

Jackson-area laws may shift for wind turbines

By [Jackie Smith](#)

October 17, 2009, 8:39PM

The Jackson area isn't exactly known for an abundance of wind turbines, but growing interest in renewable energy among residents could have some area townships changing their zoning rules.

One woman in Blackman Township, where turbine regulations have yet to be a topic of discussion for officials, plans to install an 80-foot turbine on her 45-acre corn field in order to lower her electricity bill.

"What I save in the winter I can use in the summer when the electricity cost is high," said Linda Kiszka. "But I don't use a lot of electricity because I'm the only one here."

Kiszka recently received a \$10,575 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for construction of the turbine. She has to have the structure up in two years and is receiving help with the plans from her son Tony, who works for Orbitform, a machinery manufacturer involved with several local renewable energy projects.

Tony Kiszka expects the turbine will generate about 90 percent of his mother's electricity. It costs \$150 a month each summer and \$90 in the winter to power her house, Linda Kiszka said.

The grant covers 25 percent of the overall project cost. Tony Kiszka said his mother also will qualify for a federal tax credit that will pay for 30 percent of the investment.

Blackman zoning administrator Jack Koch is among the officials who say setting up standards for turbines is premature, though he recalls requesting information from other townships that have passed ordinances with turbine regulations.

"We were just interested in why they did what they did," he said. "It seemed to involve them more than they needed to be."

Because Blackman has no regulations for turbines, Tony Kiszka said he went through zoning procedures classifying the project as an "accessory structure" to qualify for the grant. Grass Lake officials haven't considered turbine regulations either and the idea has just begun to be explored in Columbia.

But the Michigan Township Association is recommending townships look into setting up rules for turbines, said Dave Bertram, legislative liaison team leader for the association.

"It's something that will continue to grow over time," he said. "I think there is certainly a piece to it that communities are energy conscious and it certainly resonates with the public."

Officials in Leoni, Summit and Napoleon townships have taken the advice, after receiving inquiries from residents as to whether regulations exist.

John Worden, zoning administrator for Summit and Napoleon townships, said the two townships' boards recently passed a zoning ordinance that included regulations for energy systems like turbines.

They both address two kinds of wind energy systems — large utility grid systems and smaller turbines more akin to residential properties — and are similar in detail.

Small on-site turbines up to 80 feet tall must stand on a lot at least 1 acre in size, be set back a minimum of 15 to 20 feet from all surrounding property lines and can't produce sound louder than 55 decibels. Specifications for larger turbines, which usually are higher than 100 feet, are much more detailed.

A draft of regulations has been completed by the planning commission in Leoni Township. The commission held a public hearing about the matter Oct. 7, but Planning Commission Chairman Doug Sink said no residents came.

Now, he said the township will wait for Jackson County Region 2 planning commissioners to look over the draft, which should take about 60 days. The draft includes height, setback, noise and other rules that closely resemble that of other townships, Sink said.

"People seemed to think they could live within these standards," he said. "Keep in mind our charge in this one is to protect the health and mind of township residents."

Residential turbines remain rare, but other turbine developments are continuing to come up in the area — one of which Tony Kiszka is the project manager for.

At Jackson Christian School in Summit, two concrete foundations for two turbines on its grounds have been laid. Superintendent Jim Dolson said the investment has cost about \$24,000.

With an install date planned for early November, one turbine will be about 55 feet tall, and the other, a 30-foot turbine resembling an upside-down egg beater.

Though the turbines could benefit the school's electrical power in time, Dolson said the main purpose is to teach students about renewable energy.

He said he thinks Jackson Christian's turbine efforts specifically could be "big boon for the community" and help spotlight the area as a manufacturing environment used to host technology.

"Clearly, I think there's going to be a positive that comes out of it," Bertram said of the Jackson area's wind developments. "I think any community that plans well for it should be rewarded."