

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Antigonish County Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law are formal planning documents created to regulate the development of small and large scale wind turbines within the whole of Antigonish County. With a greater emphasis on renewable and sustainable energy sources in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of wind turbines proposed and in operation in Nova Scotia, and several companies have expressed an interest in building turbines within the County.

In developing wind turbine policy, existing policy in other municipalities, as well as the Model Wind Turbine By-laws and Best Practices for Nova Scotia Municipalities were reviewed, and input from residents was received at open house sessions. This Strategy sets clear distinctions between small “domestic scale” turbines which are intended to power individual homes, farms or businesses and large “utility scale” turbines which are typically designed to sell power produced directly to Nova Scotia Power. Wind turbines will be regulated through land use planning, where a single zone will initially cover the entire County. Everything will be permitted as of right in this zone, and development requirements will only apply to domestic scale turbines (though all developments are still subject to the requirements of the detailed area plan, if they are located in one). Any individual or company wishing to build utility scale turbines in the County however will be required to rezone the subject land to Wind Resource. This rezoning requirement is there to ensure public input on the proposed turbines, and that the decision to allow or refuse the project will be up to Antigonish County Council.

This Strategy and By-law outlines mandatory setbacks for all wind turbines. Domestic scale turbines must be set back from the nearest property line by the distance equaling three times the height of the turbine (though this can be reduced to two times if it can be shown that the noise generated is minimal). To ensure the visual integrity of the landscape, turbines must be shorter than 60 metres and have no signs, advertisements or objects attached, and only one is permitted on a lot. Domestic scale turbines (with the exception of the smallest “mini-scale” turbines) are also not permitted on lots smaller than 0.4 hectares (1 acre). In order to protect residents from health, safety and aesthetic concerns, utility scale turbines have much greater setback requirements. Turbines must be at least 600 metres from the nearest house (which increases to 1 km if the turbine is so large as to require a provincial environmental assessment). They also need to be set back from watercourses and public highways. In order to have land rezoned to allow utility scale turbines, the developer must show that their proposal does not have a negative impact on sensitive habitat or endangered species and will not interfere with radars, radios or other telecommunications systems. Developers must submit a detailed site plan including manufacturers’ specifications, an analysis of noise impacts as well as a decommissioning and site reclamation plan if they wish to cease operation.

These documents intend to reflect the importance of allowing wind turbine development in the County, given the many benefits it generates, and also the need to balance that with ensuring that small and large scale wind development occurs in appropriate locations and do not have adverse effects on either residents or the environment.