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WIND ENERGY REGULATIONS

Zoners find room for home turbines

By Mary Beth Lane
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Several Fairfield County townships are updating their zoning codes to regulate windmills, preparing for home and business owners who want to generate their own electricity.

Franklin County, which administers zoning for 11 of the county's 17 townships, is doing the same work, and planners expect to submit proposed regulations to county commissioners in August.

A change in state law last year gave the Ohio Power Siting Board authority to approve large projects generating five megawatts of power or more. It also gave local zoning boards the responsibility to regulate small wind turbines producing fewer than five megawatts.

"We had absolutely nothing in our code," said Bette Bowers, zoning inspector in Greenfield Township north of Lancaster. "People are interested. We are trying to get a jump on this."

The Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission has drafted wind-energy zoning regulations for Greenfield and also is working with Pleasant and Walnut townships.

Franklin County's draft zoning regulates height, distance from property lines, buildings and road rights of way and noise, as well as size of the required "fall zone" should a turbine topple.

The regulations are for small, personalized systems, not big wind farms, such as those proposed in Champaign, Logan and Hardin counties.

"We have seen an increased number of people interested in small turbines," said Jenny Snapp, director of the Logan-Union-Champaign Regional Planning Commission, who drafted model zoning rules for her area's townships. "We recommend that jurisdictions look at this and become more proactive because more will be coming down the pipeline."

Dover Township, east of Marysville in Union County, updated its zoning this year to regulate height, setback distance and other issues, said township Trustee Barry Moffett.

"We're not discouraging them. In fact, I'm in favor of them. We wanted to make sure that if you put one up it didn't fall on someone's house," he said.

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TURBINES

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Small wind-energy systems cost from $3,000 to $6,000 per kilowatt of generating capacity, or about $40,000 for an installed system large enough to power most of a home, according to the American Wind Energy Association.

Well-sited small wind turbines can pay for themselves within 15 years, about half their service lifetimes, if government tax incentives are used, according to the association.

mlane@dispatch.com