

Committee Transcripts: Standing Committee on General Government - April 15, 2009 - Bill 150, Green Energy and Green Economy Act, 2009

ESSEX COUNTY

WIND ACTION GROUP

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Our next presentation is from Essex County Wind Action Group, Colette McLean.

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Standing Committee on General Government. You have, as you know, 10 minutes for your presentation and five minutes for questions-

Ms. Colette McLean: I understand; I've been here all day.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Anyone who will be speaking, just ask them to please state their name. You may begin.

Ms. Colette McLean: My name is Colette McLean. I belong to an organization called Essex County Wind Action Group. I'm a resident of Essex county. With me today are Bill Anderson, who is chair of our group, and his wife, Maureen Anderson, who is co-chair as well. Also with me today is Barbara Ashbee. Barbara Ashbee is part of my presentation today. I handed out my presentation to you.

I am personally appalled at the tactics the standing committee is taking to squelch these people who are living with wind turbine problems, and I felt it important to rescind my presentation. I hope you will read it and incorporate the information in today's hearing. I would like to hand over the presentation to Barbara now.

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Thank you. I really wanted to speak before the standing committee. I was denied the opportunity to do it. I'm not a very good public speaker, so bear with me.

You need to know the problems with wind turbines and people living with them. I know you probably know me. You've probably seen my letters. When the wind turbines started up in early December, we had terrible noise issues, and it was pretty much instant. There were three nights straight we didn't sleep at all, and that's what prompted my letter to the wind company and to-I actually sent it to the MP because I didn't know how this all worked at that time. I had no idea.

We had no thoughts that we were going to have problems. When the wind turbines were actually going up at our place in the summer, we were putting a double-car garage up at the same time. We had put in a new fence, a new deck, everything. We weren't expecting anything. We're not anti-wind, we're not anti-green, but there are big problems with the setbacks in our area.

By the way, I'm from Shelburne. I'm sorry; I should have said that to begin with.

The closest turbine is 456 metres behind us. There are two north and south of it. Our house faces east. Across the road, the next closest is just under 700 metres. When those winds pick up, they're so loud we cannot sleep at night. We've had test after test.

I will say the wind company has been very diligent in trying to find out what the problem is. Tests have been going on over four months now. They've been in our house with monitors, outside the house with monitors. They've shut turbines on, off. We've spent a lot of time with them, and I think they will agree that the two of us have worked very well together-with the acoustics company and with themselves-but they can't fix the problem.

There's this horrible hum and vibration in our house. It just drives you mad. It's been there for the last six days. I'm sorry. It comes and goes, but it's so loud you can't sleep, and it's coming through the walls. The buried cable transmission lines go up the side of our property-we're on one acre-and I don't know if it's electrical coming through the ground in our house or what it is. We're looking for a rental now because we can't stay there.

When I hear people say, "There aren't problems," and "It's all in their heads," and they're just unhappy because they don't have a turbine, I don't even know what to do. My government has not been helping. My MPP, thank God, has been active in trying to work on my behalf with the government, giving everybody my story, and my council has been good, but I'm not getting anything back from anybody.

This hum and vibration is not covered in the guidelines. There are no guidelines for interior noise in our house. When the winds are whipping up, and we can't sleep for days and days at a time, there's nothing. You phone the MOE and I cannot tell you how many times I heard, "We're in compliance. We're in compliance." They're in compliance. They're in compliance. In fact, they weren't in compliance. Finally, we dragged it out and got the acoustics study back. It's just been such a fight to get information.

Now they're shutting five turbines down at night, and I thank them for that because that's helping with the noise, but this vibration in the house is horrible, it's absolutely horrible. Nobody should have to live like that, and I can't believe the government hasn't intervened and sent someone to our house to test for dirty electricity or whatever it is. It's unconscionable, it just is.

We didn't want to speak out in December. Finally, I gave up and I started writing letters because I didn't know what to do because now our property value is zero. If I could move out of there, I'd have a for sale sign, we'd be gone, but we can't sell our house. We're into the fourth month and a couple of weeks ago a wind company head office guy came and talked to us. We've talked to so many people. He said, "Okay, I'll see you in a month." I'm like, "A month? We've gone on far enough."

