



## **Eyes on County Council – June 3, 2025**

### **HIGHLIGHT EVENT:**

**Council unanimously passed a resolution to support local authority for land use decisions as the State attempts to pass legislation giving them power to override certain County decisions. This has become a contentious debate between state and county officials. The US Wind energy project is at the center of this disagreement. Opponents of the proposal say it's an example of government overreach, while Democrats and environmental groups supporting the bill say it's necessary to address Delaware's energy needs. Who decides if this energy project is a net benefit for state / county constituents? See below for more details and also for related articles.**

### **Public Comment:**

**Johannes Sayre** commented on the Resolution in Support of Local Governance and the State's proposed bill to provide ability to override County Council rulings on land use – including the offshore wind energy project that was voted down by Council last year.

- “Not in My Backyard” individuals who oppose wind power have influenced the Council and used false claims about wind power and its adverse impact on the area.
- Opponents' real concerns have to do with the claim that “windmills” will ruin the view and/or decrease property values. But a 1,000-ft windmill 10 miles from shore can be obscured by the tip of a finger – so, not very visible at all.
- Choices need to be informed by the facts.

### **Resolution in Support of Local Governance – introduced by Todd Lawson, County Administrator – see related articles below**

- This resolution would emphasize the county's authority for land use decisions and be sent to the State.
- The State legislature has proposed Senate Bill 159 which would allow the state to override a counties decision for certain land use items – targeted to the US Wind project.
- The US Wind project, which had been rejected by County Council last year,

could be approved if SB 159 is passed.

- Both Kent and New Castle Counties have passed similar resolutions.
- The Council unanimously adopted this resolution. See some comments below:
  - **Mr. Rieley** noted that SB 159 could replace Sussex County's bill for homeless rights with the state's version.
  - **Mr. McCarron** expressed strong concern about the state overstepping its authority and if the US Wind project would benefit Delaware. He said that wind power is intermittent and that green energy is eating up Sussex County land.
  - **Ms. Gruenebaum** disagreed with Mr. McCarron regarding green energy and stated that she is troubled with the ongoing verbiage about "their rights, our rights" – the state and county need to work together cooperatively.

### **Presentations:**

- **Fisheries & Aquatic Innovation Center and Delaware Environmental Coalition Organization - DECO**, made a presentation of their progress and future plans for oyster aquaculture. This is a relatively new non-profit entity working with the University of Delaware to identify ways to help improve water quality and land use to benefit all of Delaware. Bottom line is the funding they have from federal and state is limited and were hopeful the County could find ways to support their efforts.
  - Aquaculture is a good way to improve water quality in the Inland Bays while improving the Sussex County economy.
  - Oyster aquaculture is the most lucrative kind of aquaculture, but shellfish aquaculture is growing.
  - **Dr. Ed Hale** shared the University of Delaware Aquaculture's Phase I and future phase's 2-4 mission to provide oysters for commercial farmers and restoration projects. For the future, they plan to increase oyster production and diversify crops. Phase II would increase the production of oysters by the expansion of the hatchery.
  - He compared Rhode Island oyster production with Delaware showing that Delaware has an opportunity to dramatically increase its oyster production.
  - The Aquaculture Innovation Center is another organization that supports the development and dissemination of aquaculture technologies, providing training and support for aquaculture businesses.

- **Kevin Roche ( FACETS Consulting ) shared his report - Delaware Fire Service Financial Review & Analysis** – regarding the financial condition of the 23 Fire Stations in Sussex County. (See related article below)
  - Revenues, expenditures, financial policies and services provided were reviewed/analyzed – generally in good condition
  - Primary revenue sources are the state and county, and EMS revenue.
  - Average call volume over the past several years is 51,000 calls/year
  - One problem is that volunteerism in general is down; another is aging leadership
  - Fire companies are in better shape than EMS services
  - FACETS recommends that the fire service work together to create a strategic plan in which they share certain administrative services such as centralized purchasing, professional services, and grant writing. There should be planning for things such as elective withdrawal from EMS such as Lewes is considering.

#### **Other Items:**

- **Dr. Lauren Hitchens Rowan** was approved by the Council to serve on the Board of Adjustments. **Jane Gruenebaum** was very supportive of her nomination.
- **Bill Pfaff, Economic Development Director** recommended the Business Park Lease, which was approved.
- **Mark Parker, Assistant County Engineer** discussed the need to remove some obstructions at the end of a runway at the airport. He recommended to the Council that they award the bid to Strobert Tree Company for \$700,000. This was approved by the Council.
- **Bob Bryant, Airport Manager**, made a presentation for the approval to accept an FAA grant award of \$2,686,767 for a new parallel Taxiway B Phase III, Authority of Signature to sign the FAA grant and a construction bid award for \$2,447,777 for the same project. The Council approved all three items.

- **Grant Requests** - the Council approved grants at various levels to Children's Beach House, Make a Wish Foundation of Philadelphia, Delaware, and Susquehanna Valley, and Big Brothers and Sisters of Delaware Inc.

After this the Council had no proposed zoning ordinances, comments, and went into Executive Session

**Council Meeting Schedule:**

- June 10, 17 and 24

**Land Use Reform Working Group Meeting Schedule:**

- June 12th 10-2
- July 10th 10-2

**Council Meeting Broadcast**

[County Council Meeting - June 03, 2025 \(AM Session\)](#)

**Related Articles:**

[State override of Sussex wind plan advances | Cape Gazette](#)

[Sussex County Council opposes state laws limiting its authority | Cape Gazette](#)

[Offshore wind bill heads to Delaware Senate floor after contentious hearing](#)

[Fire service fee recommended in Sussex County | Cape Gazette](#)

[Delaware's Open Space Program looks for more funding as land prices and sea level rise increase | Delaware First Media](#)

[Affordable apartments moving along in Angola | Cape Gazette](#)