

Blowing in the wind



By Nate Smelle

FOLLOWING A THOUGHT-PROVOKING discussion with a friend at the opening of the Three Women Painters exhibit at the Art Gallery of Bancroft (AGB) on Friday night regarding the wind power project proposed for Denbigh, I decided to re-assess my previously stated support for harnessing the wind to produce electricity. Claiming that the wind turbines proposed by NextEra Energy and RES Canada for Addington Highlands Township would destroy habitat for resident wildlife, the economy and the aesthetic appeal of the local landscape; and that long time champions of wind power generation like Denmark and Germany were pulling away from the technology, I knew I had a lot of digging to do.

Getting home later that night I switched on the lights and fired up my laptop to begin what turned out to be an all night investigation into the overwhelming amount of information that had been presented to me at the AGB. Taking my friend's suggestion to check out a video on YouTube entitled, Down Wind, I soon found myself knee-deep in a quagmire of petroleum-fuelled pseudo science and nuclear-powered propaganda.

The bias of the video's producers became more and more evident with every economist and so-called 'expert' they brought in front the camera to help sell their snake oil. When the talking head hired to read the cue card for this 'mockumentary' identified Dr. David Suzuki as a 'climate change alarmist' trying to profit off of wind power industry, while at the same time portraying a factory farmer as an environmental activist trying to save the world, I nearly choked on the ice in my drink.

Instead, I poured another and did my best to remain calm so that I could appreciate the rest of the film. Once the final credits had rolled off the screen, I went through the list of 'facts' I had jotted down one by one, only to discover that not one of the claims made by the film makers or on the anti-wind websites I researched held true. Studies from around the world repeatedly seemed to show that there was no scientific evidence proving wind turbines actually harm human health, the economy or the environment. Migratory birds and other wildlife are not being killed in catastrophic numbers by wind turbines; nor were countries such as Germany and Denmark trying to move away from wind power generation. In fact what I found was the exact opposite. For instance, Denmark is now striving towards producing 50 per cent of its electricity through wind power by the year 2025. Likewise, Germany had also committed to substantially increase its wind power production to help mitigate the effects of anthropogenic climate change.

As with any development there will always be an impact to the community in which it is located. In the case of the 200 or so turbines planned for Addington Highlands Township, the only issue that I have with this proposal is that it will alter the scenic landscape surrounding Denbigh to some extent. Although I personally find these towering turbines attractive to the eye, I understand how they might not fit with the overall aesthetic of certain locations. Before wind turbines, or any proposed development for that matter, can be approved and welcomed into a fragile local economy like ours that is so heavily dependent on tourism, both its costs and benefits to the community must be measured and discussed extensively with the community.

That said, it would be foolish to give in to social pressures manufactured from misinformation and unfounded fears provided to the public by people with a vested interest in a toxic status quo. By refusing to do our part in helping to create a sustainable energy infrastructure that best utilizes renewable resources such as wind and solar power, we also continue to buy into the finite alternatives that are destroying our health, our planet and the quality of life for future generations.