

Wind energy firm seeks lease of Augusta County regional landfill

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Shenandoah Valley's powerful winds can be a nuisance at picnic grounds and farmers' markets, but it might soon become an asset for the region too.

Apex LLC, a Charlottesville-based wind energy company, is asking for approval to place 20 to 30 wind turbines on and around the Augusta County Regional Landfill. It would be a lease option.

"We're quite interested in supporting the wind industry here in the state," said Tyson Utt, director of development for the Mid-Atlantic Region. He said this would be the first commercial wind farm in the state. "This site actually has a few key attributes for a wind project."

[The site has good access roads, good transmission lines, compatible existing land usage and a surprisingly consistent amount of wind, he said.](#)

"We're looking for unique areas where the wind might be stronger than people think," Utt said. "The technology has advanced quite a bit in the last few years so projects don't necessarily need to be located in places like North Dakota or somewhere people typically think of wind projects as being."

"We're still way in the preliminary part of the process," said Dennis Burnett, county director of economic development. "But if it will work, then it would be great."

Waynesboro and Staunton City Councils and the Augusta County Board of Supervisors, the co-owners of the landfill, would need to approve the five-year lease option before the company can begin work on a feasibility study. Augusta County Board of Supervisors approved the lease motion 7-0 Wednesday night. Augusta would also have to separately approve a land-use overlay, a zoning change that allows for private use on public land.

The study would take at least a year to conduct, said Utt, and the company has already placed a sonic detection and ranging system south of the landfill to begin studying the wind profile of the lower atmosphere in the area.

If the site is deemed viable for a wind farm, an environmental assessment and permitting would take at least another year, Utt said. The entire project would take three to five years to complete.

"We'd like to be able to start construction in 2014," Utt said. "Virginia is the second largest importer of electricity, behind California. We want to be able to help the state be able to produce its own renewable energy sources."

The electricity produced would be sold to a utility company, and the landfill would receive royalty payments from Apex, as would any other landowner allowing wind turbines. Apex is not seeking any public money for the project, Utt said.

The project would not only benefit the landfill and local taxpayers, but could be an economic boost for the area.

"You have the roads to build, the foundations to lay," Utt said. "It would have a lot of economic impact in the area. Certainly a lot of activity in construction."

Waynesboro and Staunton City Councils are expected to vote on the matter in the next couple weeks.