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Susan Bernstein - Fall winds

September 29, 2011 - Green Buildings

Labor Day has passed and the true summer of 2011 is beginning to be a faded memory as back to work and school sets into high gear. This month, the Mass. Legislature's Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy (JCTUE), held two public hearings on seven bills related to wind turbines, their siting, the restrictions, and the approval and appeal process. Among the bills was the re-introduction of "An Act relative to Comprehensive Siting Reform for Land-based Wind Projects" sponsored by Representative Frank Smizik of Brookline and others. The bill is similar to one introduced in 2010, designed to enable smaller facilities, including wind-power land-based facilities that generate 2 or more megawatts (MW), to access a streamlined permitting process. In comments by the State House News Service, it described the 2010 version of the bill as one in which "[b]ill backers say it streamlines the project approval process while retaining the ability of local boards to reject proposals, in an attempt to facilitate new renewable energy supplies, but the bill's opponents, citing pockets of local opposition and alleging preferential treatment for wind projects, blocked the bill." Opponents are also questioning potential adverse health impacts of wind turbines and a seven member panel of health officials and academicians met during the summer to solicit comments and pursue scientific evidence. The state totals green energy efforts, as of September 1, 2011 with: total installed wind capacity of 40 MW out of a goal of 2,000 MW by 2020; 57 MW of solar capacity out of a goal of 250 by 2017; and 74 communities designated as new "green communities." However, it is still unclear whether a land based wind-siting bill will garner the support it needs to be passed and procedurally be enacted.

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