

Let 'er blow: Council drafts rules for in-town turbines

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It's no well-kept secret that the Equality State is one of the windiest in the Union.

With this blustery climate feature in mind, more Wyomingites are looking to the wind as economical means to power their homes.

As such, Jackalope City residents shouldn't be surprised in the coming months and years at the sight of residential-use wind turbines within city limits.

With a final April 11 nod of approval from the Douglas City Council, an ordinance went into effect that's been in the works for some months, regulating the presence of the wind-hungry spinners in town.

"A number of people were interested in doing personal, small wind systems and we didn't really have regulations or guidance on that," said Planning and Community Development Director Forrest Neuerburg. "And certainly it's an up and coming thing for folks and provides them with good benefits."

Borrowing in large part from a similar ordinance that Casper passed to regulate in-town wind turbine activity, the Douglas ordinance outlays stipulations for would-be turbine owners.

To date, there are no wind turbines in city limits, but four to five residents expressed significant interest in the green-friendly power generators within the past year, Neuerburg said.

The city breaks wind systems into two categories: Micro Wind Systems (MWS), producing 10 kW or less, and Small Wind Energy Conversion Systems (SWES), producing 25 kW or less per tower.

The ordinance establishes a minimum lot size for installation, with a minimum of 6,000 sq. feet (.13 acres) needed for an MWS and a minimum of 20,000 sq. feet (.45 acres) for an SWES.

Seventy feet is established as the maximum tower height for turbines on lots between 20,000 sq. feet and one acre.

For lots 1.01 acres to five acres in size, 100 feet is the established tower maximum. For lots more than five acres, no maximum tower height is dictated by city code.

Wind turbines have a universal minimum height requirement, and cannot spin their blades lower than 20 feet from the ground.

The ordinance also outlays allowable colors for turbines, limiting them to neutral, subdued tones and disallowing "bright or vivid colors."

Additionally, the turbines are not to exceed 60 decibels (the volume of typical conversation) as heard from the closest property line.

The option of in-city wind turbines gives residents a tangible way to cut power costs, Neuerburg said.

"The average house operates, electricity-wise, on 10,000 kilowatt hours per year. Five to 15 kilowatts would make a significant contribution to that amount of demand," he said of employing a wind-turbine.

A number of other regulations apply for would-be wind turbine owners, and Neuerburg advised that those who are interested in installing one should contact the city for more information and consult chapter 18.63 of the city code.