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## Study hints at cost of wind development

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A professor who researched wind turbines and property values recommends communities think hard about homeowner compensation.

The study is titled “Values in the Wind: A Hedonic Analysis of Wind Power Facilities.” It examines property values near wind farms in Lewis, Clinton and Franklin counties.

The report found mixed results, with property values decreasing in two counties, and increasing in the third. It’s slated for publication in the Land Economics academic journal.

“Homeowners who sell leases to developers are, presumably, adequately compensated,” said Dr. Martin D. Heintzelman, a Clarkson University assistant professor of economics and financial studies.

“Nearby homeowners, however, do not generally receive any direct compensation, and it is possible that PILOT payments are not completely making up for losses dealt to this group,” he continued. “So, it may be necessary to develop other schemes which would compensate these affected parties.”

The study collected data from 11,331 residential and agricultural property transactions over nine years in the three counties.

Heintzelman and researcher Carrie M. Tuttle found very little in the way of previous peer-reviewed studies on the issue — only two similar studies which they said used limited data.

But it’s ultimately tough to say if wind turbines affect property values negatively.

“There is, unfortunately, no definitive answer here,” Heintzelman said. “In two of the three counties studied, property values do appear to have been negatively impacted, on the order of 10 to 20 percent below what they would have been in the absence of the turbines. The exact number, in terms of decline, depends critically on how close a property is to the turbines.”

Reasons are hard to say, he said. They could include real or perceived effects, from simple aesthetics to health concerns from noise and vibrations.

But property values did increase in Lewis County. Heintzelman said it could be due to factors including setting of turbines on a relatively isolated plateau, or residents’ preferences.

Outside variables, such as the economy and job availability, were taken into account during the research.

It's unclear if the study is applicable to Wyoming County, which has turbines in the towns of Eagle, Wethersfield and Sheldon, along with the planned Stony Creek Wind Farm in Orangeville.

"I don't know enough about Wyoming County to speak to this," Heintzelman said. "I don't think the study would be inapplicable, but in applying the study to Wyoming County, one would want to compare Wyoming County and the setting of the turbines to our study area and make a determination."

Representatives from Invenergy were asked if the company offers direct compensation to nearby homeowners lacking wind turbines at the High Sheldon Wind Farm or Stony Creek.

The company completed High Sheldon two years ago and has proposed the latter.

"Invenergy has agreements with many property owners in Sheldon, some with turbines on their property and some without turbines on their property," said Eric Miller, director of Business Development. "For owners without turbines on their property, the agreements can cover, for example, easements for roads or buried cables."

He and other representatives referred The Daily News to a separate study.

"As an experienced developer and operator of U.S. wind farms, Invenergy is familiar with studies regarding wind farms and property values," Miller said. "A landmark, comprehensive 2009 study by the U.S. Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory — based on site visits, data collection, and analysis of thousands of home sales in several states — found that proximity to wind energy facilities does not cause decreased land values."

He said anecdotal evidence in Sheldon is consistent with the Berkeley study, and that sales records from 2006 to 2009 showed properties selling above assessed value and asking price in the town.

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