

DWEA Briefing Paper: **Aesthetics and Visual Impacts**

Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

Aesthetics is a subjective judgment that each of us make for ourselves - there is no right or wrong. In the case of small and community wind, many folks like the way wind turbines look and what they represent, but there are some who do not. Interestingly, most people don't have strong feelings one way or the other, but for those who do, aesthetics can quickly become a divisive issue.

Windmills and Wind Turbines are Positive Symbols

With respect for the opinion of those who find wind turbines unsightly, history points to a different societal consensus. The American farm water pumping windmill is an iconic symbol of our western heritage that commonly appears in art, publications, and governmental logos. It is commonplace and has been on farms in America since the 1890's. To the Dutch, their windmills are an integral and cherished symbol of their cultural heritage. Modern wind turbines appear in commercials, movies, and print ads to reinforce homeland security, environmental, and progressive themes. Wind energy systems are icons of environmental stewardship and a national commitment to providing for our energy needs.



Other Manmade Structures Abound

Power poles, transmission lines, cell phone towers and countless other structures dot our landscape and have become such an integral part of our visual environment that they have virtually disappeared - we just don't "see" them anymore. Similarly, when a new wind turbine is installed, the visual novelty typically wears off within a few months and it blends into the landscape like other man-made structures in the area.

Unlike large utility scale wind turbines that are clustered into wind farms and dominate their surroundings, small and community scale wind turbines are similar in size to other accepted tall structures that are already a part of our landscape - church steeples, utility poles, cell towers, and town water towers for instance. Keep in mind that while not everyone is enthusiastic about the appearance of the town water tower, most do recognize the benefit to the common good and therefore consider it an acceptable part of the landscape. Small and community wind also serve the common good and should be accepted as well.

Putting it all in Perspective

Often, the loudest critics of the looks of small wind systems have never actually seen one and they imagine the much larger utility scale turbines. DWEA recommends visiting a small or community scale wind turbine in order to gain some first-hand perspective on size and appearance. There will never be a tall man made structure that does not generate some aesthetic criticism. This was the case with the Eiffel Tower, the Brooklyn Bridge, and even the Statue of Liberty. However, minority complaints should be balanced against the overwhelming societal good of wind energy. **Wind turbines serve the common good. There will never be consensus on aesthetics. DWEA recommends that small wind systems not be denied permitting solely on the grounds of visual impact.**