By Bob Ciesielski

The New York State Sierra Club's Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee unanimously endorsed the Apex Clean Energy Inc. wind project in Town of Somerset in Niagara County and the Town of Yates in Orleans County as environmentally sound.

In early October, Apex made its first presentation of turbine siting and studies concerning the project and addressed an array of issues including property values, siting of turbines, environmental questions, jobs, the
availability of tax and community financial benefits to towns and school districts, and the approval process itself.

Some 47 Vestas 4.2-megawatt turbines are proposed for a capacity of 197 megawatts. According to farmers and landowners, they will be paid substantial royalties for turbine leases, which will help keep farming profitable and maintain the agricultural nature of the region. The agrarian productivity of the leased parcels will be maintained up to the turbine towers.

There have been more than 10 major studies in the United States and Canada of property values near wind turbines. These studies show that after construction, there is either no loss of value or a slight increase in value due to increased economic activity, taxes and community benefit payments from the turbines.

The proposed sites for the turbines were presented. The homes and businesses of all nonparticipating landowners would be greater than 1/3 mile away from the closest turbine. The property lines of all nonparticipating landowners are more than 650 feet from a turbine. Barker Central School would be located more than a mile from the turbines.
Sound from the turbines will not exceed 45 decibels outside any nonparticipating residence or business. This level of sound is the equivalent of background from an air conditioning system in a large school hall, as displayed at the Oct. 2 public presentation.

Regarding birds in the area, Apex is required to meet all federal and state bird and wildlife laws and regulations, including the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. As of 2016, more than 250 studies have been made of birds and wind turbines nationwide. Studies indicate that wind projects located in migration paths, such as along the Texas Gulf Coast and other Great Lakes, can and are being constructed in ways that avoid any unusual or elevated levels of impact.

The Sierra Club sees the development of sustainable, renewable energy as necessary. The threat of climate change is highlighted by the recent report from 13 federal agencies. Independent studies find that fossil fuel production causes many more bird losses than wind turbines per generated megawatt of electricity.

Bob Ciesielski, of Buffalo, is energy committee chairman of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.

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