



# **EXPLORING WIND VERMILLION**

**A NOVEL EXPERIMENT IN  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
AND WIND ENERGY SITING**



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# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## THE CHALLENGE

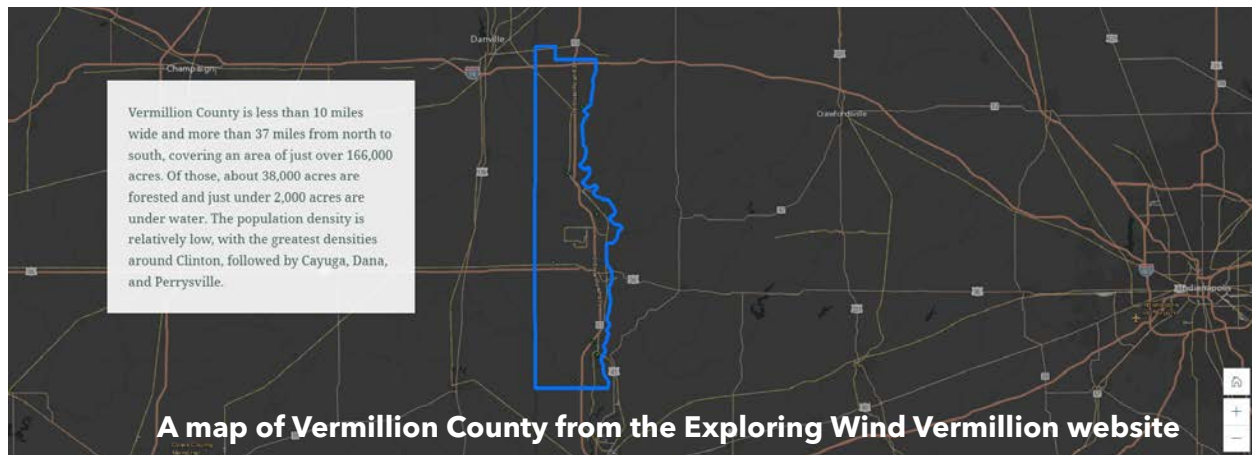
Consumer interest in clean energy assumes the development of new wind-powered generation capacity. Alongside solar power, wind power is viewed as a cornerstone in the United States' chances of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by midcentury, but efforts to site and build wind turbines are encountering challenges that have become as predictable as they are daunting.

During the past dozen years, organized local opposition to renewable energy projects—including, and perhaps especially, wind projects—has been increasing, according to accounts from various developers, researchers, advocates, journalists, and subject matter experts. The resulting debates and disputes can slow and disrupt local permitting processes, sow dissension between neighbors and neighborhoods, and lead to project rejection. Efforts by developers to respond to or anticipate opposition by mobilizing support and engaging in proactive messaging frequently deepen divisions that can harm the social fabric of local communities. Standard public processes for making local land use decisions—processes that include ordinance crafting and permit approvals—are not always the best vehicles for encouraging informed, deliberative dialogue on contentious issues. As a result, area decision makers often find themselves and their constituents stuck in processes that create great disagreement

and disunity, and which typically advantage the most passionate and fearful voices in the room. Seeking to return a measure of civility to their communities quickly, decision makers frequently choose to prohibit projects that have fomented discord, and in other cases, try to delay their decisions in what are often quixotic attempts at finding solutions to appease most. Projects may be delayed, rejected, or prohibited due to this contention. Thus, many communities do not have a chance to consider their options more fully by weighing facts and claims side by side, identifying shared values and goals, and working their way toward common ground in the interest of their community.

Development efforts can reach an end due to legal rulings, fatigue from acrimonious public meetings, or locally established ordinances and moratoria that render it functionally or technically impossible to site a project. Projects that do get sited can leave behind a wake of anger, disappointment, and tattered community relationships among residents.

Thanks to the connectivity afforded by the internet and social media, opponents of renewable energy, driven by poor experiences in their own communities or more ideological agendas, typically join forces and work across county, state, and national borders, sharing resources, strategies, and tactics. It is common for the voices of opponents based in another county, state, or region to be heard in local public meetings. Those outside voices can swiftly get involved in shaping and bol-



stering opposition before the developer in question solidifies its own local presence or is certain of its objectives. Local residents can connect to a larger network of anti-renewable energy activists around the region—and even the world—instantly. Renewable energy supporters cite disinformation about the impacts of wind power as a common roadblock to development, but some local residents may simply be using that disinformation to rationalize concerns about property values, turbine noise, or threats to wildlife.

Attempts to find suitable and willing host communities are now typically met with sharply competing narratives. From opponents' perspective, renewable energy developers are said to divide and overwhelm communities unless local groups organize rapidly to fight them off. In this sense, wind development conflict is no different from any other form of development: it's "outsiders versus insiders," "us against them." From developers' perspective, national trends of group polarization and local resistance to change are said to impede communities' ability to reason their way to evidence-based decisions about economic development opportunities.

Research suggests that people are more likely to have positive attitudes toward a local land use decision, including wind energy development, if they view the planning process as fair, transparent, and trustworthy, and if they had an opportunity to participate meaningfully enough to have influence over—not just input into—the planning process.<sup>1</sup> Developers, advocates, and local authorities, then, may need to find effective ways to shift

from merely informing and consulting with residents to involving and collaborating with them—perhaps even sharing decision-making power in some way.

## THE VISION

In early 2020, [Apex Clean Energy](#), a Charlottesville, Virginia-based clean energy company, undertook a rare—and perhaps unique—experiment in collaborative decision-making, seeking a suitable community with which to engage to determine whether and how to site and build a wind energy project in that community.

After rigorous study, reflection, and discussions with a range of independent experts in consensus building, Apex envisioned a wholly new approach to project development that would offer the local community unprecedented input into siting and design decisions. Should the community ultimately elect to accept a co-designed project, it would receive a share of the profits. Should the community decline, the company would withdraw rather than resort to the conventional methods of assertive communication and legal strategies. In late 2020, delayed by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, Apex selected a community in which to attempt this approach: Vermillion County, Indiana.

The collaboration, as originally envisioned, would begin with the identification of a representative subset of community members—elected officials, civic leaders, educators, business owners, clergy, etc.—who would be willing to both educate Apex officials about



local values, history, and interests and learn from wind energy experts about technical considerations in project siting and construction, as well as potential risks and benefits. The experiment sought to create a space for mutual learning, rooted in an intent for decisions to be reached deliberatively and collaboratively, both within the community and between developer and community. It also hoped to find a way to ground these decisions in evidence and experience, rather than unsubstantiated rumors, fears, and claims. Finally, the experiment aspired to demonstrate that the offer of transparency and shared control would generate enough trust to make a true partnership, however novel and tentative, possible.

## ENLISTING ASSISTANCE FROM A NONPARTISAN PARTY

To earn trust and enhance its own approach to effective collaboration, Apex hired an independent facilitation team to refine and implement its envisioned approach to collaborative decision making, engage directly with community leaders and residents, and help different parties learn from one another, as well as from outside experts. The three-person facilitation team consisted of experienced practitioners (in facilitation, mediation, consensus-building, community engagement, and coalition-building) drawn from two organizations—Keystone Policy Center<sup>2</sup> and the Consensus Building Institute<sup>3</sup>—without any vested view if or how wind should be developed in Vermillion County.

The facilitators, impartial as to the outcome of the collaborative process, hoped to help residents of Vermillion County and Apex learn from one another and from outside sources of information. The team was tasked with helping participants from both the community and the company explore ideas and options, identify key concerns and issues, and seek to arrive at a decision that would be fair,

transparent, evidence-based, and reflective of the community's interests and values.

The facilitators' written introduction to the community included this statement:

"The facilitators were identified by and are funded by Apex. However, the facilitation team is not a typical contractor. They are not an agent of Apex but have been contracted to facilitate the engagement process. They work under a statement of independence and do not have a stake in the outcome. The facilitators are accountable to the County and participants as well as to Apex."

## BEGINNING WORK IN VERMILLION COUNTY, INDIANA

In late 2020, Apex began to introduce its concept for a collaborative siting process to the community of Vermillion County, Indiana, a long, narrow county sandwiched between the Illinois border and the Wabash River. Nearly 40 miles long and only about 10 miles across at the widest point, Vermillion County is relatively flat, mostly rural, and somewhat wooded, with much of the population clustered in the south of the county. The county's population numbers about 15,600 and is on the decline, down 4.4% since 2005. The median age is 43, compared to about 38 for the United States overall.

The local cultural and economic history of the county has been shaped by the coal industry and the former presence of a military munitions plant that produced MX nerve gas and heavy water in World War II. While actual mining and chemical manufacturing concluded decades ago, several community members still remember the days when the plant was active. The annual Little Italy Festival celebrates the surge of Italian immigration that helped populate the mines with workers.

Although the county seat, Newport, lies in the northern half of the county, one-third of

Vermillion’s population resides in and around the city of Clinton to the south. It is common for residents to refer to church participation as an important part of their experience of community, and hiking and hunting are often named as popular pastimes. Agriculture is an important dimension of economic and cultural life in Vermillion County, with institutions such as the Farm Bureau and state extension programs playing roles in how residents gather and learn. Major crops include corn and soybeans.

