

County, DWPI agree on corridor

In a tight vote that's certain to rankle some Dufferin residents, county council Thursday voted to approve an easement agreement for a 230 kv power line on the rail corridor.

The agreement potentially means the county could receive as much as \$2-million from proponent Dufferin Wind Power Inc., comprising an immediate payment of \$700,000 plus a further \$700,000 for community improvements, up to \$500,000 for fencing if requested by any adjoining farm business operators, and payment of the county's legal costs to date (\$110,000).

Had agreement not been reached Thursday, the easement issue would have gone to a hearing into expropriation by DWPI on Monday, March 10.

Had that occurred, it is understood that the county would have forfeited DWPI's cash offer of settlement and would have had to rely on the Ontario Municipal Board to set compensation if DWPI were to be granted authority to expropriate. As well, the county would have incurred legal costs.

However, the 14-13 recorded vote is bound to rankle as 12 of the 14 were from the mayor and deputy mayor of Orangeville, and two from the mayor of East Garafraxa.

There had been only 27 votes as Shelburne Mayor Ed Crewson (2) had declared a conflict of interest as one of his properties abuts the rail corridor. Deputy Mayor Ken Bennington (1) voted against the agreement, along with all votes from Amaranth (2), Grand Valley (2), Melancton (2), Mono (4) and Mulmur (2).

In Amaranth, Deputy Mayor Walter Kolodziechuk in a Friday interview described the decision as 'heartbreaking.' He said the township 'has made it clear we have no intention of signing agreements for the use of township roads. If they want to fight, we'll fight.'

He described the company as 'bullies. That's what they are,' and said DWPI had originally talked of a 69kv line. 'If they had stuck with that, we would have worked with them.'

Melancton mayor and Warden Bill Hill said Friday he was 'surprised' by the outcome of Thursday's vote. For the record, his opinions echoed much of Mr. Kolodziechuk's position on the issues, and also indicated dissatisfaction with the provincial government's role.

DWPI had initially demanded the immediate issuance of access permits as part of the easement agreement. On Thursday, the county amended the agreement to exclude that condition.

Friday, Connie Roberts, speaking for DWPI, said the company 'has no concerns with the changes made by County Council at last night's meeting and is proceeding with acquiring access permits to start construction on the power line as soon as possible.'

In a summary of DWPI's position, presumably approved head office, she said: 'Everyone at Dufferin Wind Power is thrilled with this outcome and the opportunity to cancel the expropriation of the rail corridor.'

'County Council's approval has resulted in the most gain for the community in terms of a \$700,000 right-of-way payment and a matching Dufferin County Community Contribution Fund that the County could use to upgrade the former rail corridor for recreational use.'

'The latest concession by Dufferin Wind Power was a \$500,000 letter of credit to the County to compensate them for any claims made for fencing along the corridor, a demand made by Council and addressed in the latest document that was approved last night.'

?Running the 230kV power line through a former rail corridor ? a utility corridor ? is the smart thing to do. It will allow continued recreational use of the corridor, farmers are assured access to their land, and it is seen as a better alternative to a dual 69kV line that would run along municipal roads, in front of homes and businesses.

?It was the community's concerns as heard at the public information centres that helped influence the decision to use the rail corridor for a 230kV line rather than a dual 69kV line. Concessions were made to minimize visual impact of the power line: Instead of lattice structure Dufferin Wind chose a single wood pole design and agreed to bury the line through the town of Shelburne and through an industrial area in Amaranth.

?Dufferin Wind Power has followed all safety standards and guidelines set out by the Electrical Safety Authority and the design has been approved and has received Leave to Construct from the Ontario Energy Board.

?The County's decision is a smart one. The people in this community are already benefitting from the infusion of investment dollars. Wherever possible, the Dufferin Wind Farm is being built using local materials purchased from community businesses. Everyone in the community will benefit as a result of monies paid by DWPI to municipalities for building permits, property taxes, and a Community Contribution development fund.

?Dufferin Wind Power wishes to thank both Dufferin County staff and Council for assisting with this positive outcome and we remain committed to being a good corporate citizen and a good neighbor,? she said in an emailed summary.

By Wes Keller