

DWEA Briefing Paper: **NIMBY'S**

Masters of Misinformation

NIMBY is an acronym for the phrase Not In My Back Yard. According to Wikipedia the term NIMBY is used pejoratively to describe opposition by residents to a proposal for a new development near them. While DWEA respects the opinions of those who do not like wind turbines, experience has shown that often NIMBYs serve to distort the policy environment with wild and unsubstantiated claims of alleged harm. The stridency of such opinions can also mask majority opinion in support of wind energy.

Setting the Record Straight

A few minutes on the internet can yield a plethora of “potential harms” from small wind systems, including loss of property value and “spoiling the view”. While NIMBYs often state their general support for wind energy, their statement is almost always followed by a list of alleged harms outlining why the proposed location is not appropriate. As substantiated in numerous DWEA Briefing Papers, these alleged harms have no basis in fact:

- Small wind turbines do not lower property values or make neighboring properties harder to sell.
- There are no substantiated adverse health effects from small wind turbines or small wind turbine sound, shadow flicker, or electro-magnetic interference.
- There are no significant safety risks from tower collapse, attractive nuisance, ice, or lightning.
- The sound from small wind systems is comparable to residential air-conditioners.
- Windows and cats pose a far greater risk to birds and bats than does any small wind turbine.

A great injustice is perpetrated when public officials, deciding whether a small wind system can be installed, take the allegations of NIMBYs at face value. NIMBYs are certainly entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts.

Feeding the Anti-Wind Bias of Some Planners

After three decades of industry experience, it has become clear that many planners have a bias against tall structures such as wind turbines and cell phone towers. They may feel the same about utility structures, but typically have no jurisdiction over them. Sometimes planners use their high profile to undermine the approval of small wind turbine projects. Unfortunately, biased planners give NIMBYs and their allegations undeserved credibility. This is generally the dynamic at play when NIMBY allegations of harm go unchallenged during public hearings and deliberations for projects or ordinances for small wind energy systems.

The Real Issue is Aesthetics

Opposition to small wind installations arises most commonly when neighbors perceive that their view may be spoiled by the proposed wind turbine installation. This is also the issue at the core of most NIMBY concerns, but allegations of harm are often manufactured by NIMBYs in an attempt to substantiate their bias. As the DWEA Briefing Paper on Aesthetics points out tall man-made structures always generate some aesthetics criticism, as was the case with the Eiffel Tower, Brooklyn Bridge, and the Statue of Liberty. Minority NIMBY complaints should be kept in perspective and balanced against the overwhelming societal good of wind energy. **DWEA recommends that NIMBYs be afforded respect for their opinions, including aesthetic concerns, but that they not be afforded credibility for unsubstantiated allegations regarding health, safety, and financial harm due to a small wind turbine installation.** As Robert Kennedy said, “Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator. And change has its enemies.”