Here we are, we can't move. We have nobody helping us. Yes, they're doing their best, but look at the size of the company and look at the number of turbines they have up in Canada, and they can't fix that problem. If you guys are going to go push more through-and then, because I came out and starting speaking, I've got people all over the province phoning me and saying, "Help us. We're not getting anywhere with our MPP. Nobody's listening to us." And I'm trying to help, I'm trying to get the word out, I'm trying to get-

Interjection.

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Excuse me? I'm just saying, they're phoning me and I'm saying, "Phone your MPP and tell them they have to get the message to the higher-ups." I keep getting told, "We've written letters, we're getting phone calls," and they're having problems. My MPP's awesome. She's been

fantastic, she's been very helpful and I said that my town council has been trying its best to help us also. There are other people on our farm who are having problems. They're not necessarily speaking out yet. They're phoning me, and that's fine. I have no problem with that. I would never, ever, ever put anybody's privacy at issue or say anything, but there are lot more people than even you know or have heard from.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): We have some time for questions, unless anyone else has comments. You have a few more minutes for comments, if you want, or we can go to questions.

Ms. Colette McLean: I would like to ask this committee, what are you planning to do to help this situation? What are you going to do to help these people? You may think that it's only one or two, but we have information-we're getting information-that there are potentially a lot more. And what we're finding is that, because people feel that green energy is as important, we have to do this. What else can we do? We want to see this province move forward. We're all like this in this room, including us, but what happens when people like this are being affected and there is absolutely no recourse for these people? I would like to know how the Green Energy Act is going to address this or, at least, how this committee is going to address this or how MPPs are going to address this.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thank you, Ms. McLean. We'll go to questions. Ms. Broten or Mrs. Mitchell?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'll respond briefly. The process that is ongoing right now is an opportunity for a committee of MPPs from all parties to travel the province and hear from communities, and that's what we're doing. We're having 33 hours of public hearings on the bill and travelling the province and having an opportunity to hear about the challenges in a variety of municipalities across the province with the establishment of setbacks and how the province can assist as we move forward. Individuals like you have an opportunity to put in written submissions and to attend before committee. Only so many people can come in that period of time, but the process is managed by the three parties collectively and I think it works well to hear voices. That's really what we're doing today-having a chance to hear your voices.

I know Mrs. Mitchell wanted to respond to something.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you. I just wanted to say to you that the comment that is made in one of your reports that the MPP-and you specifically named myself-from the riding specifically with regard to the Ripley farm-that nothing is being done. That is not true. I want to say that when the concerns first started from the Ripley farm-and that was, what? About, I guess, eight or nine months ago?

Ms. Colette McLean: Fifteen months ago, madam.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: No, no, let me finish. One of the things that they asked me to do was to not get involved. They wanted to work through the private negotiations. When they finally came to me and asked for some assistance, I met with Suncor to address what had been done. I've talked to Hydro One. There are studies going on right now to deal with the issues. In my mind, we have to go in and address the concerns. That is what my office is doing. When we see something like this-and Sandy is coming later to speak to the committee. She will be speaking as the last presentation. But to say that I have done nothing is inappropriate.

Ms. Colette McLean: I disagree with that, madam, because you have done very little, if you've done anything. You are promoting wind and you're calling Bruce county the centre of energy. You're pushing for these projects to go ahead and you're dismissing these people as NIMBYs.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: No, I'm not-

Ms. Colette McLean: They went to you and you said nothing.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thank you. That's time for questions, Mrs. Mitchell.

Mr. Yakabuski, you have the floor.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Barbara, for your personal experience, which I think is extremely important-how somebody is personally affected by this. Now, you live with your husband?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Do you have any children?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: They're all grown and out of the house, thank God. If we had children there, we would not be there.

Mr. John Yakabuski: At the times that they're there, are they affected?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: One's in Australia and the other one's in Maryland. They're all over, so-

Mr. John Yakabuski: So he doesn't come home for weekends?

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do appreciate your submission and putting a face on what we're hearing from people. It's very hard for someone like myself to quantify it, because so much of it can be seen as anecdotal, but I'm still hearing that any kind of official response at the ministry level is basically non-existent.

