

Redwood County Energy Dialogue

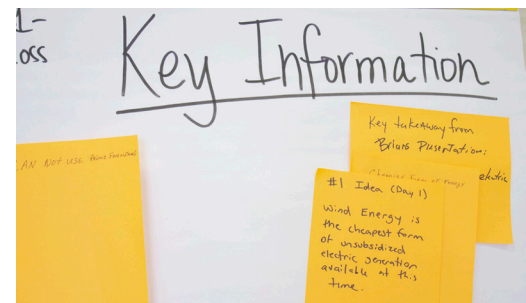


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SUMMARY

In small towns across America, people are grappling with what the national shift towards renewable energy will look like locally. Some see wind and solar projects as an exciting gateway to road improvements, income for landowners, jobs, lower property taxes, and expanded community services. Others view these projects as a disruption to the landscape they love, as big machinery and blinking lights are constructed to benefit developers and power companies. Then, somewhere in the middle, is where most people likely find themselves: unsure about what exactly clean energy could mean for their hometown. There's a clear need for people across this spectrum to learn more about the future of local energy and identify their shared community priorities.

On September 12-14, a diverse group of 18 Redwood County community members met at the Redwood Area Community Center to learn about the energy system and make recommendations to improve how the energy system serves Redwood County.

The Redwood County Energy Dialogue is the first of a two-community, wind development-focused series of the Rural Energy Dialogues program. Through in-depth, democratic deliberation, this project is intended to offer new opportunities for communities in Greater Minnesota to consider the topic deeply, offer input, and make recommendations about how their communities should move forward.

The project is a collaboration between the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the Jefferson Center. These dialogues are sponsored by the McKnight Foundation.

Participant Selection

18 participants were randomly selected from a pool of Redwood County residents to reflect the demographic makeup of the county in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, education, political affiliation, and more.

Process Overview

Over the two and a half days, participants studied the energy system in detail, identified benefits and drawbacks of expanded wind development in Redwood County, and made a recommendation about expanded wind development to their community. The report below is written by participants themselves, outlining the information they studied and the recommendations they made. For more detail, including the information considered and the material generated by participants, please visit:

ruraldialogues.org/redwood-county

Speakers

- **Energy Overview & How Development Happens:** Brian Ross, *Senior Program Director, Great Plains Institute*
- **Redwood County Finances & Decision-making:** Vicki Knobloch Kletscher, *County Administrator, Redwood County*
- **Design Guidelines & Wind Development:** Shanelle Montana, *Senior Project Developer, EDF Renewable Energy*
- **Economic Resilience & Wind Development:** Gene Metz, *County Commissioner, Nobles County*

STATEMENT TO NEIGHBORS



“

In our time at the Redwood County Energy Dialogue, we spent two and a half days listening, discussing, and brainstorming with a wonderful and diverse group of community members about the topic of expanded wind development in Redwood County.

We listened to presentations from interesting and informative speakers who gave us good information about the benefits and drawbacks of wind development in order to guide future decision-making. We discussed the benefits and the ways to enhance them and drawbacks and ways to mitigate them, some of the top benefits being increased tax revenue for counties and townships and income for farmers and landowners.

When people work together, they have the opportunity to get a lot done. We can see a future in wind energy and are inspired by the possibility of realizing its benefits. It is important for community input since this will directly or indirectly affect all residents. There are many ways for community members to make a difference, like joining any of the over one hundred committees the county has.

This is a subject not to be taken lightly, and there is a lot of thought and care that needs to be put into the process of wind development. If we get started with thoughtful exploration of expanded wind development in Redwood County now, we can move ahead faster.

It's time to move forward.

KEY FACTS ABOUT OUR ENERGY SYSTEM & REDWOOD COUNTY

The following were identified by the participants after each expert presentation.