Vermillion hosts two relatively large health care facilities, with a range of small local clinics dotting the county. There are two school districts, one to the north and one to the south; roughly half of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

## The local economy

Key economic statistics as of early 2021 include a median household income of \$48,000, a 73% home ownership rate, a vacancy rate of 11%, a 12.2% poverty rate, and a 4.3% unemployment rate.

Large employers in the county include White Construction (now part of IEA), a locally founded civil engineering company that is also one of the leading builders of utility-scale wind and solar projects in the United States; an Elanco facility (a subsidiary of Eli Lilly, producing medicines and vaccinations for pets and livestock); an International Paper plant; and Duke Energy’s 1,104-megawatt [Cayuga Generating Station](#). The Duke facility, marked by a 575-foot smokestack, sits next to the Wabash River near the vertical middle of the county. The coal portion of the plant is currently slated to close in 2028, raising questions and concerns about how to replace the tax revenue in the future.

The land formerly occupied by the munitions factory is now called [Vermillion Rise](#), and its 7,000 acres have been zoned for industrial redevelopment. Over the years, the county has done a great deal to develop portions of the site with the hope of attracting new economic development opportunities to the area. But several proposed uses of the site have already been rejected by the community. A proposed confined animal feeding operation for hogs was rejected by the county commis-



The Elanco facility in Vermillion County

sioners prior to Apex’s arrival, and since then, the considerations of wind energy on the site have also been rejected. Former mining operations may provide additional options for development.

## The political landscape

Vermillion was a traditionally Democratic district that has experienced changing affiliations like much of more rural America. A majority of residents voted for Democratic candidates for president in nearly every election cycle since 1970, but then voted narrowly for Mitt Romney in 2012 and for Donald Trump in both 2016 and 2020. The face of county leadership also changed in 2020, as two long-serving Democratic county commissioners lost reelection bids to Republican candidates, resulting in an all-Republican county commission.

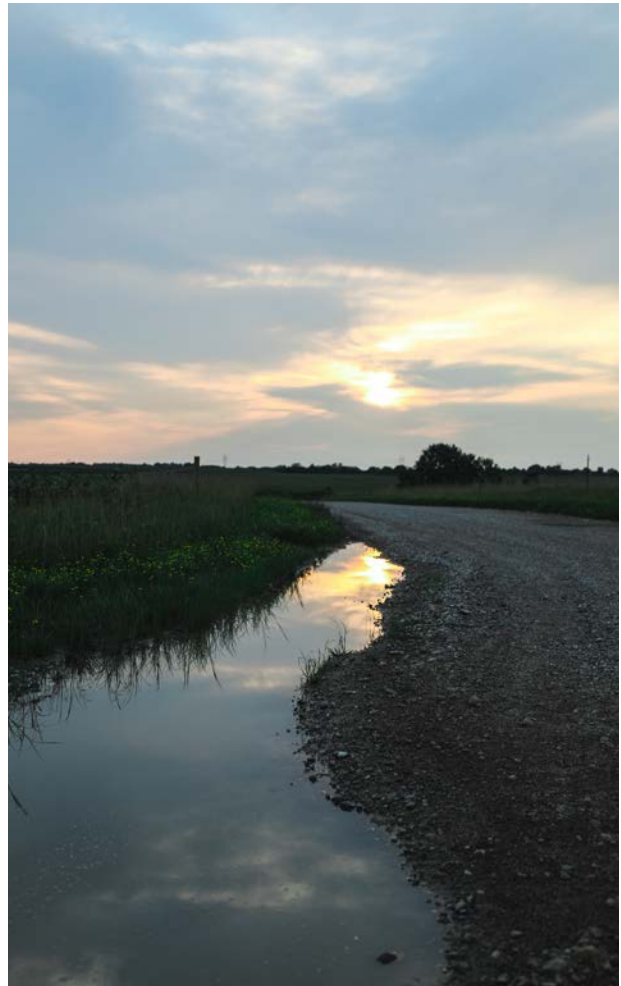
The fact that local political affiliation tends to be distributed geographically is widely acknowledged. It is not uncommon for residents to refer to a “Mason-Dixon line” running across the width of the county, although in this case, it is widely perceived that the north tilts conservative or Republican while the more populous southern part of the county tends more liberal and Democratic (and is just north of Terre Haute, home of Indiana State University).

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS REPORT

This report aims to provide an account of Apex’s collaborative experiment: what the company tried to do, key decisions affecting the process, how the community responded, and circumstances influencing the process and outcome. The authors also attempt to document some of the lessons they believe can be learned from this effort, and they offer some recommendations and considerations for future efforts in community engagement regarding wind energy development. Though it is difficult (and perhaps dangerous) to draw broad

and definitive conclusions from a single experiment, the authors encourage others who wish to attempt more community-driven siting to seek out strategies that ask communities to consider how to site a project, rather than whether to site a project; to commit to their engagement approach early; to obtain early endorsements of their novel process from key stakeholders; and to always identify a local influencer who is willing to help champion the proposed process. Additional insights and recommendations can be found at the end of the report. It is the hope of the authors that others will attempt variations on the Exploring Wind experiment and that the investments Apex has made in Vermillion County will help inspire more successful efforts elsewhere in the future.

The report is authored by the independent facilitation team and Apex team members.



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## DEVELOPER'S REFLECTION: WHY VERMILLION COUNTY WAS SELECTED FOR APEX'S NOVEL PROCESS

Apex Clean Energy has had difficulty developing wind energy projects in Indiana, where we had been working since at least 2012. In Wells County, Henry County, Rush County, Huntington County, and Montgomery County, our efforts to secure county permits for wind projects have been unsuccessful. In several cases, these projects never even had the opportunity to apply for permits, because county ordinances were crafted to prohibit the development of a project before we could do so.

This experience is not unique to Apex. To date, 36 counties in Indiana, many of them among the windiest in the state, have passed ordinances that block or outright ban wind energy development through moratoria. Based on this understanding and our own experience, we knew that any wind project we attempted to develop in Indiana would likely follow a similar trajectory. If we hoped to be successful, we would need an exceptionally good plan for connecting with landowners and assuring local officials that this project would be in the best interests of their community.

We also knew that, across the country, local ordinance and permit processes often put officials in a very difficult position. When a wind developer does its job poorly, decision makers and their meetings are often overwhelmed by very vocal, but generally relatively small, groups of individuals opposed to the project; when a wind developer does its job well, decision makers are overwhelmed by both those opposed and those in favor. In either instance, local officials often find themselves at best deluged with contradictory information and passionate disruption of their meetings, and at worst accosted by threats, intimidation, and harassment. Apex had seen this happen in numerous counties in Indiana and beyond, and we recognized the damage this contention can do to the social fabric of a community.

When we decided to launch "Exploring Wind Vermillion," the new community-led development process, we sought to change this persistent dynamic. We hoped to turn down the temperature of the issue and inspire more deliberative community discussions about the pros and cons of developing a wind farm in the county. If community members elected to site a project in the county, we would offer them, along with royalties in the project's ultimate output, the chance to help us site and design the project to ensure the final product would fit into their vision for the future. We believed the Vermillion County community might be interested in working with us on this effort for several reasons:

1. Though a local election has just taken place, and Apex didn't know the new commissioners well, we believed from early discussions with the commissioners that (although one was likely opposed to wind energy for the county and one was skeptical) they might

participate in a new kind of process to explore the idea. No commissioner had stated outright opposition to wind energy in the county.

2. We knew that several of Vermillion's neighboring counties, including Montgomery County and Fountain County to the east, had recently passed ordinances that were designed to preclude projects, but Vermillion County had not yet passed such an ordinance.
3. We knew that Vermillion County had an existing interest in energy due to the presence of a Duke Energy power plant, a history of coal mining, and the presence of ammonia production plants. The county is also home to a former military facility that was used to produce MX nerve gas and heavy water in World War II, which local economic development advocates have been trying to repurpose for new manufacturing or industry for years.
4. Vermillion County, Indiana, is immediately adjacent to Vermillion County, Illinois, where there are several active wind facilities that have demonstrated the economic development opportunities presented by wind energy development.
5. Vermillion County is the home of White Construction, a contracting firm that was acquired by IEA in 2011. White/IEA is one of a handful of American balance-of-plant contractors that specialize in wind farm construction, and several employees of the company, including its CEO, live in Vermillion County.
6. Early conversations with landowners in the area, the economic development office, and other local contacts suggested that the county might be more open to wind energy development than its neighbors.

Given the combination of these factors and our deep understanding of the difficulty that wind energy development in Indiana generally presents, we believed Vermillion County was an intriguing place to attempt a new, community-driven approach to wind energy development.





# THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

## SUMMARY

**M**otivated and informed by previous community engagement experiences as characterized above, Apex and the facilitators collaborated on a multimodal approach to community engagement over approximately one year. The approach involved independent research, outreach, and engagement from the facilitation team alongside work by Apex staff to develop relationships within the community. Community engagement opportunities took several forms so that residents could participate in the manner that worked best for them. Along the way, Apex and the facilitators solicited candid input on a range of topics and questions; adapted to community responses and capacity to engage; and adjusted to the county political climate, respecting community leaders' desire to convene town hall meetings and undertake an ordinance development process.

