

Sofia Stumpf ~ Heron Lake Township ~ Jackson County

Powering Our Future – Energy to Build on in Your Township

Minnesota has become increasingly known for its role in providing clean and renewable energy through the use of wind turbines. The Minnesota prairie and elevation, especially in southwest Minnesota, makes it an ideal place for wind farms to expand and offer an opportunity for alternative energy sources. It is important for townships to balance the economic needs of the township while hearing and responding to the concerns of the community.

The local township has showed possible coming changes from citizens and farmers who have cultivated the land for generations. In an effort to learn more about the impact of wind farms on my home township, I contacted our County Auditor to better understand how wind turbines effect local economic contributions. I was informed that the overall tax revenue split is 80% to the county and 20% to the township. In 2017, the total tax revenue generated by the 66 turbines in my township was \$330, 421.20. With a 20% contribution to our local township, that meant a sum of \$66,084.24 was added to our local township coffer.

There is no question that wind farms generate income for townships, but the impact of noise, acres lost, safety and aesthetics are community concerns. I was curious what kind of response the energy developers had to these concerns as expressed by local county citizens. To gauge this response, I spoke with the local Project Manager for Geronimo Energy. He stated, ‘this is important to helping the community within the township and the developer create a win-win situation.’ While there are health and safety concerns, each concern can generally be addressed by coordinating with the developer early on, while also educating the locals.

County commissioners are also active in weighing the benefits and concerns of wind energy in local townships. My own commissioner told me that the initial local concerns were centered around noise pollution and the impact on livestock and residents. These concerns have dissipated with time. The income from the turbines is sizable and has been used to reduce the levy, which means lower taxes for the community. The income is also used for capital improvement projects in the county which may otherwise not get done. Currently, the roof on the County Courthouse is slated to be repaired utilizing some of the income generated specifically from the turbines.

Residents initially expressed concerns in regards to the logistics of whether or not wind turbines should be utilized in the community. Over time, residents began to see that the merits outweigh the adverse effects. Help and dedication from those involved with the projects to educate the public means that there are no longer worries of land loss, eye sores, or noise. Our state offers some of the best geographical placement for wind farm energy harvesting. The importance of public education regarding the locally-reaped benefits from wind farms is vital to offering citizens the knowledge they need to voice concerns and questions.