- Wind energy is the cheapest form of unsubsidized electric generation at this time.
- There are many steps to wind development and the process takes approximately 7 years from start to finish.
- Utilities are committed to carbon-free energy: Xcel plans to reduce carbon emissions 80% by 2030, and 100% by 2050.
- There is a lack of existing wind power in Redwood County.
- Current state policy prevents the use of prime farmland for wind energy development.
- It is important to know who your commissioners are so that you know who to go to about your concerns.
- There are over 100 committees for residents to get involved with in Redwood County to help make decisions.
- There is a lack of communication to the public about meetings when committees get together to discuss important topics. Who is on these committees? ---> There is a lack of communication between the County and the public as far as when committees get together to discuss important topics and who sits on the committees.
- There is a need for other sources of income aside from taxes, as new opportunities for County revenue may exist.
- Wind farms will bring in revenue for the county budget which is important because there is always a need for more money.
- Community input is important for making good decisions because diversity in decision-making can improve the decisions. Commissioners work for the people.
- Redwood County has approximately 16,000 residents, which restricts funding opportunities that larger counties would qualify for.
- There are agreements with other counties - joint powers agreements - to get funds due to small population sizes in rural counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TOP POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF WIND DEVELOPMENT

The following are the top identified benefits of potential future wind development in Redwood County and corresponding possibilities to maximize the benefits as ranked by participants.

A benefit of expanded wind development could be...

1. Benefits to the larger community, including the \$1 million annual production tax which goes to the local government. (16 votes)
2. Financial gains to the community, landowners, (with a 2% increase each year), and many more with the possibility that it could reduce taxes. (15 votes)

To maximize this benefit, we could...

- Reduce taxes for residents
- Require wind energy employees to live in the county
- County to purchase land to place wind generation on and receive full benefits which would be reflected in lower taxes for all county residents
- Re-invest in economic development/education
- Tie in a portion of funds to long-term planning
- Maximize the amount of turbines
- Be proactive with investment
- Hold community input meetings to guide upcoming uses of tax money
- Money gained from taxes should be earmarked for specific projects, then the community can vote for and see the results from the benefits
- Provide compensation for neighbors and adjacent landowners

“I came into this not knowing one bit of information, so this has been an eye-opening experience.

I feel a lot more informed now in terms of communicating information to others.”

TOP POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF WIND DEVELOPMENT (continued)

3. Money is spent locally which helps create an overall better life for residents, both economically and environmentally. (11 votes)

To maximize this benefit, we could...

- Leverage the opportunity to support the start of new small businesses and help local businesses potentially expand
- Work with the technical college to provide wind turbine maintenance training locally.

4. Wind development creates a different and sustainable source of revenue for local government. (9 votes – tied)

5. Wind development creates a steady source of income from production tax to put toward community projects. (9 votes – tied)

To maximize this benefit, we could...

- Leverage the opportunity to support the start of new small businesses and help local businesses potentially expand
- Work with the technical college to provide wind turbine maintenance training locally.



TOP POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS OF WIND DEVELOPMENT

The following are the top identified drawbacks of potential future wind development in Redwood County and corresponding possibilities to minimize the drawbacks as ranked by participants.

A drawback of expanded wind development could be...

1. There may be no opportunity for local utilities to utilize the power generated by the turbines. (11 votes)
To minimize this drawback, we could...
 - Explore options and develop methods for local utilities to use the power locally, instead of sending it to other areas
2. Funding may not be distributed between the County and townships in proportion to the impact they experience. (10 votes)
To minimize this drawback, we could...
 - Spread funding more equally among township and county so that each entity can prosper.
3. The high cost to increase capacity in the transmission grid. (9 votes)
4. Wind development can create obstacles to farmers to be productive – and possible destruction of equipment and repair costs. (8 votes - tied)
To minimize this benefit, we could...
 - Use turbines to support agricultural practices, like putting herbicide sprinklers on the blades for weed control
5. Damage done to habitat and the environment. (8 votes - tied)



VOTING RESULTS

The following are the results for the question, “Based on what you’ve learned through this experience, do you feel residents should support expanded/future wind development efforts/projects in Redwood County?”

