



Advancing Wind Power in Illinois Conference 2009

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Stark County

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Let me start by giving a brief background about myself and Stark County. My name is Mike Bigger and I currently serve as Chairman of the Stark County Board. I have served on the Board since 2000 and I am in my third two year term as Chairman. I have lived in Stark County for nearly 29 years having moved there in 1981 to start an Insurance agency which I still operate.

Stark County is one of only 15 counties in Illinois with a population under 10,000. We stand at just under 6200 people now. We are located approximately 30 miles north west of Peoria. Stark County is a rural heavily agricultural based county.

\$100 - \$200 million commercial developments don't come along very often in Stark County. Especially ones that allow local farmers and landowners to realize a new cash crop and added source of revenue. The Wind Energy Industry found Stark County, Stark County did not find Wind energy. And we could not be more thrilled that they found us.

In a letter dated 08/04/2003, and sent to each county board member, Mr. J. Turner Hunt of Orion Energy told us he was "providing preliminary information on a possible wind farm that **may** be proposed by Orion Energy to be located in Marshall and Stark Counties". At the time we all thought that is interesting, but none of us had high expectations. From that initial letter grew to a reality the Camp Grove Wind Farm LLC. The development went on line in December of 2007.

Being such a small county our staffing is bare bones. Each office is staffed by the elected official and usually only one other staff person. This development put a lot of extra work on several of our key people, those being Debbie Duncan our Supv. of Assessments and Zoning officer, Jim Owens our State's Attorney, and our part time county engineer at the time Jerry Fitzpatrick. Before the wind farm was constructed and went live Stark County hired a full time county engineer, Mr. Jon Hodel and he became a very valuable resource as we went into construction and having the farm go online. We could not have done this without all of these folks. Our developer, Orion Energy, now Vision Energy, were tremendous to work with. They approached the project in a spirit of cooperation, openness, and transparency. I think the key to the siting of a successful wind farm development is the relationship the county establishes with the developer from the outset. The county board chairman and the county board as whole need to be engaged, involved, informed, and supportive of the development, while at the same time staying out of the way of the full time elected officials and staff doing the day to day work to make the development happen. One thing we relied on heavily was our county engineer working with the developer and our township road commissioners to make sure are roads and bridges were properly protected during the construction phase.

I realize every community and county is unique. What worked great for Stark County may not work great somewhere else. For us three positive factors helped to make this happen. #1. We have good wind with close access to two major transmission lines. #2 We had a very rural agricultural based site to locate the farm, that did not need to

compete or intrude upon residential or more populated areas of our county and #3 widespread, near unanimous, approval from the landowners.

We are proud in Stark County to have a state of the art wind farm operating in our county producing clean renewable energy. As County Board Chairman I have not seen one downside to this development. There are all kinds of questions that come to mind with a development like this, with one of the biggest being what effect will this have on property values for property located in close proximity to the wind farm. For us it has had no discernable effect. As I mentioned Stark County is very small, with a stagnant population. Property values have been stagnant as well. Farm ground **has** appreciated significantly the past few years and these wind towers I feel will support that going forward. I do not see any adverse effect on other commercial or residential values in the county as a result of this wind farm.

I would argue if anything it has had a positive effect for the properties that have towers located on them. If that landowner decided to sell, having an added long term revenue source as part of the property would seem to add value in my mind.

Wind Farm developers spend millions of dollars on development costs and do extensive research and planning for years before a single turbine blade turns. The risk they take is far beyond what most of us would ever contemplate. It is absolutely in their best interest to work with the local jurisdictions in a spirit of openness and cooperation. If they are going to spend hundreds of millions of dollars before they have any hope of seeing a dime return, they need the landowners, local officials, and the communities at large to be on board, supportive, and to feel they are an important part of the process. That is exactly how our developer Orion Energy, now Vision Energy, made us feel.

T. Boone Pickens if you are listening, you can plant as many of your towers you want in Stark County. Bring them on!

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