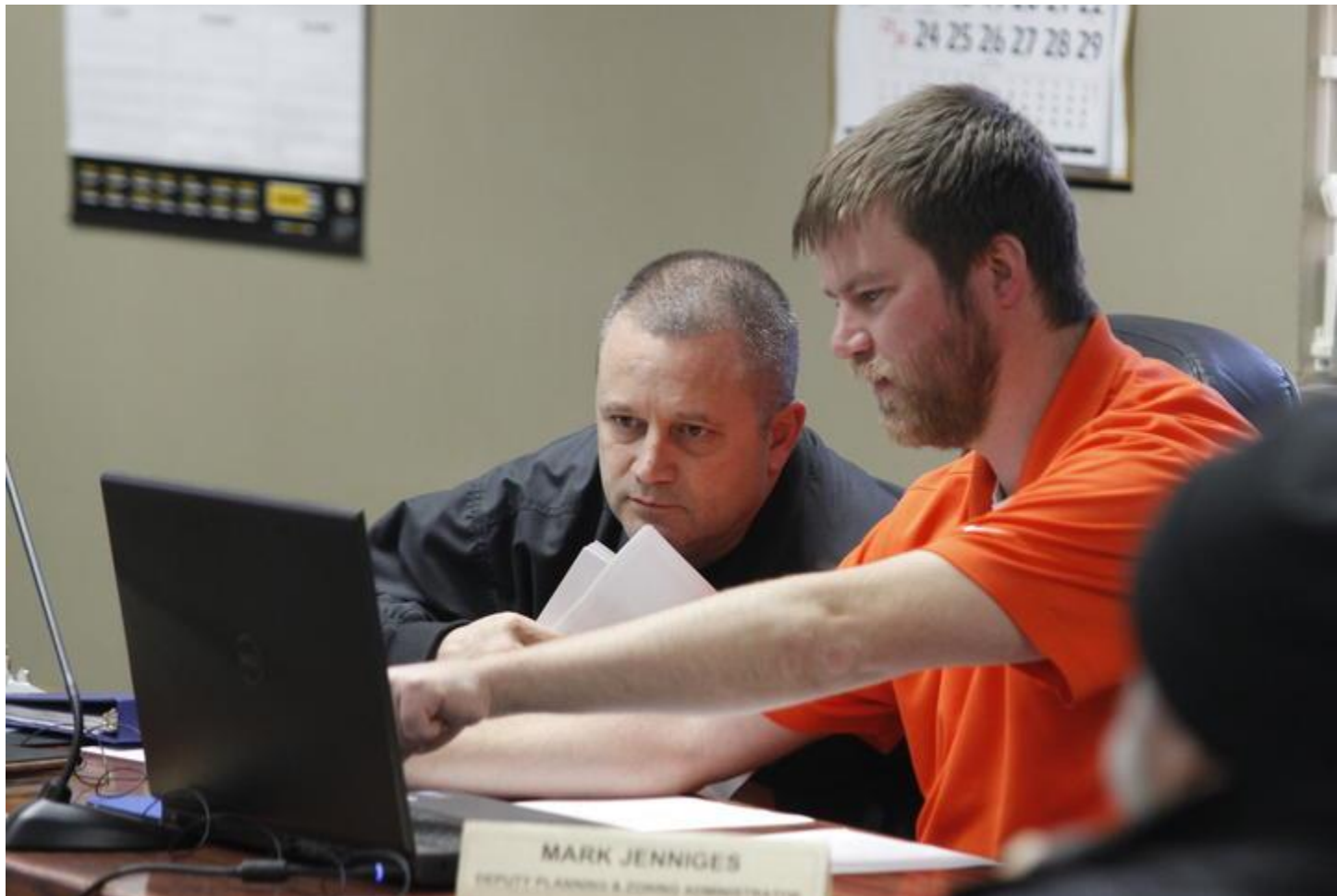


Davison Co. 1,000-foot wind setback decision delayed

By Evan Hendershot on Apr 4, 2017 at 10:22 p.m.



Davison County Planning and Zoning Administrator Jeff Bathke, left, and Deputy Administrator Mark Jenniges speak prior to the Davison County Planning Commission meeting on Tuesday at the Davison County North Offices in Mitchell. (Evan Hendershot / Republic)

A proposal to establish a series of wind turbine regulations will have to wait another month.

Approximately 40 people packed the Davison County North Offices on Tuesday night for the county's Planning Commission meeting to hear the six present board members debate the publicly panned 12 wind energy recommendations proposed by the county's Planning and Zoning Department. The commission decided to delay proposing the plan to the Davison County Commission and will instead discuss the matter at its May 2 meeting.

County Commissioner Kim Weitala serves on the Planning Commission and acknowledged that 1,000 feet may be too short of a setback between a tower and the nearest home. But she said one mile is too far, as proposed by several landowners, and would essentially close the door on wind energy projects in the county.

"No, I think 1,000 is too short," Weitala said. " ... So I don't think it's fair to put a mile on there, because why are we here then?"

The idea of a half-mile setback was floated by the board, but Planning Commission Chair Bruce Haines proposed a setback based on the height of the tower rather than 1,000 feet. Haines offered the example of a 450-foot tower, stating a setback could be established determined by a multiple of 10, thus setting a 4,500-foot setback. Davison County Commission Chair Brenda Bode then suggested also including a minimum setback as an alternative to the setback determined by height, which Haines said would be feasible.

"Because then we protect ourselves either way," Haines said.

The proposal includes 12 regulations, most notably rules enforcing light and sound restrictions. But before the meeting ended, public comments focused on the potential decrease in property values and appearance of wind towers.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Jeff Bathke also said whatever regulation is on the books, the Davison County Commission could demand stricter regulations at the time of the conditional use application. And as he's done throughout the public hearing process, Bathke noted the regulations would be the first on the books for Davison County.

"If someone were to present one right now, there are no regulations under it other than they need a conditional use application," Bathke said, stating an applicant could install towers that make as much noise or be as bright as possible.

The proposed regulations are part of a larger zoning ordinance overhaul in the works for years, including updates to definitions and minor clarifications. Dozens of other items received no public opposition Tuesday night.

The proposals will require approval from the five-person Davison County Commission, the same commission that denied a 9- to 11-turbine project between Mitchell and Mount Vernon last year. And whatever the final pitch is, Commission Chair Brenda Bode said the ordinance gives the county a good starting point when considering future projects.

"So I strongly think this is going to be a working document, and as the industry changes, we'll probably see changes with what we do with this," Bode said about the ordinance serving as a living document that can be altered.