

Davison County residents unhappy with proposed 1,000-foot setback for wind towers

By [Evan Hendershot](#) on Mar 7, 2017 at 7:17 p.m.



Turbines at the Beethoven Wind Farm near Tripp rotate in this Daily Republic file photo. (Matt Gade / Republic)

One Beulah Township resident doesn't believe the industry standard for wind turbine setbacks should be the same standard imposed in Davison County.

With the second public hearing regarding the county's proposed zoning ordinance changes set for 5:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Davison County Fairgrounds, Jerry Scott said the 1,000-foot setback proposed between county homes and wind towers isn't good enough.

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"It seems to me that the distance is basically created to allow the developer to put the maximum amount of turbines in a smaller space, kind of like trying to put a shoe on with a shoehorn two sizes too small," Scott said.

The ordinance is years in the making, with the county's duo Planning and Zoning Department employees conducting extensive research on a variety of topics to update an array of items in the lengthy ordinance. But folks like Scott have set their sights on the wind setback, which could find its way to the Davison County Commission if the ordinance proposals are approved by the Planning Commission.

Scott pointed to health and safety concerns, and wondered how a wind turbine within 1,000 feet of his home could potentially impact his property value. Scott's concerns come approximately one year after the commission denied a 9- to 11-turbine wind farm just down the road from his property.

"Common sense tells me that people aren't going to find properties with wind towers 1,000 feet from them very valuable," Scott said.

But county officials were quick to note Wednesday's meeting isn't the last time the ordinance will be discussed before the commission considers its approval. Planning and Zoning Administrator Jeff Bathke said the meeting will be the second public hearing, and the five-person commission ultimately makes the final decision on the ordinance.

"Barring any major revision, the Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the County Commission on the proposed changes, either at the March 8 meeting or a future meeting," Bathke said. "There will then be a public hearing, a first reading and a second reading at the County Commission level."

Bathke also noted inaccuracies in an advertisement in The Daily Republic, which he said implies it was from the county's Planning and Zoning office. It also said Wednesday's meeting would be the last public discussion on the ordinance, which is not accurate.

As for the reason the 1,000-foot setback was proposed, Bathke said it was the result of a full-fledged research effort between himself and his deputy, Mark Jenniges.

"We chose the 1,000-foot distance for our zoning ordinance revision, as this was the furthest distance of what similar counties in the Midwest have used as the standard," Bathke said.

Bathke said most setbacks in similar jurisdictions were primarily 750 feet, 1,000 feet or 1.1 times the height of the tower, the latter of which would be less than 500 feet in most situations.

County Commission Chair Brenda Bode encouraged residents to visit Wednesday's meeting, and she also wanted to clear the air regarding ordinance. While many have noted the ordinance's wind tower setback, Bode reinforced the notion that the ordinance revisions have been in the works as early as 2013.

And Bode also pointed out that the ordinance can still be changed.

"This is not set in stone by any means," Bode said. "We've got some things that have changed since the last time we met, so this process will continue, and there's a lot of things in it that people need to look at besides wind energy."

One resident Bode won't have to encourage to look at the ordinance is Gene Stehly, a rural Davison County resident who, like Scott, is discouraged by the 1,000-foot setback. Instead of what's proposed, Stehly hopes the county considers a one-mile setback. And he said he's not alone.

"So I've talked to countless people regarding wind energy in our county, and you know what, I concluded that a vast majority of our residents are not in favor of building wind farms under any circumstances," Stehly said. "They feel that they're a blight to the landscape."

But Stehly did suggest a compromise.

If a group of the county's property owners collectively applied for a variance where everyone agreed to forego the one mile setback, he said that would be suitable. But for the interest of those who don't want to participate, he would like to see a larger setback.

And Stehly had a supporter in Scott.

"But locally right now, I think that the health and welfare and enjoyment of property and such in Davison County is probably far better served by a much larger setback or just telling them we don't really want them here," Scott said.