

# Windmills make waves in Lake County

July 23, 2009

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<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/wheeling/news/1675709.lake-county-windmills-072309-s1.article>

It is an idea as old as ... well, as old as the wind. It is also an emerging technology that few Lake County officials know much about, or know how much to trust. According to some, electricity-generating windmills are becoming less like the gargantuan eyesores most are familiar with, and more like the aesthetic afterthoughts that suburbanites would be comfortable to live with. A small, quiet, discreet windmill can cut owners' electricity bills and punch their tickets onto the green bandwagon -- if it indeed works as advertised.

The Lake County government is conducting an exploratory committee to learn more about what windmills can and cannot do, while many municipalities are studying the technology themselves, because there is too little expert information to be found.

"They should be in the forefront of bombarding residents and businesses with information, and they're not," said David Korner, a trustee in Bannockburn, which approved last week a six-month ban on windmill construction permits. Several other municipalities have approved similar moratoriums, all saying they need time to generate independent research about what wind turbines' possibilities and limitations are.

The debate encompasses how many decibels windmills generate, and how many their neighbors will want to hear; the danger to birds, which could be hit by fast-moving arms; the danger to bats, whose radar could be thrown off by the hum; chunks of ice being hurled off the arms; height and appearance.

David Husemoller, senior planner for the Lake County government and the head of the Lake County Wind Energy Task Force, said there may be a windmill to fit most area's preferences. The task force, comprised of representatives from 12 municipalities, is drafting a model ordinance that any Lake County community could amend and adopt. "The technology's evolving very quickly," Husemoller said. "We're just doing a lot of research right now, trying to figure out what we can do. If it's something that's good for the environment, we all want to support it, in a way that makes sense."

Husemoller said there are currently three models of wind turbines:

- The largest are the multiple-mill farms downstate, which Husemoller said the task force is not considering.
- The smallest are the single, building-mounted devices popping up in Chicago
- In the middle -- and already in Lake County -- is the single-pole, 35- to 80-foot-tall generator, a beacon of green growth to some and an earache and eyesore to others.

Chipotle Mexican Grill's Gurnee Mills restaurant, which opened in October, is its first in the country to use a windmill. "A lot of people ask about it," said Robert Delgadillo, the kitchen manager. "It saves a little bit of energy." The turbine generates 19 percent of the restaurant's energy, he said, which is stored on-site during the day and used to power the lights and refrigerators at night. Delgadillo said it is a reliable energy source -- a strong breeze gets the arms moving a bit, and there is sometimes enough left at the end of the month to sell to ComEd. At a cost of \$10,000, the pole was an investment the company considered carefully; municipal officials advised other business or home owners thinking about wind power to do the same.

Wadsworth and Lincolnshire have also passed six-month bans on turbine permits, and some Lake County decision-makers have sounded underwhelmed by the current products manufacturers are offering. "They keep promising, but they haven't delivered," said Sherry

Graditor, Riverwoods trustee, during a June board meeting. Riverwoods officials also talked about appearance and noise pollution; on a windy day at Gurnee Mills, the hum from Chipotle's turbine was audible on the sidewalk that passes by the base, but dissipated at the edges of the parking lot.

In Libertyville, however, another turbine may be noisier: A Lake County court has temporarily shut down the 120-foot device owned by Aldridge Electric, which resident David Gates has filed complaints about.

Husemoller said the county task force hopes to have a model ordinance ready for villages to consider by the end of the month -- a uniform law would help settle disputes about windmills as their popularity rises. "Municipalities are getting requests," he said, "or they know that they're coming." "I didn't see that there were that many good answers," said Bannockburn Trustee Gene Nordby last week. "They can tell you 'Oh, it almost makes no noise at all.' It could be a Yugo."

Leaders in other villages, however, are already welcoming the new rise in popularity for an ancient power source. "It's green, it's good and it works," Riverwoods Mayor William Kaplan declared during a meeting last month. "I don't know how, but we're going to do it."