

Wind Energy

Business Challenge/Environment

Our client, a wind farm developer, proposed to build a 100-megawatt project with nearly 70 wind turbines in a rural heartland community. The site was zoned for agricultural use, and county officials were very reluctant to rezone agricultural land, and also concerned about potential construction damage to local roads. Opponents said the towers would decrease property values, create harmful noise levels and ruin the landscape. The only vocal supporters of the project were participating landowners.

Outcome

We created positive media reporting within two weeks of engagement through positive letters in newspapers and demonstrations of support at public meetings. This visible community support encouraged local decision makers to approve the project, and also discouraged the small but vocal group of opponents who had previously dominated the process. The project was approved by a 9-0 vote, with two members abstaining.

Our Approach

- Initial efforts focused on identifying supportive residents and assessing opponents' motivations, arguments and criticisms of the project.
- We developed messages to counter misinformation from the opposition, and distributed them in company outreach materials, earned media and public testimony to decision-makers.
- Our outreach team coordinated community events, including a tour of an operating wind farm in the vicinity, a picnic for supporters and kite-flying lessons for local children. We used these activities as organizing tools where participants were provided various opportunities to demonstrate support for the project.
- Coalition building began with local institutions, key stakeholders and power brokers, and then expanded to include community residents.
- We formed a third-party advocacy group to demonstrate grassroots community support, and mobilized members to attend and provide testimony at public hearings, to contact local media and to make presentations before other community organizations.
- We mobilized citizens through turnout efforts targeting identified supporters for public hearings and scripted speakers' comments.

CASE STUDY