

OUR VIEW: Local board acted valiantly, but tough questions remain

By Daily Republic Editorial Board on May 3, 2017 at 5:00 p.m.



(Matt Gade / Republic)

A special site to see was on full display at the Davison County North Offices on Tuesday night.

Without any vitriol or nastiness as seen in recent politically-charged discussions nationwide, Davison County residents and county Planning Commission members calmly discussed a 1,000-foot wind tower setback, and commissioners took their neighbors' views to heart.

A proposal to recommend a 1,000-foot setback was tabled on Tuesday, allowing the Planning Commission to gather facts about wind energy systems before making its final call. It was a wonderful display of direct democracy from the 25 or so residents in attendance, and we commend the Planning Commission for listening to the views of the public.

— READ: Davison County wind setback tabled indefinitely

Now comes the hard part.

As Planning and Zoning Administrator Jeff Bathke has long noted, the proposed 1,000-foot setback would establish a greater setback than currently set by state law — which calls for a setback of 500 feet or 1.1 times the height of a tower. Credit is first and foremost due to Bathke and Planning and Zoning Deputy Administrator Mark Jenniges for the hours they put in to find a starting point for the Planning Commission to work off.

But the final answer probably isn't a 1,000-foot setback, nor is it a one-mile setback.

Planning Commissioner Lewis Bainbridge brought up an interesting thought on Tuesday night, saying "I don't want to shoot ourselves in the foot for some future thing that may come along."

What if wind power — a renewable energy source — becomes more efficient and profitable? Davison County would find itself on the outside looking in.

And what about Mitchell Technical Institute's wind turbine technology students? A new system in the area could create learning opportunities and a handful of jobs in the area for graduates.

Perhaps more important than those questions is what would happen if a wind energy system were proposed in Davison County tomorrow. The county would have little on the books to argue against a project.

We're glad the Planning Commission put the recommendation on hold, especially considering the public opposition to wind towers lining the Davison County prairie, but we also don't want to see revenue streams for farmland owners disappear at a time when crop prices are dropping and input costs are rising.

We have faith the commission will make the right choice, but we're hoping it will be the right choice for both wind energy opponents and supporters.