Initial facilitator engagement did indicate some willingness among community members to engage in a process to explore wind energy in Vermillion County, though the process never succeeded in securing high levels of participation from community members. In addition, over the course of the engagement period, residents and local leaders appeared to grow fatigued with the extensive engagement process being conducted in parallel by the Area Planning Commission (APC) regarding the county's wind ordinance. Ultimately,

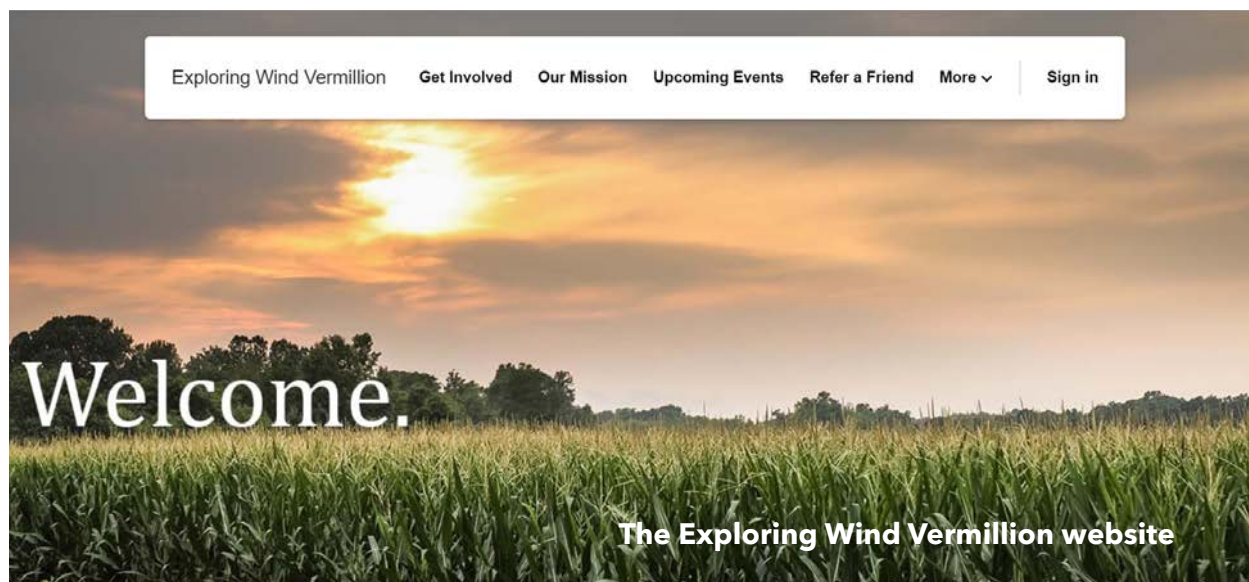
the County Commission instituted a wind ordinance that eliminated the potential to site turbines in the county, precluding any possibility of Apex's community exploration process to result in a viable wind project. After a brief effort to continue the process despite the new ordinance, the facilitators and Apex elected not to move forward with a more extensive community engagement process, due to an inability to generate meaningful and consistent participation from the public.

The phases of activity that made up this process are described in more detail on the following pages.

## PHASES OF ACTIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT

### Initial messaging to community

Apex formally launched Exploring Wind Vermillion in April 2021 with the launch of the [Exploring Wind Vermillion website](#). But before Apex had made the decision to try out such a novel approach, representatives from the company had already been engaging within the Vermillion County community in a more traditional manner for about a year. Having lost the opportunity to utilize an existing transmission interconnection in Montgomery County, Indiana, due to that county's passage of a prohibitive wind ordinance, Apex was evaluating opportunities to save this interconnection by developing another



wind energy project in Vermillion County, neighboring Fountain County, and Vermillion County, Illinois (just over the state line). In early 2020, in Vermillion County, Indiana, Apex representatives had begun more traditional conversations with local landowners and community leaders to explore the potential for wind and solar projects in the area. Though these conversations were exploratory in nature, they did follow a more traditional development script—defining a prospective area of interest in the county and then seeking to assess interest among the landowners in that area for leasing.

Around this same time, Apex was considering launching its new community-led process in Fountain County. In fact, as early as March 2020, Apex had begun work with the independent facilitation team to map out a plan for engagement in Fountain County. However, that month was when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the United States, and a decision was made to postpone the launch of the process, because it would necessarily require unusually high levels of in-person interaction and travel to the project area.

By late fall of 2020, when conditions surrounding the pandemic were beginning to stabilize, Apex reinitiated its plans to test its novel process. But by that time, Apex had learned that Fountain County already had a prohibitive wind ordinance in place, one that mimicked Montgomery County's ordinance,

and so Apex decided to consider introducing the collaborative approach in Vermillion County instead.

Meanwhile, several Indiana state legislators, seeing the trend of local rejections of wind energy projects across the state, were considering the idea of introducing new renewable energy siting legislation in the 2021 legislative session. Driving these legislators was concern expressed by the state's utilities and large corporate customers: that Indiana was not providing them access to renewable energy generated in state, which they would need to fulfill their own clean energy goals and commitments. Apex was one of the companies working with these legislators to provide input on the draft bill and attest to the role such a bill might play in opening the state up for clean energy business. Early in 2021, HB 1381 was introduced in the Indiana State House, crafted to set some limits on how significantly county governments would be allowed to restrict wind facility siting in their jurisdictions. The Association of Indiana Counties and some Vermillion County residents feared this bill would lead to the elimination of local control over wind development and opposed the bill. The timing of this legislative push created complications for the Exploring Wind process, as discussed in more detail on pages 17–18 ("Developer's Reflection"), although it is difficult to know just how significantly it affected the effort.



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## DEVELOPER'S REFLECTION: DECIDING HOW TO ENGAGE ON INDIANA HB 1381

As mentioned, Indiana has become a very challenging place to site wind energy projects. Despite having a fantastic wind resource, access to available transmission, and demand for clean energy from in-state utilities, 36 of the 92 county governments in the state have used their land use authority to prohibit the construction of wind energy projects. Over the past several years, this trend has become so severe that the Indiana General Assembly has begun to explore how to ensure that the state doesn't entirely lose out on the economic opportunities of future wind energy projects. Apex and several of our industry partners have been supportive of efforts to legislate on this issue. In 2021, in the middle of Apex's Exploring Wind Vermillion process, the Indiana legislature took up House Bill 1381, which sought to set limits on a county's ability to restrict wind energy siting. The original language specified that county ordinances could not include stricter provisions on sound, setbacks, height, or a few other common factors than those set forth in the state statute. It also stated that counties could not take action that would effectively ban wind energy.

Apex was supportive of this legislation. We knew it would open the state for clean energy investment and might allow companies like ours to make progress on wind energy projects for which hundreds of Hoosier landowners had signed leases. But we also knew that the Association of Indiana Counties would be against a bill like this, because it would be perceived as an infringement on county authority, and we suspected that the county officials in Vermillion might also be alarmed by our involvement in supporting the bill while we were working hard to earn their trust.

Our team had many conversations about how to navigate this challenging dual track. We knew that we intended to stand behind the commitment we had made when initiating Exploring Wind Vermillion to honor the outcomes of the Exploring Wind process, even if it became clear that it would not be possible to complete a project in the county. But county officials were already starting to question that commitment, thinking that if this new law went into effect and Vermillion was forced to pass a workable wind ordinance, Apex would simply abandon the promises we had made and build the project allowed by the new legislation.

This concern was compounded by a great deal of misunderstanding about the legislation within Vermillion County. We heard from several individuals, county commissioners among them, who believed that the bill might come into effect far sooner than was possible and that if the county passed its own wind ordinance *before* the bill became law, it would be exempt

from the new provisions. Even though neither was necessarily true, these misunderstandings created extra incentive for the county to rush forward their own wind ordinance—one that resembled the prohibitive ordinances that had been passed by neighboring counties.

In the end, the bill we had been advocating for in the legislature did pass, though it was a heavily watered-down version. After a great deal of discussion and negotiation with different parties, the version of HB 1381 that passed did not prohibit counties from banning wind, did not set caps on key siting provisions, and did not try to incentivize the passage of wind ordinances to allow wind development. The version of HB 1381 that passed simply provided a set of recommended, voluntary ordinance provisions for counties that wished to welcome wind energy development into their jurisdictions.

To our knowledge, this bill has done little to address the issues that inspired its drafting—namely, that the state’s utilities and large corporate customers could not get access to renewable energy generated in the state, which they would need to fulfill their own clean energy goals and commitments. Unfortunately, however, Apex’s advocacy for this bill did sow seeds of distrust in the Vermillion County community.



Through all the means described thus far, Apex had become a known entity in Indiana and Vermillion County, so when it made the decision to launch its Exploring Wind Vermillion process in January 2021, it wasn't starting with a blank slate. While Apex's early engagement efforts helped its team build relationships within the community, gauge the political dynamics of the county, and begin establishing the conditions in which a wind project could be possible if it were supported by the community, it also seeded mistrust among some residents.

