

Ringgold County Board of Supervisors Minutes

July 17, 2023

The Ringgold County Board of Supervisors met in special session Monday, July 17, 2023. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M with the following members present: Colby Holmes, Randy Taylor and Steve Knapp.

A motion was made by Taylor, second by Knapp to approve the agenda.
AYES: Unanimous NAYS: None

At 6:30 p.m. Chairman Holmes asked for a motion to open the public hearing on proposed ordinance regulating the construction, operation, and deconstruction of wind turbines and/or related facilities for wind energy conversion systems (WECS) and an ordinance regulating the construction, operation, and deconstruction of utility scale energy systems (US-SES) on property located in the unincorporated areas of Ringgold County. Taylor moved to open the public hearing. Second by Knapp. Motion carried.

Holmes discussed the process and reasoning behind preparing the proposed ordinances. The Board, separately, visited with other Supervisors in surrounding counties to get their suggestions, what worked or didn't work for them, when drafting their ordinances. The Board coordinated with Ringgold County Attorney Clint Spurrier in preparing both drafts.

After considerable discussion, the Board chose a setback of one-half mile from the property line.

There is potential for a waiver to be completed should a neighbor agree to the construction of a wind turbine that is less than the proposed setback distance, pending compliance with the parameters of the ordinance.

Kelly Main stated he does not agree with the half-mile limitation as that makes it near impossible for wind turbines to be constructed in the county.

Jim Goins asked the Board what feedback they have received from the community. Holmes stated that roughly 98% or 99% of the comments he has received so far, do not support wind turbines in the county.

Mike Kemery asked whether the Board has researched the amount of revenue the towers would bring to the county budget. The Board stated they have investigated those figures. Taylor County for example is projected to bring in roughly \$3 million pending completion of all wind farms, Holmes said. Kemery went on to state he does not understand the difference between allowing a hog barn on a property and placing such strict restrictions on wind turbines.

Tim Creveling stated if a young farmer needs the revenue from a wind turbine to keep their operation going, it is their land, and they should be able to construct what they choose.

Matt Routh stated it is his understanding that even if a projected farm is scheduled to come to the county, there is still a lot of leg work to be done prior to final approval of construction. Holmes stated yes, that is correct per the proposed ordinance, there are additional steps that are needed to begin construction.

Sheridan Martin, a Land Representative with Vestas, confirmed they are looking at construction in Ringgold County currently.

Jim Goins stated Farm Bureau reached out to their membership to get an idea of support and he stated the response was overwhelmingly against wind turbines. Goins went on to state, in fact, those who responded requested the setbacks be at least 2 miles.

Holmes explained there are two sides to the construction of wind turbines. It is a tough decision as a county supervisor, Holmes said, for budgetary purposes given the current financial state of the county. The offices are operating at a lower staff ratio than surrounding counties and with recent budget constraints set by legislature, he can see the value in wind turbines from that perspective.

Tim Creveling stated he would like to see setbacks of 400' from a residence and 750' from the road.

It was asked if the Board could include restrictions to non-resident landowners. They replied that no, they cannot impose those as it would be considered discrimination.

Melinda England explained there is a cost with regards to road maintenance/changes and stated that very well may exceed any potential revenue to the county.

Ann Werner questioned whether the county bridges can sustain the weight of the equipment to construct the wind turbines. Holmes explained, no, most of the bridges will not. Knapp stated that many of the bridges in the county will not sustain the weight.

Sheridan Martin explained his company works with the county engineer to determine locations and bridges that will be crossed. The company then pays to ensure the bridge will be of legal weight for them to cross. The same goes should the turbine be decommissioned, he said.

The Board talked about the process of bonding to cover costs of decommissioning. It was also stated should the company fail to pay the taxes; the responsibility falls to the landowner.

It was asked if Vestas knows the statistics of turbine maintenance. Turbines are serviced twice a year, Martin explained.

Holmes explained the liability insurance requirement of the owner or operator of the wind turbine. The Board went on to state there is a decommissioning plan should the day come a turbine is no longer in use. This is in place to protect the landowner, Holmes said.

Holmes stated we have a lot of absentee landowners in the county who would look at wind turbines as an investment and may not consider the thoughts of their neighbors. The Supervisors want a plan in place that protects both parties.

It was asked if the wind energy produced by wind turbines would benefit the energy companies in our community. The Board explained the energy goes into the grid. Roughly 39% of the energy produced comes from wind turbines.

Ann Werner questioned what would happen if the government funding ceased or was reduced. Holmes said he talked to CIPCO and they stated there would be a significant change in operations due to a significant loss in funding.

Sheridan Martin stated the turbines are built to sustain a tropical 3 hurricane. He went on to say they are safe in tornadoes; built durable, Martin said.

Holmes began conversation on the proposed solar ordinance. He said Union County is currently working on a solar farm. The solar ordinance is pretty basic, Holmes said. There were no other comments on this proposed ordinance.

Delwyn Showalter said he is torn, while he does not like wind turbines and has no desire to have one on his property, he does not feel like he can say what his neighbor can have on his land.

Dustin Brown stated he moved back home from Texas where there are a lot of wind turbines. The value of his ranch doubled because it was ten miles away from a wind turbine, he said.

Ann Werner stated we have a beautiful county and she does not want to deface it. Look at the future and do not rush the process, Werner stated. Maintain the recommended setbacks and see what happens.

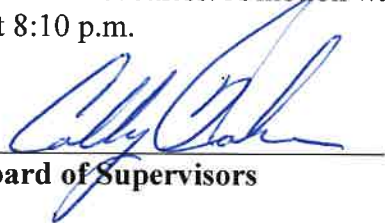
Tim Creveling questioned whether Sun Valley should be included with specific setback restrictions. The Board said they would be considered the unincorporated area and would then follow those guidelines.

A motion was made by Knapp and seconded by Taylor to close the public hearing at 7:59 p.m. Motion carried.

The Board tabled approval of the minutes.

There was no further business. A motion was made by Knapp and seconded by Taylor to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

ATTEST:


Board of Supervisors


Ringgold County Auditor