

# Comments turn more negative on wind energy at latest county listening session

**By Bob Steenson**  
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The first three joint meetings of the Floyd County Board of Supervisors and the Planning and Zoning Commission regarding a new commercial wind power ordinance were mostly informational in nature, including the third held earlier this month, which was dubbed a listening post to gather comments and information from those interested.

The fourth meeting – another listening post, held last week – attracted both the largest crowd and elicited the most concern regarding alleged negative aspects of wind power.

Julie Kuntz, a Cerro Gordo County resident who has described herself as “working diligently to stop the onslaught of industrial wind over our rural communities,” said one of the concerns is that there aren’t adequate rules to protect eagles, bats and other flying animals.

Wind turbine south of Charles City. Press file photo

She gave the members of the two boards a handful of handouts, and said that at a previous listening session a wind power company spokesperson had said that the county didn’t need to put anything in its ordinance to protect eagles, because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service already does that.

But she said that’s incorrect. Fish and Wildlife has guidelines, but they are not rules, she said, referring to a copy of a letter that agency. The state also does not regulate wind farms, and she referred to a letter from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources that recommends areas that should not have wind turbines in them.

In Worth County, Kuntz said, the recommendations resulted in no part of a proposed wind farm area where turbines could be erected, so the developer did its own “high level desktop re-



Press file photo

Wind turbine south of Charles City.

view” and determined that there were lots of places where wind turbines could go.

“Wind and solar ordinances need regulations to protect our natural resources,” she said. “We need to follow the experts. That is the Iowa DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s recommendations, and not rely on the multi-billion-dollar out-of-state corporation to have our county’s best interest at heart. To me, this is a no brainer. Include the DNR recommendations.”

She referred to setback limits that will be included in the Floyd County ordinance, which

could be the setback for a wind turbine from a property line or from a residence, depending on what aspect of the turbine is being regulated.

**“ALL LANDOWNERS HAVE** a right to the enjoyment and use of their property,” Kuntz said. “But their property line. I really feel strongly that the setbacks for noise and shadow flicker and for safety reasons need to be at the property line,” not from a residence on the property.

“Shouldn’t my family and I be safe on any part of our property as we would be in our home? Shouldn’t I be able to go out and garden? Shouldn’t my husband be able to be out working on his tractor? Shouldn’t my kids be safe playing in the yard?” she asked.

She also urged the supervisors and the commissioners to look at the handouts she had given them or that she could send to them referring to decommissioning wind farms after their usable life is over, fire suppression systems on the turbines, drainage protection, radar interference, and other concerns.

Supervisor Chair Mark Kuhn said she had gone over her allotted five minutes, but al-

lowed her a little time more to talk about sound concerns, and she said that two public health boards had concluded that the low frequency sound generated by wind turbines can affect some people. She gave examples of a person with cochlear implants, children on the autism spectrum, and others who seemed particularly affected by the sound, but said it can affect anyone.

“It’s a lot like seasickness,” she said. Some people aren’t affected at all and others are “heaving their guts out.”

Mason Kolbet said his wife and two children who have hearing impairments are unable to go to a friend’s home that is about 1,300 feet from a wind turbine because of the effect it has on them, even though it doesn’t bother him.

**JEFF GORBALL, A WORTH** County zoning commissioner who helped write that county’s wind energy zoning ordinance, suggested Floyd County consider shadow flicker, sound, and safety as three different things, and mentioned a way of measuring sound that he suggested is closest to how humans hear.

He also suggested making the rules protective, but also allowing landowners to voluntarily

negotiate to waive some regulations if that makes sense for them on their land.

A couple of the people at the meeting had concerns and questions about decommissioning wind farms and what would happen if the company that ran it was no longer in business or abandoned the project.

John Robbins, a senior planner with the North Iowa Area Council of Governments (NI-ACOG) who is helping Floyd County write its new wind energy and also solar energy regulations, said the ordinance will require that a company provide proof of financial responsibility to take care of decommissioning a wind farm when it’s no longer usable.

That could be through a surety bond or other financial security that would provide the funds needed to dismantle the wind turbines and restore the land if the company was no longer around to do so.

