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District 20 drafts wind turbine plan to cut energy costs

By **Kimberly Pohl**
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The Windy City may have gotten its nickname from the weather after all.

At least, that's what one suburban school district is hoping.

Keeneyville Elementary District 20, which has grade schools in Hanover Park, Roselle and Bloomingdale, wants to build a wind turbine at Greenbrook Elementary in Hanover Park to reduce energy costs.

The master plan was presented to the Hanover Park village board Thursday night by Superintendent Carole Auer and director of operations Gary Ofisher. The board must give its approval for the project to move forward.

"This is the beginning of a new trend," Village President Rodney Craig said. "Our challenge is to find alternative energy solutions and I encourage that."

Keeneyville, which has 1,775 students, racked up a \$248,000 electric bill for the 12 months ending June 2006. With ComEd's recent rate hikes, that bill is expected to exceed \$300,000 this year.

"We are looking creatively to not go back to our taxpayers and say, 'Give us more money,'" Ofisher said.

Keeneyville spent the past year researching the idea.

It hired Florida-based Wind Energy Consultants & Contractors Inc. The company used 47 years of data from the National Center for Atmospheric Research to determine the Greenbrook site does indeed have sufficient wind to sustain the turbine.

Based on the preliminary study, Keeneyville estimates the turbine would provide \$207,000 in annual energy savings. Over 30 years, the average life span of a turbine, revenue is projected at \$8 million — through combined savings and selling excess energy back to ComEd.

To help arrive at those figures, Keeneyville compared its project to those in Manlius and Erie, two northwest Illinois towns that recently erected wind turbines.

Then there's the bigger picture, as painted by the U.S. Department of Energy: Wind energy is indefinitely renewable and produces no carbon emissions. It doesn't contribute to global warming, acid rain, smog, haze or water withdrawal.

How big?

Keeneyville's proposal offers only speculation as to the turbine's price tag and size.

The turbine could cost \$2æmillion or more. It may tower 200 feet in the air, or perhaps 250 feet.

Once Hanover Park gives its approval, a 12-month study would be done to get more specific figures, said Kirk Heston, director of business development for Johnson Controls, a power solutions firm.

District 20 already took care of half the cost of erecting the wind turbine with a 50 percent grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.

Keeneyville would borrow the remaining 50 percent using performance bonds, which would be repaid through the savings that otherwise would have gone to ComEd.

On Thursday, the village board was enthusiastic, but wants the public involved from the very beginning

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the property across the street," Trustee William Manton said.

Trustees also were concerned about potential noise, but the American Wind Energy Association equates the "whooshing" sound made by modern turbines to a kitchen refrigerator at distances of 750 to 1,000 feet.

The foundation will pay for the 12-month study.

It would involve erecting a temporary 120- to 150-foot tower mounted with anemometers. The devices — picture little propellers, pinwheels or spinning cups — collect wind speed and directional data.

Since the turbine would vastly exceed current village height regulations, Hanover Park would have to amend its zoning ordinances.

There's also a chicken and egg situation.

The foundation won't allow a feasibility study without village approval, and the village wants to know the project's feasibility before it'll give approval.

To help jumpstart the process, Ofisher said members of the Parent Teacher Organization will go door-to-door in the next few days, asking residents of the 200 or so homes in the area to sign a petition supporting the turbine.

Auer is appealing to residents to think of the benefits.

"We need to prepare students for the future and let them know we need to take care of this earth. We need to teach them about conservation and renewable energy sources," Auer said.

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