

New wind regs are in the works

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Natrona County's development department hopes to have better rewritten regulations about commercial wind farms presented to the county commission in three months, the department's director said Tuesday.

"We've got them scheduled about when wind regulations get to you," Blair Leist told commissioners at a work session. Commissioners do not make formal decisions during work sessions.

The commission, in anticipation of permit requests by companies to construct wind farms consisting of 240-foot-tall towers, passed emergency regulations on Sept. 23.

Until then, Natrona County had no means to protect the health and safety of those living nearby "wind energy conversion systems" (WECS), Leist said, so it borrowed ideas from Platte County and adopted the emergency regulations.

The emergency regulations start in general terms about placement of towers near transmission lines and municipalities, then deal with more specific issues such as a quarter-mile buffer between towers and houses.

Around that time, the county and the town of Evansville were in the process of creating a "Use Control Area" zoning district and the Houston-based Chevron Global Power was requesting permits to build its 11-turbine project on the property of the former Texaco refinery.

One paragraph in the emergency regulations adopted in September states wind turbines and their towers must be set back at least a quarter-mile away from any primary structure such as a residence, while another says the buffers must be a half-mile if the primary building is in certain zoning districts.

Stan Mundy, who lives on East Lake Drive, brought the apparent contradiction to the attention of Leist and interim County Attorney Heather Duncan-Malone.

Last week, Leist acknowledged the contradictions and said his department would rewrite the language about the buffers and other regulations.

Tuesday, Leist said he expects the rewritten regulations -- with the legal advice of Duncan-Malone -- to be presented to the county's Planning and Zoning Commission on April 14, and then to the Natrona County Commission for final approval on May 19.

The revision of the regulations may not end the concerns about the wind farms, though.

After Leist made his presentation, Duncan-Malone asked the commissioners to go into executive session about potential litigation.

She declined to comment on what the litigation might be or how it might affect the Chevron Global project.

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