**ANSWERING SEVERAL OTHER** questions, Robbins, supervisors or industry representatives also at the meeting said:

- Fire liability – Robbins said the ordinance would require liability coverage for the developer or operator. Supervisor Jim Jorgensen said fire chiefs are very interested in determining how fires started and would be involved in determining liability.

- Lighting – Systems that would only turn the red blinking lights on at night are available, but the Federal Aviation Administration would have to determine if that system would be allowed on a specific project, whether the ordinance called for it or not.

- Private air strips – Invergency County Outreach Manager Merlin Bartz told Roger Mulcahy that separation distances would be allowed for private air strips just as they will be for the regional airport.

- Land easement agreements currently being signed – Kuhn said there is currently a moratorium on wind turbine projects while the ordinance is being rewritten, and no company has applied for a permit. If there is something in a landowner agreement now that turns out to go against the ordinance, the developer will be bound by the requirements of the ordinance.

- Timeline – Robbins said the county has been working on the process for about two months and he has begun writing a draft of a possible ordinance. A meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission is tentatively scheduled for March 7

where the commissioner will provide feedback, then Robbins will likely take that feedback to a Board of Supervisors meeting March 11 where the supervisors will decide if more listening sessions need to be held. The goal is to complete the process within the next three to four months.

**TOWARD THE END** of the session, Kuhn read two letters the county had received that supported wind energy.

The letter from Patrick Merfeld said he lived within two miles of turbines and works within one mile and has had no ill effects from living there. He said the biggest cause of eagle death is being hit by vehicles, followed by lead poisoning from ingesting lead shot, followed by loss of habitat.

He said it is true that turbines kill bats, but research is being done on ways to keep bats away from turbines.

He cited studies that he said show no connections between wind turbines and negative effects on human health, and said there are plenty of other things that generate low frequency sounds.

“I believe that turbines provide an essential method of producing clean energy, freeing us from reliance on fossil fuels. I think opponents of wind turbines are promoting needless damage to our environment by extending the use of fossil fuels and promote the use of fossil fuel at risky energy sources such as nuclear power,” he wrote.

Another letter, from John Merfeld, said he was in favor of maintaining the county ordinance as it is, and said wind energy “offers landowners the opportunity to diversify farm income with a reliable source of income.”

**AT THE BEGINNING** of the meeting, held at the Floyd County Law Enforcement Center in Charles City, Supervisor Kuhn said he had been asked by several of the people in attendance if they could give up their allotted five minutes of time to allow a 23-minute video to be played at the start of the meeting, which Kuhn agreed to.

The video, “Blown Away: The People Vs Wind Power,” by former Fox News political talk show host Tucker Carlson, alleged to show “the destructive effects of wind energy,” and how companies are targeting the poorest rural communities to locate wind farms because rich people don’t want the turbines where they can see them.

## TOWER

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cost of purchasing land, but that idea was dropped after an outpouring of support for the park by the people locally and from across the county who wanted to prevent the beauty and nature of the park being marred by a large tower surrounded by a chain link fence.

The park is also the location of a statue memorializing Rockford Navy SEAL Jon Tumilson, who was killed in Afghanistan in August 2011 when the Chinook helicopter in which he was riding was shot down while transporting a quick reaction force team to reinforce a unit of Army Rangers.

Schlader and Prichard talked about access to the property and to the rest of the field that would remain Schlader’s property

There is an existing field access at the site that would be the basis for an access road for tower construction and maintenance, and Prichard said the county would grant Schlader an access easement so he could use it to get in and out of his field.

The new communications system will make the county part of ISICS, the Iowa State-wide Interoperable Communications System.

Also at the meeting the board:

- Agreed to revive the Home Base Iowa initiative in Floyd County, to offer \$10,000 interest-free loans for five years to veterans to be used to help purchase a home within the county.

The money can be used by a veteran or the spouse of a deceased veteran as part of a down payment, or for other expenses. The county intends to allocate up to \$120,000 in program investment over three years, allowing up to four veterans per year to receive the funds. Details and applications are available by contacting Tim Fox, CEO of the Charles City Area Development Corp., which will administer the program and

be paid \$250 for each applicant assisted.

- Approved spending about \$78,000 for equipment and \$9,000 annually for software and firmware updates and maintenance fees for new election equipment.

