



## Staten Island Advance

### **A fresh idea for Fresh Kills**

**Proposed wind farm at the closed dump could power as many as 5,000 homes**

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**By GLENN NYBACK**  
**STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE**

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- For more than 50 years, Fresh Kills was known around the world as a rancid dump -- a trash pile so big you could spot it from space.

Now, in a dramatic reversal, portions of the former 2,200-acre landfill are looking to go squeaky clean, with construction of the first wind farm in New York City. The farm could deliver enough clean, renewable energy to power as many as 5,000 homes.

While designers and officials can't promise any immediate energy savings for Staten Islanders, the installation would represent a significant citywide commitment to cleaner, self-sustaining forms of energy -- something that is widely perceived as crucial since sources of fossil fuels like oil and natural gas are rapidly depleting and coal, while plentiful, is dirty.

"It is by far the best renewable project that is about to happen in New York City," said Paul Curran, managing director of Patterson, N.Y.-based BQ Energy, which cost-shared the study with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA).

"This will be the most visible wind farm anywhere in the world, without question. And it's a perfect place for it. It's a place that's going to produce renewable green energy in the future and we are very excited about moving forward with it."

A 14-month Borough Hall-commissioned study has found that there is enough wind to sustain seven wind turbines (the industry term for what is commonly known as windmills) throughout the vast, 3.4-square-mile site, potentially supplying the electrical grid with 17 megawatts of power. The turbines could be installed in as little as two to three years, pending city and state approvals and environmental review.

Borough President James P. Molinaro, who initiated the study, was pleased with the favorable report.

"It's good news," Molinaro said. "It's by far the best location in New York City. When the general population sees the benefit of it, it's difficult to be against."

Molinaro, joined by Curran, Paul Tonko, president and chief executive officer of NYSERDA, and other Borough Hall officials discussed the findings with the Advance Editorial Board last week.

The report is separate from City Councilman Michael McMahon's proposal to develop a solar- and wind-generated power park in Bloomfield on the site once discussed for a NASCAR track. The site, which McMahon believes could supply most or all of Staten Island's energy needs, would be dubbed the Staten Island Cleantech Park.

About 236 wind turbines would be needed to power more than 169,000 households on Staten Island (according to Staten Island Economic Development Corporation statistics.)

## **SUFFICIENT WIND SPEED**

Molinaro said he wants to work with the Sanitation Department -- and conduct environmental and land-use reviews separate from that of the overall park plan -- before the first portions of the landfill are transferred to the Parks Department within the next "year or two." Molinaro believes it will be easier to get the wind turbines in the ground when Sanitation is in charge than when Parks takes over.

Both department spokesmen declined comment.

Curran said the Fresh Kills wind farm project would resemble a newly completed project in Lackawanna, N.Y., near Buffalo. Eight wind turbines were installed on the old Bethlehem Steel mill -- the first large-scale wind power project in an American city, he said.

"Conventional wisdom had always said it wasn't windy enough here," Curran said about an old notion that wind turbines wouldn't work in New York City. But wind data gathered over 14 months from a meteorological device atop the Travis-facing North Mound showed that the average wind speed is 14.5 mph, which is sufficient, he said.

## **STANDING TALL**

The \$40 million cost to install the windmills would be covered by BQ Energy, using no taxpayer dollars. The energy produced would either be sold into the electrical grid or to local businesses, Curran said. Molinaro indicated that the Pratt Industries paper recycling mill in Travis has expressed an interest in buying most, if not all, of the power.

A Pratt Industries spokesman could not be reached for comment.

Curran said one approach calls for installing turbines at each of the four former trash mounds -- one on the North Mound, three on the New Springville-facing East Mound, one on the Arden Heights-facing South Mound and two on the Arthur Kill facing West Mound.

The turbines at Fresh Kills would soar some 410 feet, or about 40 stories. Each is about 15-feet wide at the base. There are eight potential designs for the turbines, which could either be piled into the ground or mounted above-ground with special anchorings and landscaping. Curran said. Because of high demand for wind turbines, and a backlog in orders from manufacturers, it would take about two years after the city OKs the project before the windmills could be in place at Fresh Kills, he said. Putting them up, however, would only take about two days, he added.

Curran downplayed typical community concerns including excess noise, visual blight and harm to birds.

The noise generated is a low, "whooshing kind of sound like the tide rolling in," he said. Visually, they're actually captivating to look at. In fact, he said, five wind turbines built on a wastewater treatment plant in Atlantic City have become a bit of a tourist attraction with some visitors to the city's casinos requesting hotel rooms that face the turbines.

Finally, only a couple of birds fly into wind turbines each year, Curran said. And a recent study by Canadian ornithologist Ross James backed him up, finding that an average of one or two birds are killed per wind turbine annually across North America.

"Far more birds fly into the Verrazano Bridge," Curran said.

## **'GOOD DEMONSTRATION'**

Molinaro -- along with Borough Hall environmental engineer Nick Dmytryszyn and Meagan Devereaux, Molinaro's chief of staff -- repeatedly made comparisons between the wind turbine project and the gas fired New York Power Authority power plant in Rosebank.

Dmytryszyn pointed out that both facilities have lifespans of 20 to 25 years. The Rosebank plant, he said, cost about \$50 million to construct while the wind project cost \$40 million. But while the wind farm could

supply only about 5,000 homes with electricity, the NYPA plant could power anywhere from 37,600 to 47,000 homes. (Power plants can serve more homes annually because they are capable of running 24 hours a day, seven days a week; wind turbines cannot run when there's no wind.)

Still, Dmytryszyn said power plants release harmful pollutants, like carbon monoxide, ammonia and nitrogen oxide into the air; wind turbines don't.

"To us, there really isn't a comparison between what's good and what's bad," he said.

Meanwhile, NYPA has repeatedly asserted that the gas-fired Rosebank turbine, along with 10 identical ones in the city and on Long Island, is among the cleanest running plants up and running.

Tonko said renewable energy is "a great opportunity ... to be the solution out there.

"It shows people that it's doable," he said, referring to wind energy projects in the city. "This is a good demonstration."

### **SOME STILL SKEPTICAL**

Some in the city's Parks Department have expressed skepticism about wind turbines at the landfill, saying the structures don't fit with picnic areas, nature outlooks and trails for biking, hiking and running.

There's also uncertainty over the future development of the West Mound. That's where recovery work was centered after the World Trade Center attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and where tons of remains from Ground Zero were buried. Family members have sued the city to relocate those materials to a separate cemetery, honoring the victims.

But Curran said he's optimistic that turbines would mix well with whatever is finally designed at the site. Installation could even begin on the West and East mounds before they are completely capped by Sanitation by 2013.

"We haven't heard of a use of the landfill in the next 40 years where this would conflict," he said.

Ms. Devereaux, who has an environmental science background, said Staten Islanders should embrace the project as part of a forward-thinking solution to the country's anticipated energy crisis.

"This is clean, this is efficient and we can do it now," she said. "We're going to need more energy and this is the way to do it."

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