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: It hasn't been. My MPP finally wrote-

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's Sylvia Jones?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Yes, Sylvia Jones wrote to Mr. Gerretsen's office in January saying, "These people have real concerns. Please get in touch with them." I received a copy of the letter on the 15th, and on the 20th, our MOE office phoned and he said, "I hear you're having a problem," and I said, "Yeah, we're having a problem," and I went into it with him on the phone. We had a long discussion-probably 45 minutes long. I got some misinformation on decibel levels allowable. Again, I've said how many times that I've been told, "They're in compliance, they're in compliance." That's just the phrase word that they like to use, and when I questioned-basically, I was told over the phone that up to 60 decibels was allowable.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The fact that your setback on one was 400 and some metres and the closest one in another direction was 700 and some metres-that, you would think, would certainly give them reason to consider those setbacks as being inadequate-

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Totally inadequate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: -if those are some of the symptoms that you're suffering from with regard to that proximity.

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Woefully inadequate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Have they made any commitment to you with regard to further setbacks?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: No. The wind company is shutting five down at night. They recognize they have a problem, and finally when we got the acoustics report, it was there in black and white. It took a long time-

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's evidence that there's a problem, if they're shutting them down.

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: There's absolutely a problem. But the one behind us is shut down permanently, and then they're running four during the day-three to four-on low rpm so that they're not emitting as much noise as the other ones, and then they shut them down at night.

But this vibration is just absolutely horrible, and it comes and it goes. Other people have heard it. We had a councillor in. We phoned her one day. Actually, I was in school and my husband phoned her to come in, because we were trying to get people to experience it that we-that's the first time I had actually met her; I had been to council meetings, but I hadn't actually met her. I was trying to get people to feel it. It's a horrible, horrible feeling, and it's a humming-

Mr. John Yakabuski: And do they feel it if they're in your home?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thank you, Ms. Ashbee-Lormand and Mr. Yakabuski. That's your time for questions. You can continue in a moment.

Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm very sorry to hear of the experiences that you're going through, because they clearly have had an impact on you. Can you tell me the name of the wind company?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Canadian Hydro.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The acoustics report that was produced: Is that something that you would be willing to share with the committee?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: I don't see why not.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That would be worth seeing.

What puzzles me is this: I've talked to farmers in Alberta, in Pincher Creek, whose farms were saved from bankruptcy by the installation of wind turbines, and they were extraordinarily happy in their experience. Some were-

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: I'm not saying everybody-I'm so sorry.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No, that's okay.

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Not everybody's having a problem.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm not saying you haven't experienced what you've experienced. What I'm trying to understand is what the difference is in conditions. I've talked to people, again, in southwestern Ontario, who are very close to wind turbines. Frankly, they're very comfortable with them. So I'm curious as to what the factors are that have given you this experience that is clearly very difficult.

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: I am just as curious, and that's why they're doing the testing. If there wasn't a problem, they wouldn't be shut down.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Do you get the vibration when the turbines are shut down?

Ms. Barbara Ashbee-Lormand: Yes, and it's my thought-and they can't figure it out. Mind you, nobody from the MOE has come to check, but there are buried cable transmission lines going up the side of our property and there are Bell wires, and there's a theory that perhaps the transmission cables are inducing electricity into the Bell wire, which is coming into our home. It's grounded in our circuitry so it's going around our house. We have had, just last week, an electrical consultant test for dirty electricity and he did find dirty electricity at 13 volts, which may not sound like much, but it's a lot.

Ms. Colette McLean: That's why we're asking for the epidemiological study, to determine the extent. When they did the Walkerton review, they looked at the foci. The foci starts with two or three cases and then they branch out to determine how far the extent of the problems are. That's how you have to do it. It's going to require this province to do a review. I'm sorry, it's an investigation. If you want to go

forward with these types of projects, you're going to have to prove to us as residents-it's not up to us to tell you, to show you. We don't have the resources to do that. You have to be able to develop that study and determine how far back, if that's what you want. I don't want to see them at all, personally, I'll be quite up front about it, because I truly don't believe that this is the real green thing. Industrial wind is not the real answer. I think there are a lot of other possibilities and we should be looking at more research instead, but if you're going to go ahead, then you have to do that investigation, that epidemiological study.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thank you, Ms. McLean, Ms. Ashbee-Lormand. Folks, that's time for the presentation. I appreciate you coming in today.