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Agency Plans to Harvest Wind Power Off Jones Beach

By **BRUCE LAMBERT**

Imagine a modern windmill, sleek and metallic.

Make it giant-sized - specifically 425 feet tall, equal to a 40-story building and taller than the Statue of Liberty.

Now picture 35 to 40 such windmills, all standing in the Atlantic Ocean, clustered near Jones Beach.

The Long Island Power Authority says it will soon start turning that imaginary scene into reality, to harvest electricity from the steady sea breezes that have drawn people, from the ancient Indians to modern suburbanites, to the shoreline.

The authority says that in the coming weeks it will announce its choice of the company to build and operate the windmills. Officials will not identify the bidders, but industry sources say the two leading contenders are Arcadia Windpower Ltd., based in Manhattan, and FPL Energy, based in Florida. The project could produce the first offshore windmills outside of Europe, wind power experts say. While land-based windmills are increasingly common around the world, offshore sites are relatively new.

A larger proposal for 130 offshore windmills is pending on Cape Cod, but residents have mounted a \$1 million campaign to block it, citing economic, environmental and scenic concerns. Some Long Islanders have raised similar objections, but so far there is little organized opposition.

The Long Island project would cost hundreds of millions of dollars and take up to four years, authority officials say. The exact price and other details will be announced later. "At a time when oil prices are going through the roof, this makes imminent sense," said the agency's chairman, Richard M. Kessel.

Those rising prices forced the authority to impose fuel surcharges on electricity customers. Growing demand for power is also forcing the purchase of new generators and supply cables, so the authority is facing greater expense and more disputes over sites. And Gov. George E. Pataki is requiring the use of more clean energy, though it costs more than power from fossil fuels in the current market.

The windmills would represent only about 2 percent of the authority's total power use, and so would have a minimal impact on electricity bills.

Many environmentalists, including some who criticize the authority on other issues, have long advocated windmills. "Windmills are a necessity, not only for Long Island, but for the state and nation," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, one of several groups endorsing the project.

Windmills use a limitless resource without harming the environment, supporters say. Wind energy also reduces dependence on Middle East oil with its gyrating prices and volatile politics. "The fuel is free from Mother Nature, and the cost is predictable," said Gordian Raacke, executive director of two energy groups, the Citizens Advisory Panel and Renewable Energy Long Island.

Still, the plan poses a host of concerns. Skeptics cite noise and vibration, dangers to migrating birds, disruption of prime squid fishing, and intrusive underwater cables and power connections on land.

Most of all, critics have focused on the permanent alteration of the ocean view from the South Shore.

But authority officials said the impact would be minimal on birds, fish and even the view. Because the windmills would be 2.5 to 6 miles from shore, they would appear small on the horizon, proponents contend.

While the precise location has not been decided, the windmills would be somewhere off the coast of Jones Beach and possibly Long Beach or the western end of Fire Island.

Jones Beach is jammed on hot summer weekends. Long Beach and neighboring communities are the most densely populated stretches of oceanfront in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Fire Island has a major park and summer resort.

"Why Jones Beach rather than anywhere else on the South Shore?" said Joseph M. Kralovich, president of the Old Lindenmere Civic Association in Merrick. "It's a sore subject, but the answer is obvious. It's to avoid people with expensive waterfront homes. Nobody lives there." He opposes the windmill plan. "I moved here from the city because of Jones Beach, to get closer."

Another critic, Cathy McGrory Powell of Wantagh, said: "Jones Beach is a big tourist center. It's going to be horrible. Why, instead, isn't every government building using solar energy and every official driving a more fuel-efficient car?"

The power authority says it chose the site because the water is shallow, the winds average about 19 miles an hour, and an existing substation in nearby Massapequa would connect to the windmills, serving densely developed Nassau and western Suffolk.

Windmill defenders call the view a minor issue. "We have to make a choice: whether we want to look at smokestacks or windmills," said Mr. Raacke, of Renewable Energy Long Island. "It's worth paying that small price." He said he had found no opposition to offshore windmills in Europe, adding, "People are quite proud of them, actually."

Ms. Esposito, of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said windmills would become a tourist attraction, as they have elsewhere. "If acid rain and smog keep up, we're not going to have a view, anyway."

Last month, Hofstra University, whose campus displays a miniature windmill in tribute to Nassau County's Dutch heritage, held a conference titled "From Blackouts to Windmills." Richard V. Guardino Jr., dean of suburban studies and a resident of Point Lookout, near Jones Beach, said, "Personally, I like the way windmills look, and I think they would add something."

As a sun worshiper, the authority's chairman, Mr. Kessel, said: "No one loves Jones Beach or goes there more often than I do. A passing tanker ship is going to be a lot more visible than these windmills that you can barely see. It'll be a comforting sight, dedicated to a cleaner environment for Long Island."

Some fishing companies, though, are opposed. "Some of our largest catches are right there in the area they're talking about," said Sima Freierman, general manager of Montauk Inlet Seafood, which unloads, packs and transports fish. "There's enough places on land where they can do this."

Ms. Freierman said more than two million pounds of squid were netted by trawlers from New York in the planned windmill site each summer, as well as catches by boats from other states. The site also yields millions of pounds of bluefish, butterfish, flounder, fluke, monk and whiting. For boats, "putting windmills there is like putting concrete poles in the middle of the Long Island Expressway," she said.

But proponents of windmills say they will use only about five square miles, a small part of the fishing grounds. Windmills could act as an artificial reef and a preserve that would help replenish fish stocks, said Prof. Malcolm J. Bowman of the marine science center at Stony Brook University. Many recreational fishers are keen on the windmills, which they say will attract fish.

Before the windmills are built, more public hearings will be held, and 18 official approvals are required from various state and federal agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration, which will require blinking warning lights.

Each steel tower will rise 425 feet from the ocean surface to the top of the arc swept by the three rotating resin blades. Depending on the location, 40 to 70 feet of the tower will be underwater. The base will go an additional 60 to 80 feet underground into the seabed. The towers will be 15 to 30 feet thick at water level and placed a third of a mile to half a mile apart, according to the authority's project manager, Daniel Zaweski. The blades will rotate 8 to 20 times a minute, swiveling and tilting to catch the wind, and generate 3.6 megawatts of power. The entire group will generate 100 to 140 megawatts, enough for

30,000 homes.

The critics' biggest fear seems to be that if the windmills succeed, more will go up. "If this works, they're talking about stringing this along the entire South Shore, putting us out of business," Ms. Freierman said.

Mr. Kralovich expressed a similar fear: "Once they put this in, wind farms are going to go in, up and down the East Coast. In 30 years, it's going to look like the Jersey Turnpike."

But Mr. Kessel is taking a shorter view. "We want to take this one step at a time," he said. "It's a project that's never been done before in North America, and we want the public to see it and give acceptance, which I think they will, before we even look at expansion."

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