The Exploring Wind Vermillion website was launched in April 2021, designed to provide a common space to share information about the proposed process for exploring the prospect of siting wind energy in Vermillion County; provide answers to questions frequently asked about wind energy; and aggregate all resources and opportunities for engagement with the community. The website's name, content, and tone were designed to be neutral, informative, and transparent, avoiding "pitches" for the project and its benefits, but instead making clear that the Vermillion County process was intended to be different than the typical development process undertaken by Apex and other developers around the country. As the home page states:

"We have a vision to work more collaboratively with this community than we have anywhere else in the country, to give local residents influence over whether a wind energy project should proceed here, and if so, how. Because of this, this website focuses more on what our process will look like, how to get involved, and who we are than on anything specific to wind energy or facility design plans."

The website shared background on Apex and the facilitators; the mission of Exploring Wind Vermillion and what to expect; information on how to get involved in the community engagement process (including links to surveys and a list of upcoming events); and answers to anticipated or posed community ques-

tions. It was used throughout the process as a landing page for all things related to the collaborative process, but it was not the only source of this information. Apex and the facilitators also experimented with in-person visits, mailers, and other tools for outreach to offer a variety of modes of engagement.

Even though the official launch of Exploring Wind Vermillion stressed Apex's sincere intention to reinstate the wind energy exploration process in the county, some residents expressed skepticism about Apex's willingness to proceed in a collaborative fashion, given the company's previous conversations with landowners regarding wind leases. Apex saw early discussions about leasing as exploratory rather than binding, but the fact that these conversations had taken place caused some residents to wonder if decisions about whether and where to site a wind project had already been made. Further fueling some of this distrust were local perceptions of the company's engagement in lobbying for HB 1381 and a general awareness about other, more conventional (i.e., less overtly collaborative) Apex development efforts that had taken place in nearby counties and elsewhere in the country.

The facilitators began their engagement in this context. Some residents appreciated the use of a nonpartisan facilitator, recognizing Apex's intent to distance itself from and not be overly influential in the community's process of determining whether it wanted wind energy in Vermillion County. Other residents felt that there was no way for a team of facilitators hired and paid by Apex to be truly impartial. Still others wondered why Apex was trying to put a separate party in the middle of its direct relationship with the community. Both the facilitators and Apex worked to navigate this dynamic over the course of the process by being transparent about the role of each party and how all information was going to be used. They did so by offering opportunities for the community to engage directly with Apex in informational contexts, while ensuring that the facilitators were the ones engaging most directly on residents' positions on wind energy and opinions about a process. The

team also worked to ensure that it was clear that communication between community members and the facilitators could be protected and not shared with Apex staff.

## Initial facilitator engagement of community

The facilitators began their direct engagement with the community with stakeholder interviews, an online questionnaire, outreach to county commissioners, and a site visit to Vermillion County. Through the interviews, they began to introduce themselves within the county, better understand residents and their values and interests, and explore how a collaborative process might be useful in informing decisions about whether and how a wind energy project might be developed in the county. They also hoped to identify a representative group of individuals from the county who would be willing to serve in a formal advisory capacity to the process moving forward. In parallel, Apex released a survey to solicit feedback on questions like those in the interviews and recommendations for a collaborative process. The survey was made available on Apex's Exploring Wind Vermillion website and on paper at various events. The interviews and survey asked about life and values in Vermillion County; the history of economic development and its impact in the county; and respondents' hopes for the future of the community, communication, and decision-making in the county. They also invited respondents to share any questions they

had about wind energy and who they thought was best equipped to answer these questions, their ideal relationship with Apex, and what they would want to see out of a stakeholder process that determined next steps for wind energy in the community, if any.

Overall, between April and June 2021, the facilitators interviewed 26 people by phone, video call, or in-person meeting and reviewed 50 online and mailed survey responses. The in-person interviews were conducted as part of a June 2021 trip to Vermillion County, where the facilitators met with several residents (including a few county officials), toured the county, appeared, and spoke at a meeting of the county commissioners, and met with the only commissioner responsive to an invitation. Throughout this outreach phase, they heard from landowners, farmers, engineers, business owners, attorneys, doctors, parents, grandparents, advocates, elected and appointed officials, and people active in various civic organizations.

In late summer 2021, the facilitators released a report to both Apex and the community, with no edits from or preview by Apex, that summarized key themes and takeaways from both the interviews and the online values survey (accessible in full online [here](#) and in Appendix 1).

The facilitators developed recommendations for next steps based on the feedback and insights they had received, including consideration of the voices that were missing from the process (younger residents and residents

## Our Mission

**We strive to create a uniquely transparent public engagement process in Vermillion County that will give local residents direct influence over the future of wind energy in this community. This collaborative development process will be different than anything we have ever tried. We seek to demonstrate that a more collaborative, less divisive development process is possible.**

**We invite you to participate.**

**Mission statement for Exploring Wind Vermillion**

either ambivalent about or skeptical of wind energy). The facilitators observed that the community might benefit from a deliberative and collaborative process to explore the potential for wind energy in Vermillion County. The facilitators also recognized that this effort would only be successful if it was built on a foundation of trust. The facilitators acknowledged the challenge: many community members did not yet trust Apex, the facilitators, one another, or any specific authority or organization that might serve as a local convener. Many community members remained very wary of creating additional divides in the community, and it became clear that the effort to appoint a representative local advisory body would not be an effective way to advance the process at that time (the local ordinance process with its own approach was moving forward already; many residents, particularly opponents, did not want to participate; the county commissioners did not show an interest in supporting such a process; and those more open to a wind project did not want to upset nor come in conflict with their neighbors).

The facilitators did discover some community interest in the proposed engagement process. In response to that interest, as well as the potential wariness expressed by others in the community, the facilitators recommended that Apex focus on information sharing, idea generation, and trust building for the late summer and fall of 2021. If the community was open to it, the team planned to work to:

- Begin to answer the community's questions about wind energy by first determining which people, sources, and/or experiences the community found most credible and helpful
- Help residents better understand the county's fiscal status, including how the closure of Duke Energy's Cayuga Station and a prospective wind project might impact the county's finances
- Explore siting options in the county, including which areas would be more or less desirable for a wind project, and

consider siting characteristics reflective of the community's interests and values

Because it had been determined that the exploration of these ideas could not occur through a local advisory body, as had originally been planned, the facilitators and Apex decided to design a series of local events, webinars, and surveys for the entire community that could be used to advance these objectives. The new strategy involved creating a rhythm of surveys, report-outs, and informational sessions that would focus on key themes one at a time. The team intended to choreograph these efforts as a lead-up to a public workshop or short series of workshops in the fall of 2021, co-convened with county partners and focused on in-person information sharing. Eventually, the hope was to progress toward a large, group deliberation that would bring to the table all the previously collected insights and feedback to fairly and comprehensively consider the future of wind energy in the county.

## Exploring key themes

Over the course of the year between May 2021 and April 2022, Vermillion County residents were invited to participate in surveys on several topics that were intended to build on each other to increase awareness and understanding of wind energy in the community. The team defined a set of key themes, each of which became the focus of a month or two of communication and was accompanied by a survey to collect feedback on the topic. The themes (and accompanying goals) explored were:

1. Community values: May to June 2021
  - Collect input through live interviews and online surveys
  - Learn what matters most to residents
  - Introduce residents to the Exploring Wind process through a webinar
2. Trusted sources: June to September 2021
  - Collect input through online surveys and paper surveys at in-person events

- Learn where residents find information and whom they trust to provide it to them
  - Collect community questions to answer on the website
3. County finance: September 2021 through April 2022
    - Collect input through online survey, paper surveys at in-person events, direct mail sent to all households in the county (October 2021), make phone calls to local households (Campaign HQ, January 2022), and conduct a social media poll (Embold Research, April 2022).
    - Learn where residents believed more investment was needed in the community
    - Hold an informational webinar about the county's finances, various considerations for the future, and potential impacts of a wind energy project
  4. Project siting: November 2021 through April 2022
    - Collect input through online surveys, in-person office hours, direct mail to all households in Vermillion (November 2021), and a social media poll (April 2022)<sup>4</sup>
    - Provide some background information on county attributes relevant to siting wind energy (wind speeds, transmission access, population density, etc.) and invite respondents to rate how appropriate wind energy would be in various zones throughout the county
    - Hold in-person office hours and virtual events to introduce people to the siting survey tool and assist with participation when needed

Alongside these topic-focused events and outreach, Apex and its facilitators worked to build connections in the community and make themselves available to answer questions through an introductory webinar, open house events, and office hours.

Overall, the company's requests for input and offer of learning opportunities yielded sparse community participation and no evident interest in the proposed collaborative process on the part of county officials. Skeptics and detractors were more likely to participate in surveys than in real-time events convened by the company. Though overall, these surveys provided some insight into community desires and interests, in the end, the team failed to secure sufficient participation to validate the survey results. For this reason, a detailed analysis of the survey results is not included here, though some of these results are incorporated into the Lessons Learned section of this report. What is more important to note, perhaps, is that the team's inability to achieve significant community engagement through this process became one of the key factors in its decision to abandon the collaborative process in the spring of 2022. (See Appendix 2 for summaries of methods and results of the surveys on trusted sources, county finance, and siting preferences.)

