

# WINDLETTER

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## SMALL TURBINE COLUMN:

### Residential Wind Turbines and Property Values

--Mick Sagrillo, Sagrillo Power & Light

Doing battle with the Not-In-My-Back-Yard crowd (NIMBYs) at zoning hearings can be a never-ending occupation. Whenever a myth-pulled-out-of-thin-air or wild accusation by wind opponents is debunked by examining the facts, another one arises. This is part of the NIMBY strategy.

One accusation that occasionally arises at zoning hearings for residential wind turbines is that neighboring property values will decrease if the turbine is installed. The rationale is that the neighborhood view shed will be compromised due to the installation of a home-sized wind turbine, and, as a result, the neighbors will not be able to sell their property for its true value. This is "one of the most widespread NIMBY issues with wind farm siting," according to AWEA executive director Tom Gray.

The hypothesis about diminished property values actually comes from opponents of commercial utility-scale wind farms, and has been around for a number of years in that arena. Fortunately, several studies have been done analyzing the speculation that property values have diminished in the wake of wind farm developments. One study done by the Renewable Energy Policy Project (REPP) titled, "The Effect Of Wind Development On Local Property Values," presents data to counter the threat of decreased property values. The REPP study "found no evidence that property values decreased as a result of wind farms." Quite the contrary, "for the great majority of projects the property values actually rose more quickly in the view shed than they did in the comparable community. Moreover, values increased faster in the view shed after the projects came online than they did before."

There is no question that wind generators, which require tall towers to access an unobstructed flow of wind, are highly visible. But does visibility necessarily equate to reduced property values? Lots of human-made structures are visible in the immediate and distant horizon, including buildings, silos, grain elevators, water towers, telephone and utility poles, transmission line towers, bill boards, and communication and cell phone towers.

The upshot of studies like the REPP report is that there was no evidence that property values in general decreased as a result of the wind farms. Residential wind turbines, with very small rotor areas and tower heights relative to wind farm turbines are even less obvious on the landscape than larger commercial turbines, and most other human-made structures.

If this is the case, why do NIMBYs use such arguments at zoning hearings for a residential wind turbine? The answer is obvious: any doubt that the NIMBYs can instill into the minds of the zoning officials might help defeat – or at least delay – anything they don't want in their neighborhood, be it a housing development, a new road, a utility power line, or a wind turbine. The game the NIMBYs play is all about delay and obfuscation in an attempt to thwart the applicant, or simply make him or her go away.

In AWEA's "Permitting Small Wind Turbines: A Handbook," residential turbine manufacturer Mike Bergey is noted as saying that "in 20 years of business he's never heard of a customer's wind turbine

adversely affecting the value of neighboring real estate.” A survey of other manufacturers and dealers supports Bergey's statement. In fact, quite the opposite might be true. David Blittersdorf, quoted in the same handbook, notes that his new neighbors bought the house next door because Blittersdorf's machine indicated to them that “the community cared about the environment.”

What a positive attitude and interesting counter-viewpoint to the NIMBY's muddled contention that the installation of a residential wind turbine will ruin the neighborhood's property values.

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[Editors Note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and may not reflect those of AWEA staff or board.]