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## Howard County, E.ON part ways

BY MARTIN SLAGTER

### ■ No penalty for agreement termination

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Many residents attending Thursday's special Howard County Board of Commissioners meeting expected contentious discussion regarding the future of the Wildcat Wind Farm. What they got instead is something many might refer to as a "win-wind" situation.

The commissioners and E.ON Climate & Renewables came to an agreement to terminate their economic development agreement, putting a halt to the Wildcat Wind Farm in eastern Howard County, while ending six years of debate over the turbines that had long been a subject of controversy.

"As a result of many months of lengthy dialogue, negotiations and changes in market conditions, tonight we are announcing that we are terminating the economic development agreement with E.ON regarding Wildcat Wind Farm phases II and III," Commission President Paul Wyman said to a roar of applause among the packed board room. "This termination is mutually agreeable by E.ON. The county will incur no liability and no costs.

"There is no settlement money paid by either party, and Howard County can retain the \$30,000 initial money we received in an upfront payment to cover initial costs," he added.

As part of the termination of the agreement, the commissioners also passed a resolution to the Howard County Plan Commission asking them to amend the county's wind ordinance to reflect more restrictive standards, while requiring any future wind energy facilities to have a special use permit in the county.

The resolution also states the county will "incorporate more modern and restrictive standards for the design, installation and operation of wind energy facilities to provide a safe environment for all citizens of Howard County."

"As with any project of this magnitude and the time it took to bring it to fruition, things have a way of changing," Wyman said. "In 2008-09 our community needed a shot in the arm, and though today we find ourselves in a much different economic environment, we always have a responsibility to consider all viable economic development projects presented to us for the

future of Howard County.

Wyman credited E.ON for its cooperation throughout the past six years in reaching an agreement that will best suit the needs of the people of Howard County.

“E.ON gave us concessions last summer when they did not have to, and they worked with us over the last several months by keeping the lines of communication open engaging in dialogue that at times was uncomfortable for both sides, but ultimately always professional,” Wyman said.

E.ON Project Manager Andy Melka said the decision to part ways amicably came down to market conditions. E.ON also has suspended development in neighboring Grant County.

The commissioners have always been very professional to work with,” Melka said. “We’ve had some tough dialogue at some points, but we’ve always been honest with each other.

“It really came down to market conditions,” he added. “The market just wasn’t right for us right now in this area. There was a little bit too much risk that we weren’t willing to move forward with, so we approached the commissioners to ask how we could work this out.”

Commissioner Tyler Moore said the decision to part ways was the result of a culmination of receiving input from concerned residents over the past few years.

“We have obviously received concern from day one,” he said. “We continued to convey that concern to E.ON. To their credit, they listened to us as we listened to the constituents. Market conditions played a factor in this as well. I think that constant dialogue and professionalism on both sides is what led to [ending] the agreement.”

Howard County resident Grace Aprill, who was commended by many in the audience for her efforts in urging commissioners to do what they could to shut down the wind farm development, said the commissioners and residents can now heal after years of discussion that wasn’t always pleasant. “I think it’s important that we start to mend bad feelings,” she said. “We don’t feel ill about the people that wanted to bring [wind turbines] here. It was never about that. They have absolutely every right to use their land as they see fit.

“We felt 20 percent of the people weren’t being protected with the setbacks,” she added. “In 2008 and 2009 the information was different, but it has changed now. Let’s just start to heal.”

With the county’s moratorium on future wind farm development still in place, it will bring the resolution to amend its zoning ordinance with respect to wind facilities before the Howard County Plan Commission on Tuesday.