

Nantucket Island Chamber of Commerce Rejects Wind Farm

From the Nantucket Inquirer & Mirror Article
By staff writer Diana McCarley

On Monday, (8 July 2002) the board of directors of the Nantucket Island Chamber of Commerce released a statement signed by 22 of its 23 members which said the board had unanimously voted to oppose the project.

“Each board member felt it was important to sign the statement themselves because it is such a concern,” said Tracy Bakalar, executive director of the Chamber.

Bakalar said that board members have thoroughly discussed the issue with islanders, and they are confident the letter reflects Nantucket’s majority opinion.

“It’s basically a greater-good decision,” said Bakalar. “We believe we are representing the greater good of the island.”

Opponents on Nantucket and the mainland have rallied against the project, asserting a number of negative impacts they believe the wind farm will have on the Cape and Islands.

“They (the Army Corps) are the only ones who can say yes or no,” said Bakalar. “The only thing we can do is tell them how we feel, and they have been very receptive to our thoughts.”

The board’s letter presented its two key concerns for the project: the effects on the environment and the safety of air and boat travelers.

“This project is being advertised as good for the environment yet it would threaten 28 square miles of natural open waters in Nantucket Sound,” the board’s letter read.

“Is this how we want to treat our public waterways? The presence of 170 turbines, each 428 feet tall at the tip, would permanently impact this area and spoil the ecology of this local and national resource. Clearly, this project is not good for the environment. There are also concerns as to the noise impact of this project and the potential impact on fish and bird migration.”

The second issue addressed the effects such tall turbines and the vast area they will occupy could have on boating, fishing and aviation.

“Nantucket is truly a ‘highway’ for many of us,” the letter read. “Islanders and visitors to the Islands, fishermen and marine shippers all view Nantucket Sound the same as other New Englanders view Route 95 of the Mass. Pike. The proposed site is extremely close to regular commercial shipping and Steamship routes. Fishermen and recreational boaters frequent this area. Commercial and general aviation routes are directly over the proposed site – it is not uncommon for aircraft to fly in this area at an altitude of 500 feet, only several feet above the

height of the turbines. High winds, fog and sudden drastic changes in the weather make the possibility of accidents quite real.”

The Chamber of Commerce has not conducted studies of their own on the issues it cites, but has been working from the information provided by Cape Wind and local groups such as the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Bakalar said.

“The information that we’ve been provided by Cape Wind – and also talking to Cape Airlines and going to public hearings – is that this is not as environmentally sound as you think. Do we have facts? No. But these are very strong concerns.”

Bakalar also said the island is not alone in their fears, and that the Chamber is currently aligned with the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce, whose opposition is on record, as well as the Martha’s Vineyard Chamber which she said has showed a silent disapproval of the project.

“It’s something we need to present with a unified front,” said Bakalar.

The Nantucket Chamber supports a transition to renewable energies, said Bakalar, but a wind farm in the sound is not an appropriate source.

“This statement doesn’t mean the Chamber is against green power, but this is the wrong location. Having the turbines doesn’t automatically say we’re going to have cleaner air,” said Bakalar. “But in this case the concerns outweigh the propensity for cleaner air on the Cape and islands.”