# DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

## Environmental Sustainability CCC2025-02

**To:** Mayor Davidson and Council
**Subject:** Community feedback on Wind Energy Project Procurement in Mapleton
**Meeting:** Regular Council Meeting - 18 Mar 2025
**Department:** Environmental Sustainability
**Staff Contact:** Martin Tamlyn, Climate Change Coordinator

## RECOMMENDATION:

**THAT** Council receive staff report CCC2025-02 for information.

**AND THAT** Council resolves to remain an unwilling host at this time.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

At the regular council meeting on September 24, 2024, for item **9.1.3**, a report and discussion were held regarding renewable energy opportunities in the region. A renewable energy company had approached the Township expressing interest in exploring a new wind turbine energy project.

Like many other municipalities, Mapleton declared unwilling to host further projects (**Resolution 2013-11, May 28, 2013**). The resolution cited that a significant number of residents (11) had reported negative health effects and that one person had to relocate. At this time, many Ontarians were also upset by the lack of process and consent to hosting renewable energy projects where they lived.

As part of the plan to meet Ontario's growing electricity needs, the government tasked the Independent Electricity Systems Operator (IESO) with managing a series of competitive electricity resource procurements focusing on delivering new electricity generation and capacity (e.g. storage) resources. Municipal governments have an important role in these procurements, determining whether to host projects in their communities and overseeing local development approvals. Without municipal approval of projects where they make sense, the province may be unable to procure enough electricity to meet demand.

The IESO energy procurement process has four stages: Pre-Engagement, Municipal Support Confirmation, Contract review, and Downstream Approvals.

Pre-engagement is the first formal opportunity for municipalities to engage with developers on proposed projects and raise general questions or concerns about a project. Some developers may choose to engage earlier, and in this case, Innergex has reached out to potential leaseholders in the community with a slow response. Where municipalities are not willing hosts for certain types of electricity project(s), e.g., natural gas, wind turbines, battery storage, etc., this pre-engagement offers the first opportunity to indicate to a developer that a project is unlikely to be approved. Communicating this as soon as possible is beneficial to avoid additional resources being directed at a project.

At the September meeting, **RESOLUTION 2024-14-05** was passed, stating that staff be directed to gather input to determine if there is interest from a public perspective in becoming a willing host. The following report outlines the pros and cons of Industrial Wind Turbine projects and provides an executive summary of findings from a survey of residents living close to the existing Industrial Wind Turbine (Conestogo Wind Energy) Centre.

## DISCUSSION:

Balancing the pros and cons of renewable energy projects with the community's needs is essential. In rural communities, industrial wind turbine projects can offer revenue opportunities for landowners and, in some cases, for the community while also providing clean energy to meet Ontario's growing electricity demand. Renewable energy projects are also crucial for reducing reliance on natural gas for peak energy generation.

Still, depending on proximity, they can be visually intrusive, noisy, and impactful to human health and wildlife. Research on the impact of wind turbines on property values in Ontario is mixed and appears highly dependent on the size of the project, the proximity of dwellings, and the region in which they are sited. In some cases, property values decreased between 4% and 8%.

In a letter to the Township dated October 3, 2024, MPP Matthew Rae reassured residents of new legislated requirements that:

> *'When it comes to renewable energy projects, it is important to note that, unlike the previous provincial government's approach, municipalities must be willing hosts to any renewable energy projects… and that any proposed renewable energy projects on or near farmland would also require an Agricultural Impact Assessment to be completed.*

### Wind Turbine Survey

As per Council's resolution, staff contacted residents who own or rent property within a 2km radius of the Conestogo Wind Energy Project for feedback on their lived experiences. 39 properties were identified, and surveys were mailed out with stamp-addressed envelopes enclosed. A QR code was also provided to complete the survey online. Over 50% of residents responded. Surveys were voluntary and anonymous.

Here is an executive summary of the findings.

- **Location**—80% of residents have lived in the area for over 6 years, with more than half living less than a kilometre from a turbine. Two people had turbines on their property.
- **Visual Impact**—75 % reported moderate to significant impact on their surroundings, and 20% reported no effect.
- **Noise**—55% said they heard the turbines often, 25% said sometimes, and one person said never, with most respondents reporting minor to moderate noise impact on daily life.
- **Health**—A third of residents surveyed reported health issues related to the wind turbines.
- **Other Impacts** – Half of the survey group experienced shadow flicker (when blades pass in front of the sun, causing moving shadows), 20% had witnessed avian or bat injury or mortality, and 1 person reported impacts from infrasound.
- **Perceptions of the Planning Process**—65% stated the process wasn't fair, 25% said it was moderately fair, and one person said it was very fair.
- **Property Value** – 70% of those surveyed said their property value has decreased.
- **Financial Returns** – 90% of those surveyed do not receive any financial return from the energy project.

- **Climate Change** – 80% of those surveyed were concerned about climate change.
- **Is Wind Power Effective in Climate Mitigation?** Most people answered no, five said somewhat, and two said yes.
- **Should Wind Power be encouraged in Ontario?** 75% responded no to this question, and 20% said yes.
- **Overall Experience** – 70% were negative, and 15% were positive.

**Summary of Additional Comments.**

The survey responses highlighted various concerns regarding industrial wind turbines, particularly their effectiveness in mitigating climate change and their potential impacts on communities, agriculture, and the environment. Many respondents emphasized the importance of fair consultation and expressed how these projects have affected friendships, family relationships, and land values. There is a strong belief that placing wind turbines near communities and prime agricultural areas, like Mapleton, could pose challenges to daily life and livelihoods. Additionally, there were comments about the long-term management of turbines once they are decommissioned, with an interest in exploring alternatives such as solar panels. The primary message calls for considering all residents' perspectives and the importance of achieving community consensus before moving forward with such initiatives.

**STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS:**

**Vigilant Asset Management:** n/a
**Prosperous & Diversified Economy:** n/a
**Our Wellbeing:** n/a
**Diligent Fiscal Management:** n/a
**Operational Excellence:** n/a