## Interaction of wind experiment with solar project

Meanwhile, alongside the launch of the Exploring Wind Vermillion effort, Apex had begun moving ahead with a more conventional development process for a solar energy project within the county. On November 24, 2020, the Vermillion County commissioners approved a solar ordinance. This ordinance was drafted in partnership with Apex and was intended to allow the advancement of solar energy development in the county. For some residents, especially certain landowners and pro-renewables residents, the solar effort was a positive introduction to Apex. Many others felt that while they supported solar energy in the community, they were not interested in wind energy, which they perceived as having more negative visual, economic, and environmental impacts. Still others who supported both solar and wind in the county were not interested in creating additional conflict and strife in the community around wind turbines, especially if a solar energy project was possible with less conflict.

Still, contention in the community continued to grow for both wind and solar, and the solar ordinance that was passed in November 2020 was amended again in February 2022, making it more restrictive.



**Timeline of Apex activities throughout the Exploring Wind Vermillion process**

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE AND ACTIVITY

Organized community concern about and opposition to Apex’s presence and intentions—actual or perceived—took several forms, including an online petition, input at public meetings, a grassroots campaign with shirts and signs, and support for a prohibitive wind ordinance.

### Opposition efforts

By the beginning of March 2021, a petition entitled “[No Wind Farm](#)” was posted on [change.org](#), a nonprofit used around the world to influence decision-makers in government, mobilizing supporters and advancing causes. Started by a resident of the centrally located town of Dana, the area where Apex had explored early leasing opportunities,

and posted to multiple community Facebook pages, the online campaign attracted a total of 221 supporters.\* The petition claimed:

“The proposed wind farm that is working to come into our county has not proved that it will actually do what it says it will do. The company is basically paying off the landowners and area towns/townships in order to try to get it pushed through... Windmills are not as efficient as they seem and they are an eye sore on our beautiful landscape.”

Only four signatories gave reasons for their opposition to wind; those reasons were among those heard from concerned community members throughout the arc of the Exploring Wind Vermillion effort and included:

- Belief that wind power is inefficient and overly subsidized as compared to other energy sources, especially fossil fuels

\* The authors of this report do not know whether all the petition’s supporters live and/or work in Vermillion County.

- Feared harm to domestic animals, livestock, wildlife, land, and climate
- Uncertainty about what happens when turbines must be dismantled or replaced
- Belief that productivity is “fickle” meaning it is intermittent due to the wind resource variability
- Shadow flicker—a flickering effect caused when rotating wind turbine blades periodically cast shadows through constrained openings such as the windows of neighboring properties
- Noise impacts
- Visual impacts
- Amount of agricultural land taken out of production for turbines and their infrastructure

The “No Wind Farm” page first included a customized slide deck created by Ted Hartke, an Illinois resident who is a frequent opposition presence at wind energy hearings in the region, describing his family’s negative experience living near a wind turbine. It also included a video presentation by Robert Bryce, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and frequent detractor of renewable energy, asserting the environmental and economic limitations of renewable energy sources, including wind.

Before long, concerned Vermillion residents began voicing opposition to a wind project at county commissioner meetings and other public forums, citing visual and other impacts. By late June, a local grocery store was selling red T-shirts reading “Friends IN Vermillion” on the front, and “Protect Vermillion County’s Landscape” on the back next to a turbine in a circle with a slash through it. By late July, “Protect Vermillion County’s Landscape” signs appeared in some residents’ yards, again showing turbines with lines through them.

Meanwhile, that summer, both in one-on-one conversations and in public meetings, the facilitators began encountering the conviction on the part of many concerned residents that Apex had already decided on an area of

the county as the site of a wind project—that company representatives were in fact behaving disingenuously in inviting the community to help identify potential locations. Such apprehensions centered on the middle latitudes of the county, especially the territory surrounding Dana, a township that houses a museum named after native son Ernie Pyle, a famed World War II correspondent. With a current population of approximately 600 people, the community has dwindled in size through recent decades of economic transition, raising concerns about the prospects for future vitality.<sup>5</sup>

While the facilitators remain uncertain as to the reason for some locals’ conviction that project placement was preordained, it is speculated that land agents likely showed some landowners a map depicting an early “area of interest” in the months prior to the launch of the Exploring Wind Vermillion process. It is also possible that, at some point, members of the public learned of a map of test points that Apex had filed with the Federal Aviation Administration as a part of its early assessment of the area’s suitability for wind energy. In any case, assertions about plans to surround Dana with wind turbines persisted; by some later accounts, opposition to a wind project was centered in that area.

## Response from county officials\*

In late 2020, immediately before Apex began to investigate the concept of attempting its Exploring Wind Vermillion process in the county, a local election determined that two of the three County Commission seats would be filled by new candidates. Although initial outreach was made to all candidates to introduce Apex before the election, and some effort was made to financially contribute to candidates who were open to renewable energy during the election, Apex had not built strong relationships with either of the new officials by the time they took office. Furthermore, based on information from the community and conversations with the candidates, Apex had reason to believe that one of the three commissioners

\* Note: This section reflects subjective impressions of the facilitation team.



was likely opposed to wind energy in Vermillion County and the other two might at least be open to a new process. This assessment was part of the inspiration for Apex to attempt its novel public engagement approach in Vermillion County; there seemed to be little chance that a traditional approach to development would succeed in the county, so it appeared worthwhile to take the risk of experimenting with an untested concept there.

That said, once the new officials were seated, Apex representatives perceived that the new officials were eager to support change rather than prioritize preservation of a status quo over much of the county's business. In short order, the new commissioners appeared to be reconfiguring committees. Apex hoped that the reconstituted commission, evidently willing to depart from prior ways of doing business, could serve as an effective proponent of the sought-after process. The Apex team was optimistic about earning the commissioners' endorsement of or participation in the collaborative approach (the process itself, not the project). Unfortunately, Apex was never able to do so.

An early March 2021 meeting of the county commissioners drew a larger-than-usual crowd due to a presentation from Apex on the agenda. Although the company did not introduce the facilitation team to officials or the broader community at the meeting, the presentation outlined the proposed collaborative process, including the highly unusual steps of pledging to honor any outcome of the process of joint learning and dialogue and offering the community a share of ongoing project royalties once a completed wind farm was operating. Some community attendees at the meeting clearly opposed wind energy development or at least harbored strong concerns about it, but the commissioners did not allow for questions, declaring instead that an open forum would be provided sometime in the future, at which residents could pose questions to Apex.

Going forward, although anti-wind locals periodically attended meetings of the County Commission to voice opposition to wind

energy development, the commissioners quickly shifted immediate responsibility for determining Vermillion County's approach to wind to the Area Planning Commission (APC). (Details follow.) Over time, none of the commissioners openly discouraged or rejected the process Apex proposed, but neither did they explicitly welcome or encourage it, let alone offer guidance, introductions to local stakeholders, or assistance in assembling and convening a community advisory team to engage with the company. In short, they took a hands-off approach to Apex's process entreaties.

## Responses to facilitator outreach

Throughout the spring and summer of 2021, the facilitation team interviewed willing community members through introductions from Apex representatives and, over time, from other community members. Most of the individuals who agreed to speak with the facilitators, and, indeed, most of those to whom the facilitators could gain an introduction, skewed in favor of or at least open to wind energy in Vermillion County. Interviewees also tended to be older, and most often were based in the southern (more populous and more Democratic) part of the county. The facilitators pressed for a more representative balance of perspectives, but the pool of prospects for candid, one-on-one conversations was shaped by the relationships already formed by the company and limited by the lack of willingness from local officials to open such doors. Most of the community members contacted by the facilitation team who were vocally opposed to wind development and/or distrustful of Apex either declined to speak or did not reply.

Community input through the online questionnaire, and to some degree the interviews, yielded several reasons for skepticism about the prospects of local acceptance of wind energy and/or for reluctance or refusal to participate visibly in a collaborative process of learning, dialogue, and decision making. Residents supportive of or curious about wind

energy were reluctant to engage publicly in dialogue about the subject—let alone advocate openly for it—to avoid causing or deepening community divides. Common refrains included fear of neighbors “being madder at me over this than they already are,” and fear of involvement in a dispute over wind impeding an individual’s ability to make progress on other civic efforts more important to them. Some noted that of all things to get into fights about with their neighbors, wind energy just didn’t pass the cost-benefit test.

## Launch of concurrent development of a local wind ordinance

As Apex publicly launched its collaborative process in spring 2021, Vermillion County commissioners directed the local APC to initiate the drafting of a local ordinance on wind energy development under its existing processes and procedures. A strong majority of APC members emerged through public meetings as early opponents of wind energy (at least in Vermillion County) and/or distrustful of Apex’s intentions.

In early March, within days of both the “No Wind Farm” petition and Apex’s presentation to the county commissioners outlining the proposed collaborative process, the APC began development of a new wind ordinance, holding weekly evening workshops, during which planning commissioners reviewed information and discussed how they might proceed. Although these meetings were open to the public and had an allotted time for members of the public to share comments, the workshops did not utilize “deliberative dialogue” techniques to generate productive discussions with the community, and therefore were very different from the type of dialogues that Apex had been proposing. The workshops continued, with few breaks, until finalization of the ordinance. In early April, Apex announced its intention to discontinue attending the APC meetings to avoid the

appearance that it was trying to advocate for wind energy during the ordinance process and to avoid confusion between the APC’s ordinance development process and Apex’s hope for a more collaborative dialogue.