Yes, under most circumstances/whenever possible – 56% (10 votes)

Yes, but only if certain conditions are met/put in place – 44% (8 votes)

No, not under any circumstances – 0% (0 votes)

“When I first walked in here I knew these things existed, but I didn’t know how close they were to functioning here. My opinion is that the positives far outweigh the negatives.”





For those who voted for “Yes, but only if certain conditions are met/put in place,” the following is a compilation of the conditions identified by participants:

- The local government (townships) are not receiving a high enough percentage of income.
- A guarantee that, if there is a bankruptcy, we don’t have a county littered with windmills that are not producing but will not be taken down or have the land reclaimed.
- Information/case study of already implemented wind systems; health and safety studies of impact to the well-being of the residents; new statistics/more recent studies available to public.
- We are assuming that the tax incentive is permanent.
- Make sure money is distributed among counties proportional to impact experienced; put turbines in best spot to not affect farmers.
- If landowners had a say where the turbines go.
- If production tax has high certainty for future to provide income locally; landowners have choice in the matter, no eminent domain to force turbines into locations; multiple companies are considered to keep the longevity of expectation as realistic/profitable as possible.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Through our discussions we recognized a number of outstanding questions we had about the wind development process and operation of wind generation facilities that would help us understand the issues more fully:

- Are there any health and/or safety issues for communities and individuals related to the construction or operation of wind generation?
- Do wind turbines cause any problems with cellular signal or is there any possibility for interference?
- Does stray voltage pose any risk for humans, wildlife, or equipment?
- When in the development process is the public involved or consulted to weigh in on wind development issues?
- What perspectives and experiences (positive and negative) do other communities and community members have in counties where wind generation has been happening?
- How is lease ownership handled or transferred when property is sold or changes hands through family or other change in property ownership?



PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES



“ For me it was educational, some weeks all I do is talk to my wife, and then Sundays I have church. It was also educational to meet lots of people and get different views.

“ I walked in thinking ‘Well, ok, this might be long and drawn out.’ But the longer it went the more fun it became. It was easy to talk to people - you could tell not everybody had the same ideas, but nobody was rude.



“ I really appreciate the diversity of this group. Everyone was super respectful. It's the true face of Minnesota nice.

DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHIC <small>All statistics compiled from American Community Survey results unless otherwise noted</small>		REDWOOD COUNTY PERCENTAGE	IDEAL # OF PARTICIPANTS	CONFIRMED # OF PARTICIPANTS	ACTUAL # OF PARTICIPANTS
GENDER					
	Female	7%	9	9	9
	Male	7%	9	9	9
RACE/ETHNICITY					
	White/European-American	94%	16	17	17
	Persons of Color	6%	2	1	1
PARTY AFFILIATION <small>Extrapolated from recent election results</small>					
	Democrat	40%	7-8	6	5
	Independent	—	—	3	6
	Republican	60%	10-11	9	7
AGE					
	18-39	30%	5-6	5	4
	40-64	40%	7-8	7	7
	65 & over	30%	5-6	6	7
EDUCATION					
	Less than High School	12%	2	0	0
	High School or GED	42%	8	8	6
	Some college	28%	5	7	8
	Bachelor's degree or higher	18%	3	3	4
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS		100%	18	18	18

Funders

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

Funding is provided by the McKnight Foundation, who is committed to advancing a more just, creative, and abundant future. Find out more at mcknight.org

Partners

The Redwood County Energy Dialogue was designed and facilitated by the Jefferson Center and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.



The Jefferson Center is an international leader in civic participation, deliberation, and engagement, driven to design the future of democracy. With over four decades of experience, they partner with citizens, communities, and institutions to design and implement informed, innovative, and democratic solutions to today's toughest challenges.

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