

Recommendations for the Development of Wind Energy in Abilene and the Surrounding Area

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The Abilene area has benefited in recent years from placement of wind energy turbines in our region. The return to the local economy of these wind turbines is not a single event benefit; rather, an understory of business follows the placement of these turbines. Wind energy is no different than any other business: it provides jobs and tax base to the community.

Wind energy in the Abilene area has benefitted from several location factors. These include:

- Land
- Wind
- Proximity to markets
- Regional tradition of energy production
- Labor

The multiple activities that comprise the wind energy industry in Abilene should be coordinated for continued and increased benefit to Abilene and the surrounding region. To this, a series of recommendations is offered for public policy:

For the Abilene Industrial Foundation and the Development Corporation of Abilene:

- **Identify facilities that would be appropriate for the manufacture of wind energy equipment:** Newton, Ohio saw a successful repurposing of a shuttered Maytag plant into a wind turbine plant run by TPI Composites. We need to work to maintain an inventory of potential sites for wind energy equipment production.
- **Identify large land owners in the counties surrounding Abilene for possible turbine placement:** Large tracts of land offer the convenience of dealing with one individual when siting a wind energy field. Working to identify large land holders that would be interested in developing an alternate revenue stream from wind energy would aid in the continued development of wind farms in the region.
- **Coordinate between smaller land owners to assemble land parcels for the development of wind farms:** In areas where the winds are consistent and high, but the land is owned by multiple owners, economic development agents should work to assemble land owners to ease wind field development.
- **Consider the development of new speculative buildings that could house wind energy manufacturing businesses:** The Development Corporation of Abilene has enjoyed success in developing and finding tenants for speculative industrial structures. Continued development of such buildings, targeted at wind energy component manufacturers, would broaden our inventory of available structures for wind company relocation.

- **Monitor property tax abatement strategies that can be used to incent the placement of wind turbines:** Tax abatement is a central element of current wind farm development. Communication between taxing entities about concessions and creative strategies for assembling tax abatement packages should be developed.
- **Recruit other energy producers to area:** The agglomeration of wind energy production in our area would offer second-order benefits to other energy markets. We should recruit solar energy production to our area as it could benefit from the alternative fuel emphasis currently in our economy.

For state politicians:

- **Monitor property tax legislation that might impede the development of wind energy:** Again, property taxes are a central element of wind turbine placement. Our state legislators should monitor property tax legislation that might have deleterious effect on wind turbine development.
- **Monitor permitting, fees, and environmental law that could impact wind energy:** Apart from taxation, legislation may be crafted that would change the appeal of locating wind energy production in our region. Legislators need to monitor environmental law along with fees and permitting for wind energy that could affect our continued development of wind fields.
- **Work to secure electric infrastructure that allows for easy delivery of wind power to large metropolitan areas:** Our region has many areas that are viable for wind production with one exception: they lack the ability to transport wind-produced power. Our legislators should work to develop a comprehensive transmission line network comprised of appropriately-scaled power lines.

For our local legal community:

- **Familiarize local legal community with wind rights to facilitate leasing to wind energy producers:** Defining leases for oil production is a well-established market in our area. Benefiting from the similarities, our legal community needs to develop the skill set to serve wind energy producers working to lease wind rights from local landowners.

For existing economic development successes

- **Protect Dyess airspace to ensure the long-term viability of the base:** Dyess Air Force Base is a cornerstone of the local economy. It is important that any efforts to develop wind energy, such as encroachment of wind turbine fields, do not detract for the viability of Dyess as an air base.

For local elected leaders and the Abilene Chamber of Commerce:

- **Support the development of the Tenaska coal energy plant:** The variable nature of wind energy is its greatest detractor. Our region needs to augment variable wind energy production with a steady source of power. The Tenaska plant would provide this and give another reason why our region should receive funds for a well-developed power grid for energy delivery to other markets.
- **Work with local education institutions to develop programs that provide labor for wind energy:** Abilene has multiple opportunities to locally train workers for wind energy employment. The Texas Tech Graduate School, Texas State Technical College and our local high schools all provide an infrastructure to educate employees for this industry. Our school need to work with wind employers to discern the skills needed and develop programs to produce workers with those skills.
- **Support Abilene Regional Airport so that wind energy company executives will see that the cost of travel is reasonable and convenient:** There are multiple benefits to this recommendation; other businesses headquartered in Abilene and leisure travelers benefit from a comprehensive airport. Still, given the international nature of the market for wind components in places like Spain and Denmark whose efforts in wind energy predate ours, we need a viable airport to make plant or headquarter relocation a reality.
- **Balance turbine property tax abatement against new business development from turbine placement:** The classic trade-off in property tax abatement for economic development assesses the loss of public revenues in one quarter for the gain in jobs and tax revenues elsewhere. Local public policy makers need to make sure they are balancing the gains of jobs against the loss of tax revenues and the burdens these abated companies place on local public services.
- **Support a bond election for a technical trade high school that places emphasis on wind energy trades:** As mentioned, Abilene has several educational institutions that can train labor for wind energy. A technical high school that offers a curriculum for wind energy employees would train workers for employment following high school.

Additionally, it is important to recognize this as a regional effort, not an Abilene or Taylor County effort. Abilene, given its size, naturally functions as a hub for wind energy production. Abilene's access to rail, road and air transport along with proximity to workers, makes it the logical place for wind energy production facilities to locate. Regionally, we need our smaller communities because they may have a facility of the right size or may offer a tract of land of the appropriate scale for siting a wind turbine field. As a final recommendation for action, a dialogue is needed to establish an appropriate coordination area from which a concerted effort for wind energy development can be mounted.