Multiple factors influenced the timing of the county’s launch of its wind ordinance process. For one, the county had long planned on initiating its wind ordinance process once its solar ordinance process was complete. The County Commission had completed the solar ordinance in November 2020, and the APC noted in mid-March 2021 that it had been reviewing other Indiana county wind ordinances since that time. Second, as 2020 progressed, members of the community were increasingly aware of Apex’s presence in the county, as evidenced by the petition that had begun circulating. Last, discussions about HB 1381, the state legislation that would have limited county authority to restrict wind farm development, were intensifying during this time. Company representatives and the facilitators heard often about perceptions (though these were unsupported by legislative procedures or draft bill language) that the bill, if voted into law that coming June, would take effect immediately and would not apply to counties with existing wind ordinances. These perceptions, though not accurate, created a powerful incentive for the county to move as quickly as possible on its own wind ordinance.

## Public engagement through town hall meetings\*

By the end of March, the APC had announced its intention to hold three public meetings—one each in the north, central, and southern regions of the county—to elicit perspectives from the public regarding the draft wind ordinance’s provisions. The events occurred in public venues between late June and early July 2021. Referred to as “open house meetings” by county officials, the gatherings adopted the format of conventional town hall meetings with local officials presiding and

\* Subjective characterizations of these public meetings here represent the impressions of Apex representatives and, in one case, the facilitator who attended them.

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## DEVELOPERS' REFLECTION: DECIDING WHAT TYPE OF PRESENCE TO HAVE IN THE COUNTY'S WIND ORDINANCE PROCESS

When Apex decided to launch the Exploring Wind Vermillion process, we knew we would be swimming upstream in many ways. Although we were sincere about our intentions to do things very differently in Vermillion County, we learned quickly that the traditional path for doing this kind of work was well-worn, and it was hard to break the habits and expectations of people (whether community members or Apex staff) about how this kind of conversation could go in the community. Everyone seemed primed for each party to play a particular role in the debate that was about to unfold: the developer was supposed to defend the project and advocate for it at all costs; the supporters were supposed to come out and say why they wanted the project; and the opponents were expected to come out and fight to block it tooth and nail. To some extent, each side depended on the other side to be their foil—a fight is not really a fight unless both sides show up ready for action. So when Apex decided to step out of the “project advocate” role and take on a “process advocate” role instead, things quickly got quirky.

This was obvious in the community reaction to our plan for navigating the county's wind ordinance process. When Apex launched Exploring Wind Vermillion, we hoped that this process would provide an alternative venue for discussions about the future of wind in the county. We hoped to create spaces for more deliberative dialogues between community members and strategies for helping participants sort out facts so that we could focus our time talking about the true tradeoffs that would come from siting a wind project in the county. We hoped that this process would produce a vision for the kind of wind project that residents believed would “fit” in the community and that this step would precede the creation of a wind ordinance. Ideally, we thought, the wind ordinance could be crafted to support the vision the community had collaboratively defined.

But Vermillion County did not wish to wait for the Exploring Wind Vermillion process to conclude (or even begin) before initiating their standard wind ordinance process. The APC announced that it would begin drafting a wind ordinance for the county in the spring of 2021, just as Exploring Wind Vermillion was getting under way.

This left Apex with a challenging choice: Do we engage with the county's ordinance process as an advocate of the project, as we would typically do? Or do we sit back and stay out of the county's process, focusing instead on building a vision for wind with the community through Exploring Wind Vermillion? There was much heated debate about how to proceed among members of the Apex team, and in the end, we stumbled a bit on this one.

Originally, we decided that we could not expect to retain credibility as a fair convenor of Exploring Wind Vermillion if we showed up as project advocates in the county process. So, we wrote a letter to the APC and the county commissioners explaining that we would not be participating in the ordinance hearings, not because we didn't care about the outcome, but because we did not feel we could authentically engage in that process until we completed our work to listen to the community through Exploring Wind Vermillion.

Immediately, we started getting pushback from officials and supporters for this position. APC members seemed confused at best, and offended at worst, that we would simply not attend ordinance hearings. It was as if this decision telegraphed that we didn't care what happened in the county's process or that we didn't have enough skin in the game to make participation worth it. Some members of the APC felt more exposed with Apex absent, and some expressed that they needed Apex there to answer some of the questions that were coming from project opponents in the audience.

So, we quickly backpedaled from our original position, and we decided to send representatives to hearings after all. We eventually moderated to a position where we explained that we would attend these hearings with an intention to serve as "resources" to the APC if they had questions. But we tried to set the expectation that we would not be proactively presenting on a project or advocating for wind energy at these meetings.

This decision created interesting dynamics. Opponents in the community found that there was no one to yell at and make accusations against, which left them foundering to some degree. At the same time, supporters in the community got frustrated that Apex wasn't there to stand up for the project, and individuals who had expressed an interest in forming a local advocate group of their own never gained the momentum they could have if Apex had more seriously supported them. Surprising us most of all, local government officials got angry that Apex wasn't playing the role we were expected to. By refusing to show up and fight, we may have robbed the APC members of a critical tool they could have used for managing disgruntled constituents: a common enemy.

Upon reflection, Apex did not implement our decision to "stay above the fray" as effectively as we could have. While it's hard to imagine a way that Apex could have taken on a project advocate role and still been credible as a convenor of the Exploring Wind Vermillion process, it may have been possible for us to strike a more consistent and moderate balance from the beginning. Were we to do it again, we would attempt to define ourselves not as project advocates, but as "an expert resource on wind energy at the service of the commission with a great interest in the county's decisions," and we would actively and consistently participate in the county process in that capacity.

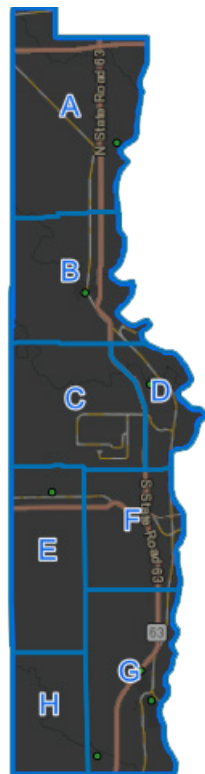


attendees taking turns speaking to those assembled from the front of the room.

It is unclear to the authors of this report whether the APC itself decided to convene these meetings or did so at the request of the county commissioners.

In conversations with some county officials, the facilitators unsuccessfully encouraged consideration of alternative formats for the open house events to allow for a greater likelihood of sustained, constructive discussion between community members than often materializes in conventional town hall-style gatherings. The facilitation team suggested that the APC consider including the following elements in its planned meetings to improve outcomes: topical presentations from independent experts, facilitated discussion stations focused on subjects of interest, small-group deliberations among residents, and opportunities for residents to ask questions of Apex representatives and of one another. Not one of these suggestions was taken.

A subset of APC members attended each of the three meetings, with an explicit commitment to offer brief opening and adjourning remarks and then participate “in listening mode,” emphasizing the APC’s objective of hearing from the public to inform the forthcoming ordinance. It was stressed that APC members are appointed rather than elected, and that they are therefore not responsible for any legislation approved by the county commissioners. A county employee who worked closely with the APC moderated discussion, moving through a list of individuals who had expressed interest in addressing the APC and the assembled community. Each speaker was



allotted a few minutes at the microphone and asked to identify themselves and then state whether they resided in Vermillion County. No questions or discussions were permitted. No county official provided substantive information about wind energy, and Apex was not asked to present any information. County commissioners attended the events but did not speak publicly.

The number of attendees at the APC open houses ranged from about 50 to 200, with standing room only at the second and third gatherings. Meetings lasted for two to three and a half hours. Based on accounts from Apex representatives and the facilitation team, the tone of remarks from self-declared local wind opponents escalated in intensity as the meeting location shifted from south to central to north. Remarks during the first two meetings were largely restrained and respectful, despite high emotion and clear differences of opinion. By the third meeting, though, opponents reacted with murmuring and negative body language whenever proponents addressed the room.

Several individuals spoke at two or all three of the events. Among those who spoke, proponents were more likely than opponents to be from Vermillion County. Many non-residents who spoke against wind energy development hailed from nearby communities in Illinois. Some who indicated that they had been “asked to speak” were affiliated with the Edgar County Watchdogs, an Illinois-based county watchdog organization. Also present to warn against the deleterious impacts of wind projects was Ted Hartke, the Illinois-based wind opponent who had contributed a slide deck to the “No Wind Farm” petition page. The few nonresident wind supporters who spoke included the Hoosiers for Renewables, an organization working throughout Indiana to communicate about the benefits of renewable energy; and the economic development director of another Indiana county that is home to several operating wind energy projects.

Also in attendance at one or more meetings were pro-wind (or wind-curious) residents—

landowners, business owners, parents of schoolchildren, blue collar workers—who confided to representatives of Apex or the facilitation team that they did not feel comfortable speaking due to the charged atmosphere of the proceedings and fear of local repercussions.

By late summer, the facilitation team began hearing that some community members were experiencing resource limitations and

process fatigue after a spring and summer of town hall meetings and County Commission and APC meetings focused on wind energy. This may have further degraded participation and appetite for the Exploring Wind Vermillion process.

