

Amended Flight Path Will Clear Way For Wind Turbine

By CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN

The Federal Aviation Administration is amenable to altering a flight path onto Otis Air National Guard Base that would allow two wind turbines to be erected in Falmouth.

The turbines, one public and another private, had initially been approved by the FAA last year, but after a secondary review were deemed to pose a risk to flights landing on Runway 5 at the base. On Christmas Eve, the FAA notified the two applicants in an e-mail that their projects were deemed a hazard to air navigation.

One of the turbines is being commissioned by the town and would be erected at the Wastewater Treatment Facility on Blacksmith Shop Road in West Falmouth. The other would be built at the Falmouth Technology Park by Notus Clean Energy LLC and would power Teledyne Webb Research.

Since December, Assistant Town Manager Heather B. Harper and Daniel H. Webb, owner of Notus Clean Energy, have been working with officials from the FAA as well as Captain Dan Abel, the commander of the United States Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod, on finding a solution to the issue.

They met in January in Boston and had another meeting at Otis last Monday to follow up on a solution, proposed by Captain Abel, that would alter the flight approach to the runway. Also attending Monday's meeting was Mark Forest, chief of staff to US Congressman William D. Delahunt, whose office has assisted the town and Mr. Webb in their efforts.

Captain Abel said the runway in question is used roughly 23 percent of the time by pilots and the problem with the wind turbine arises during instrument approaches. He said these approaches often occur during many search and rescue operations when conditions may be bad enough that pilots have to rely solely on an aircraft's instruments to land.

He said the specific instrument approach onto Runway 5 that is in conflict with the turbines predates the Coast Guard and was originally de-

signed by the US Air Force.

"We saw a solution to maintain the instrument approach," he said. "The compromise is to add an extra step down, so we would keep the plane up a little higher for a little bit longer and then start the descent" after clearing the turbines.

He admitted that adding another element to an instrument approach can sometimes be unnerving because it typically involves flying in bad weather. "All these things can add up," he said. "When you add a descent here or there, it adds more workload, which can be stressful in the cockpit."

Yet, he said, the proposed solution would be doable for pilots. The FAA will be the ultimate judge of that, he said, as they will test the new approach and determine whether it works.

Ms. Harper said if the FAA decides this is a proper solution, the town will ask it to expedite the process so the new flight approach can be included in the proper flight manuals.

Because the decision involves various branches of the FAA, from Dallas to Washington, DC, to Boston to Oklahoma, Ms. Harper said, it is important for the town to remain vigilant in regard to the issue. Toward this end, she said, a subsequent meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 17, at Otis.

Captain Abel agreed that it is vital to ensure there is good communication among all parties and expressed understanding about the plight of both the town and Mr. Webb. "I feel bad they had invested this money and effort and already received approval from the FAA," he said.

Despite the setback, Ms. Harper said, the town is moving ahead with its plans to erect its turbine at the treatment plant and its goal of commissioning it by May 2009. Meanwhile, Mr. Webb said, his project is currently in a holding pattern. He had planned on putting his project out to bid last month, but that had to be delayed.

"We need to get this permit reinstated before we can move ahead with the project," he admitted, adding that "I am optimistic this is going to get resolved."