



Wind farm clears next-to-last hurdle

Friday, November 4, 2005

LACON - The wind farm proposed for the Camp Grove area straddling the Marshall-Stark County line cleared its next-to-last local regulatory hurdle Tuesday with a quick endorsement from the Marshall County Zoning Board of Appeals. The five members present voted unanimously to recommend the County Board grant a special use permit for the 112-turbine project proposed by Orion Energy LLC, a California-based wind energy developer. ZBA member Chuck Voelker of Wenona was absent, and Chairman Bill Campion of Camp Grove recused himself because a wind tower would be on the farm where he lives.

The proposal, which would involve 43 turbines in Stark County and up to 69 on the Marshall side, has already been approved by the Stark County Board. If the Marshall County Board follows suit at its next meeting Nov. 10, construction could begin as soon as next spring, said Orion Vice President Reid Buckley. "Our goal would be to start construction next year, and this (ZBA approval) was an important step," Buckley said after the hearing. A crowd of about 50 filled the courtroom where the hearing was held, including many landowners who would have towers on their property under lease agreements. Apart from a formal presentation by company officials and consultants, only two of those landowners spoke in favor of the project, and no one stated any opposition. "I think the wind turbines will be a big asset to our county and our community," said Ronald J. Eberle of rural Sparland, one of more than 100 landowners with whom Orion has negotiated agreements in the two counties.

Those landowners stand to receive a collective total of about \$20 million in revenue over the course of the approximately 30 years that the installation is expected to be generating electricity, and that additional source of income can be very important in an almost entirely agricultural area, Buckley said. "We believe these payments will help preserve farming and help preserve farmland in Marshall County," he said.