, a Spanish company, is exploring possibilities of a wind farm in Marshall County and other Indiana sites.

"With improved technologies for wind turbines, they can run efficiently with slower wind speeds," said Augustin Abalo, a real estate developer for EOSOL, in a telephone interview from his Miami, Fla., office.

Abalo said because of client confidentiality he could not give specific locations where wind farms are being considered, but would have an announcement in about a month.

Booker said it takes a few years to determine if the area has sufficient wind to make it worth [investing](#). Environmental, drainage and meteorological testing along with tower operating studies must take place.

In the meantime, the county wants to make sure rules are ready if conditions are right.

The significant rise in the permit fee is not to deter a wind farm from locating in the county but to make sure county expenses are covered.

"Our fee is totally inadequate and it would be a steal right now with the county going through a lot of expenses and not getting reimbursed," Booker said.

For instance, the highway department would be required to prepare road assessments because roads could be damaged in the transportation, [construction](#) or decommission process.

Surveys for crop or tile damage must be conducted and additional staff, lawyer fees and financial experts would be needed.

Booker said county council members, commissioners and economic development leaders took a tour to White County, where Meadow Lake Wind Farm, owned by Horizon Wind Energy, broke ground last year to eventually build more than 500 turbines.

When fully operational, the wind towers are expected to produce enough power to operate 250,000 average homes annually.

While wind farms reduce dependency on foreign energy, increase the tax base, create [construction jobs](#) and give additional income to farmers who continue to use the land, they also change the farming landscape and can disrupt the navigation of migratory birds.

Marshall County's wind farm ordinance has been redesigned to better facilitate wind energy systems while minimizing visual impacts, providing setback regulations, encouraging location in nonresidential settings and avoiding potential environmental damage.

The fee for noncommercial wind energy conversion systems (WECS) would only rise from \$30 to \$40.

A hike in the fee structure for commercial and residential building permits, communication towers and Planning Commission and BZA fees is also proposed.

Proposed changes range from \$5 to \$100. For instance, a permit for an in-ground pool would rise from \$50 to \$100. Roof permits would rise from \$25 to \$30.

The fees cover expenses for travel mileage, time, research, photographs, notice mailings and hearings.

"We haven't raised the fees in a few years and the costs still don't meet all the expenses," Booker said.