

https://www.capenews.net/falmouth/news/mayflower-winds-sponsorship-of-falmouth-fireworks-sparks-debate/article_76806876-e42b-5345-b2ed-ddfbe8e51727.html

Mayflower Wind's Sponsorship Of Falmouth Fireworks Sparks Debate By TAO WOOLFE, Jul 8, 2022

Spectators came from all over on Monday, July 4th, to watch the Falmouth fireworks show, but most were unaware of a quieter firestorm that preceded the display.

The Falmouth Fireworks Committee, which has been raising funds and organizing the town's legendary light show since 1980, had dissension among its ranks this year over a \$15,000 donation from Mayflower Wind.

The wind energy company—which is proposing to connect an offshore wind farm to Falmouth via underground cables—offered the donation to deepen its relationship with the community, said Kelsey Perry, the company's community liaison officer.

Mayflower Wind has also contributed to the Falmouth Road Race, the Cape Cod Marathon and the Nobska Lighthouse, Ms. Perry said.

"We are not looking to buy opinions, we are just spreading awareness," Ms. Perry said.

A majority of the 13-member fireworks committee voted to accept the donation in that spirit, said Carolyn Woods, the fireworks committee chairwoman.

"It was just a donation. There were no strings attached and it was not a political statement," Ms. Woods said. "It had nothing to do with whether we were for or against the wind project."

But not everyone saw it that way.

Karen Rinaldo, a member of the executive committee, was among four members who voted against accepting the donation from Mayflower Wind.

“There are a lot of unanswered questions and many residents in Falmouth Heights are in opposition—just take a look at all the opposition signs in people’s front yards,” Ms. Rinaldo said. “It didn’t seem right to have a big banner [thanking sponsors] with Mayflower Wind’s name flying over Falmouth Heights.”

Although no route has been determined for underground cables connecting the wind farm to a substation and an extensive electric grid, Falmouth Heights would be Mayflower Wind’s top choice, the company has said.

There have been proposals for running cables along a two-mile route and an eight-mile route, either beneath Falmouth Heights Beach or under two-lane roads in the area.

Falmouth Heights residents, most in opposition, turned out en masse to a town-sponsored public forum on the proposal in June.

Audience members expressed fears about excessive noise, deleterious health effects from electromagnetic fields and a drop in property values.

Although most residents are in favor of clean energy, many question the wisdom of placing such an intrusive system beneath an environmentally sensitive beach.

“They don’t want a big dig in their neighborhood,” said Ms. Rinaldo, summing up the prevailing sentiment.

The town, still smarting from its failed experiment with two massive land-based wind turbines, has not made any commitments about Mayflower Wind’s offshore project. Much more discussion is expected.

Ms. Woods said the decision to accept the donation was a practical one.

Prices of fireworks have skyrocketed during the COVID years. A single crate of fireworks from China, which used to cost \$6,000, now costs \$40,000, she said.

The committee, which has worked hard for decades to raise the tens of thousands of dollars needed each year to pay for fireworks, is facing big increases and cannot afford to turn down donations, Ms. Woods said.

The fireworks displays were cancelled for the last two years because of the pandemic, but the fireworks display company, Atlas PyroVision Entertainment, agreed to honor the 2020 price of \$75,000—and to use the deposit, already paid two years ago by the fireworks committee—for this year's show.

But next year's fireworks contract with Atlas must be renegotiated this summer and the committee will have to consider paying more money or adjusting the length of the display, or both, Ms. Woods said.

The committee raises money by selling T-shirts and other memorabilia, seeking donations from small businesses, sending postcard solicitations to residents and other individual donors, and holding two major fundraising events, Ms. Woods said.

A gift of \$15,000 is considered a big contribution, but there was one larger donation this year, Ms. Woods said. She did not disclose the donor or the specific amount.

Ms. Rinaldo is an artist. She designs the fireworks committee T-shirts and has written a book about the Falmouth fireworks.

She said she has not resigned from the committee, but has deliberately missed a couple of meetings to protest the Mayflower Wind donation.

Ms. Rinaldo said she understands why the committee voted to accept the contribution, but says everyone has the right to express their feelings.

Ms. Woods said there has been no other fallout from the decision to accept the donation.

“It hasn’t caused any controversy and has not affected us,” Ms. Woods said. “We need to focus on how to raise more money.”

There are about 400 T-shirts, celebrating the committee’s 40th anniversary, that were not sold this year, Ms. Woods said.

“We need to start raising money ASAP,” she added.

Donations can be made by visiting the Falmouth Fireworks Committee’s website at www.falmouthfireworks.org. The committee is also seeking volunteers.