## Key themes from speakers supporting wind energy

- Vermillion County is “dying” or “in decay” and needs economic opportunities that lead to financial benefits and other growth. A wind project would not fix everything but should be evaluated for its potential benefits. Wind energy can be one of many needed building blocks to future vitality for the community.
- American reliance on fossil fuels for energy is diminishing or going away. Renewable sources of energy will be part of the future—a trend that will not be stopped—and Vermillion County needs to be part of that change.
- Increasingly, young people don’t see opportunities for themselves in Vermillion County (for example, they are unlikely to return after going away to college), and they tend to support renewable energy.
- The community should do its own due diligence, focusing on what is needed to ensure safety rather than only negative impacts and perceptions.
- The influx of opponents from outside the county or even state should not influence what the community decides is best.
- Wind farms can benefit the host community financially.
- Vermillion County could ensure it benefits from a wind energy project through careful crafting of an ordinance.
- The APC should obtain assistance from a technically qualified and non-biased expert in writing the ordinance.
- Wind energy is no worse than strip mining or burning coal, and unlike those resources, wind is an infinite energy source.
- The internet is full of misinformation—claims that are misleading or inaccurate.
- Any compelling evidence of wind turbines harming people and the environment would be covered by the media.
- Wind turbines are barely, if at all, audible when one is standing near them.
- There is no evidence of health risks to humans from operation of wind turbines and personal experiences of deleterious effects are psychosomatic caused by internal experience of stress, anxiety, or conflict, or due to belief in a potential for harm.
- The community needs to “come together” and be more tolerant of differing opinions and beliefs.



## Key themes from speakers opposing wind energy

- Wind turbines are large and unsightly.
- Renewables companies are corrupt and cannot be trusted, including regarding estimates of tax and other financial benefits.
- The contracts with local elected officials and leases landowners are signing are full of gag orders, lies, and legal threats.
- Companies pay people to show up in support of their intended projects.
- Money for decommissioning should be secured upfront.
- Wind farms do not financially benefit host communities.
- Vermillion County does not need to follow other counties in permitting wind energy development.
- The United States is not running out of coal.
- Apex should purchase land rather than renting it.
- Wind energy projects ruin the local water supply and soil. (A wind energy project in Douglas County, Illinois, developed by another company, was cited as an example, with roads and soil left in disrepair.)
- Turbine blades cannot be recycled.
- Wind projects create significant division in communities.
- A project should not proceed until human health effects are better understood.
- Wind turbines kill birds. A bird study should be conducted before any project is allowed.
- Infrasound, audible noise, and blinking lights are nuisances.
- The town of Dana will be surrounded by turbines.
- Most people supporting a wind project in Vermillion County do not live in the areas where wind turbines would be built.
- County residents too often do not have a say in developments affecting the community. (Telephone poles “coming into our county” from a nearby town was cited as an example. A local speaker at all three meetings declared the issue to be “a war between the plutocrats and the populists.”)
- The setback from a home or border property should be two miles. (One speaker suggested that one and a half miles would be a reasonable compromise.)
- Several speakers indicated they were “not opposed to wind energy,” but did not want it in Vermillion County at this time.

## PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF LEASE CONTENT

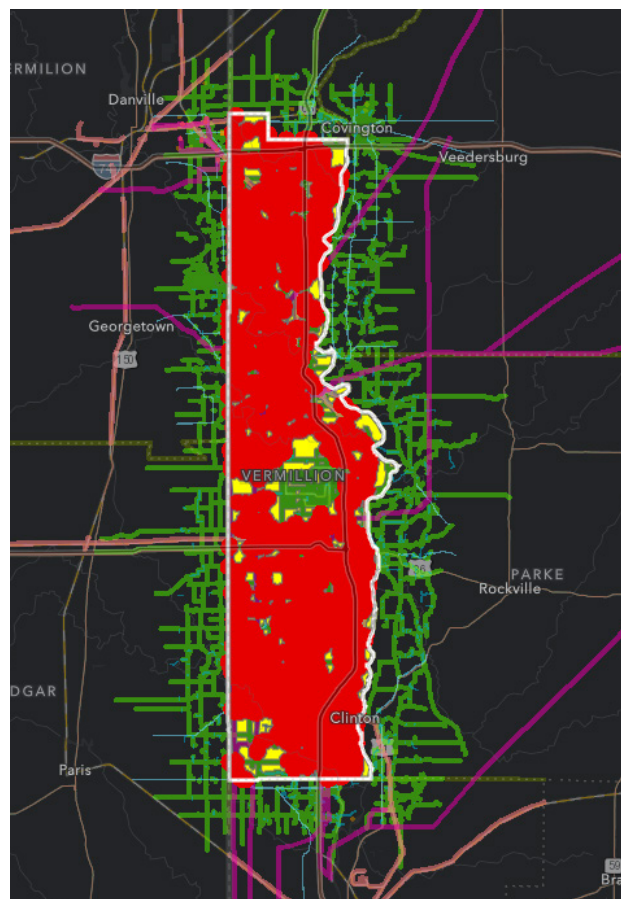
Transparency regarding lease details emerged as a theme significant to many wind skeptics and detractors. Following the second town hall meeting, Apex shared a redacted version of the landowner lease with the county commissioners, only blacking out information that might compromise the company's ability to compete with other renewables companies. Apex requested that the redacted lease not be shared more broadly but hoped that this additional information would help local officials respond to concerns they were hearing from the public and take the facts into account when making decisions. The redacted lease was intended to demonstrate:

- There was a fair method for calculating lease payments for those who participate;
- All landowners who signed leases would benefit from a project whether or not project facilities were ultimately sited on their land;
- The lease contained no "gag order" provision;
- The lease had been updated, based on local feedback, to give landowners more control over what facilities might ultimately be placed on their property and where those facilities might go;
- Landowners would not be responsible for paying any extra property tax owed due to the value of the wind facilities on their property;
- The inflation adjustment provision had been updated to incorporate requests from local landowners;
- Apex would be responsible for ensuring that no liens would be enforced on a landowner's property due to the project; and
- Decommissioning and drain tile repair were adequately and appropriately addressed.

## CONSIDERING SETBACK PROVISIONS

As the ordinance was being drafted and discussed, it became apparent that one of the ordinance's key provisions would define required setbacks from wind turbines to homes or property lines—a design requirement commonly included in wind energy ordinances. In late July, the APC held a "public working session" during which no public comment was permitted, but during which APC members were to discuss setback considerations.

By this time, a majority of APC members appeared to have settled on a two-mile setback from property lines and a 32-decibel limit at that distance—requirements far exceeding customary standards for these provisions and essentially prohibiting wind development.



**Residence setbacks at 2,640 feet**



According to a recent inventory of wind energy ordinances around the country conducted by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the mean value of property line setbacks in U.S. wind ordinances is 886 feet, or 0.16 miles, far below that proposed in Vermillion County. In fact, analysis of Vermillion County's proposed setback shows that a two-mile setback from property lines would eliminate every acre in the county from viability for wind energy, clearly serving to ban wind energy from the county.

Out of concern that this impact wasn't fully appreciated by the APC, the County Commission, or the public, Apex posted an [interactive setback map](#) on the Exploring Wind Vermillion website, which allowed users to visualize the comparative impact of various setback provisions. This made it possible for users to compare the impacts of setbacks at different distances, as well as the impacts of measuring from homes rather than property lines. Apex sought to ensure that APC members and county commissioners were aware that passing a two-mile setback from property lines would eliminate all potential for wind energy in the county now and in the future.

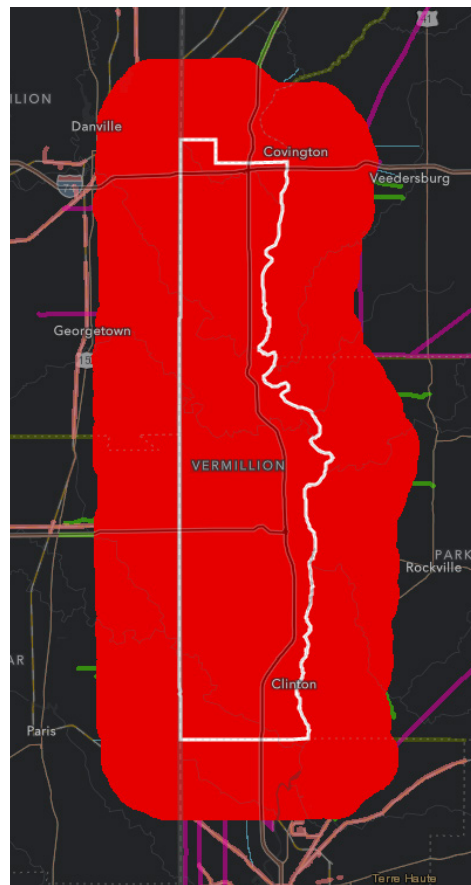
## FINALIZATION OF THE ORDINANCE

After months of meetings, workshops, and open houses, a draft ordinance was prepared and reviewed by an attorney before being put to a public hearing before the APC. Some members of the APC motioned for additional time to amend the ordinance but were outvoted. One stated reason for continuing with an accelerated timeline was concern that action by the state of Indiana would curtail local authority if an ordinance was not on the books by the beginning of 2022. On September 9, 2021, the APC voted to recommend the draft ordinance, which included the two-mile setback from property lines to the county commission. County commissioners then had 45 days to review the ordinance and either approve it, reject it, or pass back notes to the APC, at which point

the APC would have 45 days to make any changes.