County Auditor Gloria Carr, who as part of her position is also commissioner of elections, said the county’s existing equipment is nearing the end of its useful life. She also said if the county is going to get new equipment she wanted it for the primaries so election workers can be trained on it and use it before the much busier general election in November.

- Approved the job description for the position of county environmental health specialist/zoning administrator/EG11 sign administrator, and agreed to advertise for applicants. Applications are due March 22.

- Got closer to completing work on the county budget. The board plans to set the date and time for a public “max tax” public hearing on the budget at its next meeting. The total county property tax rate that begins July 1 is expected to be reduced from the current levy, while still reaching the county’s goal of at least 25% carryover funding in the general fund, general supplemental fund and rural services fund.

Most county employees will get 3% pay increases starting July 1, except for a few employees who were approved for larger raises. The board has not officially passed the Compensation Board recommendations for elected officials’ salaries, which were a 3.5% increase for the county attorney, 5.07% for the county recorder, 5.9% for the treasurer, 6.85% for the auditor and 10.06% for the sheriff.

The compensation board also recommended a 3.5% increase for each of the county supervisors, but the board voted last week to announce that the supervisors would again be taking no pay increase in the next fiscal year.

### Legal Notice • Legal Notice • Legal Notice • Legal Notice

**Floyd County Board of Supervisors Meeting**  
February 21, 2024, 3:30 p.m.

The Floyd County Board of Supervisors met in the EOC/Training room of the Floyd County Courthouse with the following in attendance: Supv Mark Kuhn, Supv Dennis Keifer, and Supv Jim Jorgensen.

Jorgensen/Keifer moved to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried 3-0.

Public comment: none.  
Keifer/Jorgensen moved to approve the February 12, 2024 regular meeting minutes and the minutes from the utility-scale wind energy listening session held jointly with the Zoning Commission. Motion carried 3-0.

Keifer/Jorgensen moved to approve the claims presented: Motion #1810-1812, Engineer/Secondary Roads #1809. Motion carried 3-0.

Builders, Mat 1	4950.00
Gordon Flesch, Lease	118.03
IICA, Edu Serv	600.00
Kwik Star, Supplies	86.57

Updates on various boards/commissions/activities: Supv Kuhn attended a County Social Services Human Services Committee meeting. Supv Keifer attended Area Development Corp Asset Management and North Cedar Regional Aviation Authority meetings. Supv Jorgensen attended a Cedar Valley Transportation meeting.

Denise Ballard, Iowa Governmental Health Insurance Plan representative, provided information on the insurance pool’s health and dental plans. The county’s annual average cost increase since 2019 is 0.8%. Ballard provided information on the 2023 monthly claims and premiums, the partial self-funding utilization, high-cost claimants, receipts and disbursements, medical benefit overview, July 1 renewal rates reflecting a 3.54% increase, and risk review. Changes to the plan include \$20 office copays reduced to \$15 if the member goes to a designated primary care provider and Prudent Rx for listed specialty medications reducing costs from \$85/prescription to \$0 employee cost. Due to the dental insurance having a 13% increase, Ballard will be providing alternative options. Should the county engage EBS to administer COBRA ben-

efits, the cost is \$1.12 per employee, per month. County, the IGHCP pool and national benchmarks on deductibles, out of pocket maximums, coinsurance and copays, pharmacy copays, total premiums, and employee contributions were reviewed. There are currently 47 entities in the IGHCP pool with an expectation of at least three joining the pool in the future. Bronze, Silver, and Gold Wellness plans were reviewed. Rocket Lawyer, a new benefit to members, offers legal services at no charge to employees. Employee Navigator offers online enrollment options at no cost as well.

Updates on Law Enforcement Center/Courthouse Project: Auditor Carr reported two ceilings have been repaired but still need lights, the ceiling repair and moving a wall in the supervisor’s office are in the works, a hole in the HVAC hot water line leaked in the fourth floor secure vestibule has been fixed, needed are being sought for scaffolding, quotes for the fourth floor south stairwell ceiling repair project, Noah needs to install parts for 3rd and 4th floor detention doors and Communication Innovators needs to program the door hardware, two law enforcement doors arrived and a door release button needs to be programmed by Communication Innovators. Keifer reported there has been no progress on the water softening system bids and is unsure if it would be cost effective to install the water softening system versus replacing equipment and faucet screens due to lime buildup issues in the future.

