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Wind energy: Governor asks panel where to locate turbines

About 35 “stakeholders” in Governor Carcieri’s plan to build a wind farm off the Rhode Island coast offer their suggestions on where the turbines should be placed.

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PROVIDENCE — Governor Carcieri is pushing forward with his plan to build a wind farm off the coast of Rhode Island, even though it’s unclear how the state would finance the ambitious project.

Yesterday, the governor’s top energy adviser convened the first meeting of “stakeholders” — people who represent various municipalities, agencies and organizations that would be affected, or want a say in how the project would proceed. Participants were invited by the governor’s office and about 35 attended the meeting, held at the headquarters of Save the Bay, an environmental organization.

Carcieri has called for building a state-owned wind farm on the scale of the proposed Cape Wind project in Nantucket Sound that would be large enough to generate 15 percent of the state’s electricity. It would become one of the first such offshore wind farms in the United States, and cost \$900 million to \$1.9 billion.

Extra

[PDF: Read the governor’s wind energy siting study](#)

Initially, Carcieri sought for the project to be completed by 2012, but he has accelerated that goal by two years to 2010.

“I don’t want to be overly dramatic,” he told the group at yesterday’s meeting. “But this is an urgent issue. ... We have to take control of our future,” rather than be entirely dependent on foreign sources of energy.

The stakeholder group is tasked with addressing what may be the project’s most vexing question — where the wind turbines should be placed. State officials are trying to avoid the controversies that have dogged developers of the Cape Wind project, who have been seeking federal and state permission for more than five years. That proposal has been slowed by a small but well-organized group of Cape Cod residents, who, along with some powerful legislators, oppose it for environmental reasons and because they contend that a sea of wind turbines would mar the otherwise pristine vista of Nantucket Sound.

The Rhode Island stakeholders group will begin with the conclusions of a report, commissioned by the Carcieri administration, which examined potential sites for wind farms throughout Rhode Island, as well as in the Rhode Island and Block Island sounds. The 132-page study, written by Applied Technology Management, identified 11 sites where a facility could be economically viable. Ten of those sites were offshore.

ATM is a water-resources engineering firm headquartered in Gainesville, Fla. The report cost about \$380,000 and the state paid for it with money from a monthly surcharge collected from utility customers, as well as a \$150,000 grant from Florida Power and Light, a major owner and operator of wind farms.

Yesterday, after hearing from Carcieri, the stakeholders heard a summary of the ATM study, and an explanation of how the consulting firm came to eliminate some potential sites and gravitate toward others.

Dennis Loria, one of the consultants who helped prepare the study, told the group that the “real opportunity” for wind power lay in the 10 offshore sites.

The stakeholders are empowered to choose one of several options to achieve the governor’s 15-percent goal. They could recommend development of just one site, such as a 22.3-square-mile area off the coast of Little Compton and Newport, or they could suggest several smaller sites.

The option that would produce the cheapest electricity appears to be developing two adjacent areas near Block Island. A 13.1-square-mile site just south of the island is in Rhode Island waters, and a 13-square-mile site southwest is in federal waters.

Both sites could each contain 56 turbines and could generate a total of 220 megawatts of electricity — enough to power 220,000 households, the study said. That’s about 1½ times the power needed to reach the 15-percent goal.

Some in the group asked questions or made comments, and most seemed supportive of the project.

Peter B. Baute, a councilman from New Shoreham, said the town would want to make sure that if the wind farm were to be off the coast of Block Island, that there would be a connection to the island, providing it with a new source of electricity, and thus lowering rates. (New Shoreham’s only source of electricity is a diesel-powered generator on the island. Electricity rates there are among the highest in the country.)

“There’s no reason we can’t run a cable,” said Andrew Dzykewicz, chief energy adviser to the governor and who is leading the wind energy initiative. “That’s easy.”

Joseph DePasquale, representing the Town of Warren, asked whether municipalities could become investors in the state’s project.

Dzykewicz said that could be an “excellent approach” to pay for the project. He added that it might be more cost-effective for a community to invest in the state’s wind-farm project, giving it ownership of a percentage of the electricity produced, rather than for the community to build its own turbines. However, Dzykewicz said the state would “thoroughly support” municipalities that wanted to go it alone.

Roy F. Bonner, of Little Compton, who listed his affiliation as citizen, expressed concern about the state owning a wind farm and going into the power business. He indicated that such an endeavor would be better left to the private sector.

One issue the group will consider is whether the project should be in state waters, federal waters or a combination of both. Wind projects in federal waters would have to go through a federal permitting process, while those in state waters would need only state approval.

Dzykewicz said he did not want the selection process to be a long-drawn-out affair. The group will meet next month and again in October. He said he hoped that at the third meeting, the group could reach consensus on the best location.

“There’s such an interest, the prices of [wind turbines] are going up everyday.”

One key issue that remains unclear is how the state intends to pay for the project. The Carcieri administration had proposed forming a state power authority that would own the wind farm, have the authority to borrow money to finance it, and the power to enter into long-term contracts with buyers of electricity. A bill introduced in the General Assembly last session that would have created such an entity was passed by the Senate but died in the House.

Dzykewicz said the governor would push for that legislation again next session.

“Frankly,” he said, “I don’t think we can get this project done without it.”

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