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Falmouth Select Board Denies Mayflower Wind Access

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The Falmouth Select Board voted 4-1 on Monday, December 19, to deny Mayflower Wind Energy LLC access to town property to study landfall sites for electric cables connecting its proposed offshore windfarm to the electrical grid.

Mayflower Wind plans to construct the windfarm in federal waters 30 miles south of Martha's Vineyard. To do so, the company needs to tunnel electric cables underground that would connect to two different substations. One of the proposed substation sites is in Falmouth; the other is in Somerset.

The windfarm would generate enough electricity to power 800,000 homes, according to the company.

Mayflower Wind has already tested many cable landfall sites in Falmouth Heights, but its initial access agreement with the town is set to expire. The company's preferred landfall sites are Worcester Avenue and Central Park. Mayflower Wind is due to refile more-detailed plans with the Energy Facilities Siting Board. The agreement with Falmouth would have allowed the company to conduct further engineering studies at Worcester Court and Central Park. The agreement would also have granted access to Kite Park in Falmouth Heights, an alternative location that the town requested Mayflower Wind reconsider.

Board member Douglas C. Brown said Mayflower Wind has already had plenty of time and access to the landfall sites to gather the necessary information.

"I just don't really think I want to encourage further development research in the previously identified areas," Mr. Brown said.

Falmouth Heights residents packed the select board meeting room on Monday. Several voiced opposition during public comment, citing damage to the neighborhood and small businesses, harm to the public park that Mayflower Wind selects for landfall and the loss of the neighborhood's aesthetic appeal. Some claimed the project will cause health problems.

Greg Mazmanian of Miami Avenue said the industrial-scale project should not run through a residential zone. He said Mayflower Wind has tried to sidestep Article 97, which protects clean water and open space. He added that granting the access agreement is inviting Mayflower Wind to proceed, despite residents' objections.

“Mayflower has done everything in their corporate arsenal to persuade and circumvent town zoning,” Mr. Mazmanian said. “Any vote tonight for the testing in the Heights...is a shameful representation of the public.”

David Buzanoski, president of the Falmouth Heights-Maravista Neighborhood Association, said that when Mayflower Wind first tested the proposed landfall sites, it used the data to submit the application for the project to the state. The company will do the same with the second iteration of data, he said.

“As much as we say it’s not a commitment...Mayflower treats it a little bit differently,” Mr. Buzanoski said. “They’re taking it and running with it.”

Joseph A. Netto, an East Falmouth resident who owns land in Falmouth Heights, pointed out that none of the people who spoke were engineers or scientists. He said the town should aim to be objective and allow Mayflower Wind the opportunity to collect as much information as it needs so that Falmouth can also access that information and make an informed decision on the project later on.

“I would like to remind you of your obligation to the citizens of the Town of Falmouth,” Mr. Netto said. “The whole town. To make decisions based on facts.”

Mr. Netto said telephone poles are also "industrial" and electric cables already run through the town.

“I think we should be objective,” Mr. Netto said. “Look at the whole picture and get this thing started so we can be in a position to negotiate for what’s best for the town.”

Robert B. Dugan of Lucerne Avenue said Mayflower Wind applied for a waiver to bypass all of Falmouth’s zoning laws, which would mean Falmouth would lose the ability to enforce its own zoning.

“They keep saying they want to work with the town, but this [waiver] completely takes the power out of the town’s hands,” Mr. Dugan said. “It seems very disingenuous.”

Mayflower Wind representative Daniel Hubbard confirmed that the company has not withdrawn the waiver. He also said Mayflower Wind will answer residents' questions in a future public meeting.

Board member Samuel H. Patterson, arguing in favor of granting access, said the town should allow state and federal boards to decide the project’s fate. He said the windfarm seeks to solve a national problem: how to transition the country away from fossil fuel energy.

Member Edwin (Scott) P. Zylinski II said he disagreed with Mr. Patterson.

“I’m unwilling to relinquish this responsibility to a greater board,” Mr. Zylinski said. “We have a responsibility to our community.”

“I think it does not show good faith by Mayflower Wind that they still have [the waiver] in motion,” vice chairwoman Onjalé Scott Price said.

The board then voted 4-1 to deny the access agreement, which was met with applause from the audience. Mr. Patterson was the dissenting vote.

“The decisions facing us are going to affect generations of the future,” Mr. Patterson said.

Mr. Patterson said the grandchildren of the people in the room will be left to deal with the effects of climate change and their generation’s footprint on the planet. He argued that transitioning to a clean energy economy is the responsible thing to do.

“I don’t want us to forget that we owe something to future generations,” Mr. Patterson said.