The Board discussed the communications tower project, starting with Kuhn meeting the January 29 and February 12 meeting minutes which were the first two meetings where sites of the tower location were discussed. Kuhn reported receiving 85 or more e-mails regarding opposition of placement of the tower on the Fossil and Prairie Center (Center) property and read Joy Tumilson’s e-mail regarding the proposed tower location near the statue of her son, John, as being an eyesore and requested a different location, such as the property adjacent to the Center, as being more appropriate. Kuhn emphasized that the location of the tower is not going to be made today but consideration to not supporting locating the tower at the Center may be considered. Keifer commented on his surprise of the number

of e-mails and his admiration and respect for John. Jorgensen was also surprised at over 100 e-mails and continues to not support the tower being located at the Center unless there is no other option.

Ben Chatfield reported that the tower needs to be located within a half mile radius of the Center. Since the last meeting, a location on the Joney Laudner Wildlife Preserve, north of a residential parcel, has been researched and was found to be 25 feet lower in elevation than the Center. Motorola’s maps of a location on the preserve reflect significant loss of coverage compared to the Schlader property. Chatfield reported Schlader is willing to meet with the Board to negotiate selling a piece of land. Jeannette Lien, Rockford resident, encouraged the Board to make an appointment to meet with Schlader.

Adam Sears, Conservation Director, mentioned his response at the January 29 meeting of the mowed area not being in the preserve was found to not be a correct answer and notified the Board. Sears stated that and buying the tower in the mowed area put up a red flag to him and some of the Conservation Board members. If another conservation area would be a considered for the tower, the Conservation Board, as managers of conservation property, would need to make the decision to the use of conservation property per Iowa Code Chapter 350.

Kuhn recalled years ago when the previous supervisors had foresight to save the site from being a landfill and all that has been done by conservation board to promote, preserve and enhance the Center property to this day. The Board thinks the Schlader property may be the last remaining good sight but at least the Center site can be crossed off the list. The Board will be proceeding with Schlader site but knows there will be delays, one due to the 90-day process for the Federal Aviation Authority for approval of any tower over 200 feet.

Heidi Reams, Conservation Naturalist and Rockford resident, mentioned being thankful for the e-mails and respect for conservation staff in preserving resources. The natural resources at the Center are sensitive and rare in Iowa, such as 1/10th of 1% of native prairie in the state and endangered plants and species; when using conservation areas for any type of function other than their nat-

ural state, take those resources into consideration. Kuhn mentioned the Board has charted a course that they will be working on as soon as possible.

Carr provided an update on the Drainage District #3 Open Ditch repair project including the pay ap for consideration is for tree removal only, the threshold for additional mobilization has not been reached yet, excavation work should have started this week, and project work is ahead of schedule. Jorgensen/Keifer moved to approve Drainage District #3 Open Ditch Pay Ap #4 for \$18,000 for Larson Contracting. Motion carried 3-0.

The Board noted a 3% pay increase from \$21.60 to \$22.25/hour per the June 12, 2023 Board action for Elizabeth Knecht, County Attorney staff, following a successful 6-month performance review with the increase being retroactive to December 26.

Keifer/Jorgensen moved for the Board of Supervisors to not take the Compensation Board’s FY25 3.5% recommended pay increase and to freeze their salary as allowed with 30-day notice per Iowa Code 331.907 prior to the county budget being certified. Motion carried 3-0.

The Board reviewed FY25 budget information. Auditor Carr provided all departmental budget expenses, levy rate options and carryover fund balances. Information will be discussed in more detail with potentially setting the first hearing date/time at the next board meeting.

Future agenda items: Conversation with landowner regarding communications tower, Environmental Health Specialist/Zoning Administrator/911 Signs Administrator job description and advertising for the position, Home Base Iowa Initiative Advisory Affairs 0% loan, and Cost Advisory Services/Cost Allocation Plan.

Jorgensen/Keifer moved to adjourn. Motion carried 3-0.

ATTEST:Gloria A. Carr  
Floyd County Auditor  
Mark A. Kuhn, Chair  
Floyd County Board of Supervisors