

Last modified: Thursday, December 8, 2011 12:42 AM MST

\$750 million wind farm proposed for area

By Josh Mitchell
jmittell@wyomingnews.com

CHEYENNE - The city of Cheyenne stands to make more than \$100 million and possibly draw a wind blade manufacturing facility here under a proposal presented Wednesday.

The Morley Company of Jackson Hole is proposing building a 300-megawatt, \$750 million wind farm composed of 120 towers on the west end of the city-owned Belvoir Ranch, which is six miles west of the city.

The proposal was presented to the Cheyenne City Council during a work session.

The project would only consume a small portion of the 17,000 acres that the city owns at the Belvoir Ranch.

Morley Company CEO Bruce Morley said the city of Cheyenne only stands to gain from the plan. Cheyenne won't be required to invest any money in the project, he said.

The city could make between \$72 million and \$130 million by leasing the land to the company over 30 years, Morley said.

The company wants to begin working out a lease with the City Council this winter, but it could be several years before the wind farm is actually developed at the Belvoir Ranch.

Morley noted there are factors that are out of his control that could slow down the timing of the project.

One of those is the national political scene and whether Congress will renew the federal tax credit for wind farms when it expires in a year.

"That's in limbo," Morley said.

He added that he couldn't guarantee that construction of the wind farm would start in three years.

The development of transmission lines in Wyoming to transmit the wind energy to market also could contribute to the timing.

"We need to be able to move the energy from where it is produced to where it is consumed," Morley said.

He noted that there are six transmission line projects being developed in Wyoming now. The Wyoming Infrastructure Authority is doing a great job of developing the transmission lines in the state, he added.

Wyoming stands to make money by selling its wind energy to California, which is under governmental mandates to use increasing amounts of renewable energy.

Other than the revenue that the city would make from leasing the land, the project also would generate about \$36 million in property taxes over the 30-year life of the lease.

A new wind farm in the area also would increase the likelihood of drawing a manufacturing center here to build parts for the industry, Morley said.

In fact, Morley said three international companies are interested in locating a wind turbine manufacturing center here.

Morley said the Swan Ranch industrial park south of Cheyenne would be a good location for such an operation, since there would be railroad access for shipping.

A wind turbine manufacturer would be an estimated \$500 million investment in the county and bring about 250 jobs, he said.

Prior to developing a wind farm at the Belvoir Ranch, there would have to be studies to ensure that wildlife and artifacts would not be harmed. This could take more than a year.

Morley said his company wants to take the risk to put a wind farm here, adding that he has strong financial backing from a Dutch bank.

Mayor Rick Kaysen, who has been working with the Morley Company for months on the project, said the opportunities presented sound too good to be true.

City Councilman Jack Spiker praised the mayor for working with the company. The extra revenue from the wind farm lease would make Cheyenne a better place to live, Spiker added.

But Spiker asked how the city would be assured that the wind towers would be removed at the completion of the project in 30 years.

Morley said removing the towers would be a provision of the lease. Another option would be replacing the units after 30 years with newer models.

Despite the benefits of wind energy development, Laramie County resident Paul Edner - the only member of the public who attended the work session - said wind towers diminish the skyline.