On September 14, the county's zoning director and the APC chairman presented the recommendation of the APC to the County Commission. The APC highlighted the number of meetings it had hosted during the consideration of the ordinance (20) and all the input it had received. The APC also explained that eight different drafts of the ordinance were considered before the final one was sent in for legal review. The County Commission decided to "take the issue under advisement" and vote on it later, but it declined to confirm when it would be voting on the ordinance. In meeting minutes, this consideration was later described as the "first reading" of the ordinance.

Following the September 14 meeting, Apex representatives sought to communicate with county officials and staff to understand how they planned to advance consideration of the ordinance. Apex staff were given indications



**Property line setbacks at 2 miles**

that the wind ordinance would be put on the September 28 agenda for discussion. Apex staff were under the impression that no vote on the wind ordinance would be taken at that meeting.

On September 28, the wind ordinance was considered, as expected. One commission-

er suggested that the commission convene a special meeting on the wind ordinance before taking a vote, but that request was overruled by the remaining two commissioners, who motioned to pass the ordinance and then did so without the support of the third commissioner. The speed of the decision was a surprise to many, including Apex.

# Exploring Wind Vermillion

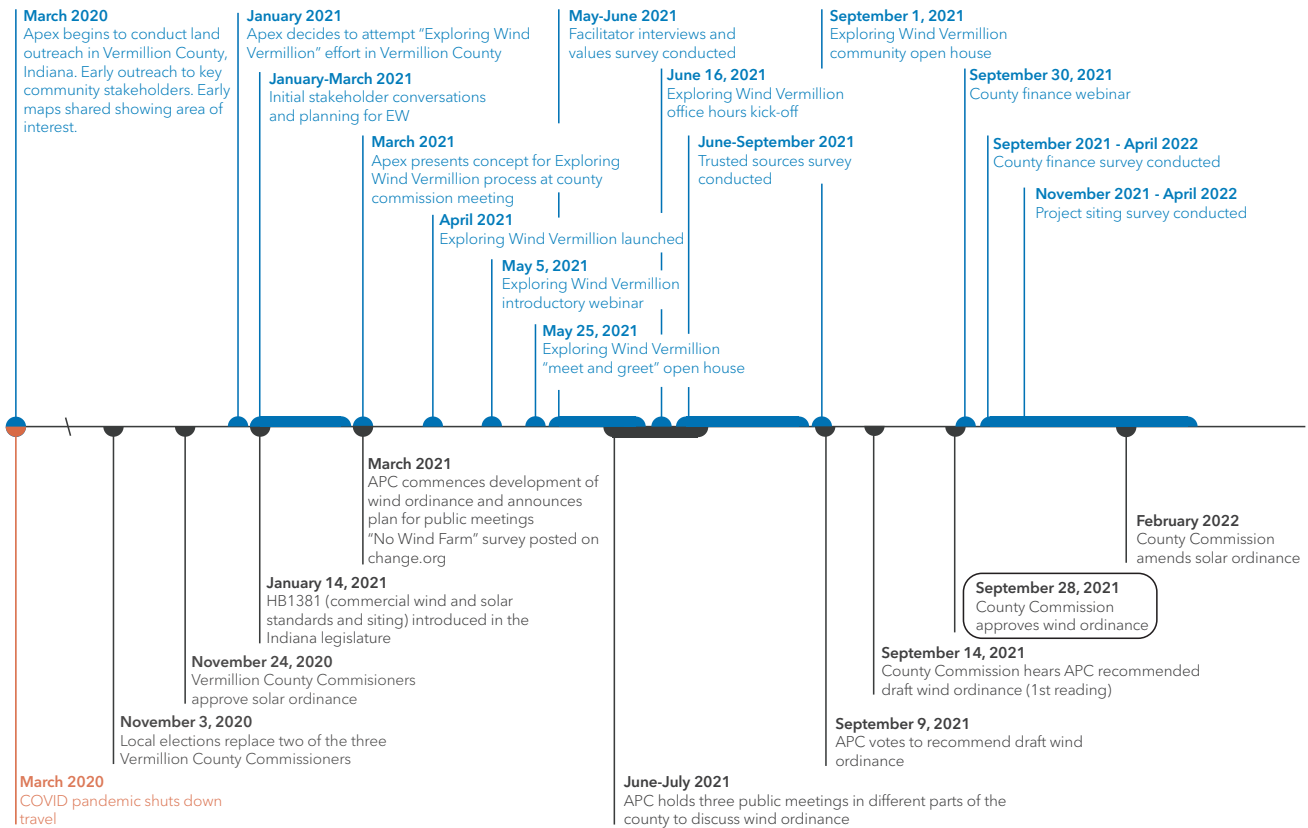
Apex Clean Energy has created a project called Exploring Wind Vermillion to help inform local residents about wind energy and give them the power to help design the wind project they would like to see in this community. This collaborative development process is different from anything we have ever tried, and we hope you will participate.

Vermillion County could be a great place for a wind energy facility if the community believes it will fit into their vision for the area's future.

Tell us what you think and learn more at [exploringwindvermillion.com](http://exploringwindvermillion.com)



**An Apex invitation to participate in the collaborative process**



## Timeline of Apex and county activities throughout the Exploring Wind Vermillion process

# COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF APEX AND THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

By late July 2021, the facilitation team was encountering signs that Apex’s presence—and presumed intentions regarding a wind project—had received notice and scrutiny for longer than it had realized. Some interviewees attested to the company engaging landowners as early as the middle of 2020. As a community official explained after the ordinance passed, “You’re a year too late on this community workshop idea. We—the community, the APC—have known this was coming for a year ... the

community is exhausted, emotions are high, and the APC has the ordinance they want.”

It became apparent that Apex’s strategic and tactical decisions, as well as the actions of its representatives on the ground, were being closely scrutinized and subjected to interpretation by community officials and residents, especially those active in considering or advocating against a wind project. As the facilitators continued to press for willing conversation partners, they heard inaccurate accounts of company employees “storming out” of an APC meeting in disappointment over an ordinance detail, of Apex staff misrepresenting technical points in relevant regulation, and of Exploring Wind Vermillion choosing to only answer “positive” questions posed to them at public meetings. Multiple individuals expressed either disappointment or indignation that Apex had not committed

itself to engaging formally with either the county commissioners or the APC to request a development opportunity.

One local wind energy skeptic linked the company's "credibility problem" to a perceived series of unsuccessful approaches before announcing the intended collaborative process (e.g., engaging landowners with uneven results and supporting a state bill that would reduce or eliminate the county's ability to oppose wind energy development). On the other hand, officials and other residents supportive of a wind project or at least open to considering its potential benefits spoke that summer and fall of perceived inaction—of Apex's collaborative posture allowing local and external opponents to "drive the narrative" regarding wind power.

Meanwhile, some residents of Dana, the persistently expected "intended location" for an Apex project, were reportedly sensitive and angry that they were not approached first and directly, especially because a handful of major landowners from the area had been.

## **LOCAL PUSH FOR SOLAR AT EXPENSE OF FURTHER ATTEMPTS AT COLLABORATIVE WIND PROCESS**

County development of a solar ordinance was well underway when the APC started work on a wind ordinance in March 2021. By late January 2022, landowners interested in a solar project had begun urging Apex to ease community agitation by formally standing down on the wind effort. The county had recently amended the solar legislation to reduce setback requirements, and even some county officials who opposed wind development expressed openness to solar development, whether utility-scale or distributed.



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## FACILITATOR'S REFLECTION: PERSPECTIVE ON A TOWN HALL MEETING

We as facilitators have found that civically minded Americans hold a particular expectation of a town hall-style meeting. Your turn at the podium is your turn to orate, to shout into a microphone at stony-faced officials, or to the agitated crowd, or to a bank of news cameras. It is your time to be heard, to speak truth to power, and chances are extremely good that you will leave even more secure of your view, more certain of your grievance, than when you arrived, whatever your views or political persuasion. The popular narrative about such events does not encourage optimism about listening, however skeptically and critically, let alone converting rhetorical questions or dire assertions into opportunities for productive debate or constructive dialogue.

Recent decades of research in psychology, sociology, and neurology suggest that gathering an emotionally charged group of people and offering them a limited opportunity to address one another rather than to engage in sustained, tempered conversation with each another is a poor recipe for considering new ideas and interrogating one's own assumptions and biases. The instinctual reaction of a person who feels threatened, whether by a neighbor's flood of anger or an outside force's perceived power to impose unwanted change on a community, is likely to be shaped by the same menu of fight/flight/freeze options available to our distant ancestors. The brain's wiring does not make categorical distinctions between a corporeal predator and a perilous idea. Either can activate the amygdala—the part of our neural system thought to be responsible for detecting danger and activating self-protective behaviors—and either can greatly diminish our ability to listen well, to receive and consider new information on its own merits. We become less likely to reason our way to new territory and more likely to rationalize how we got where we already are.<sup>6</sup> It seems to us that this dynamic played out in Vermillion County.

On a second visit to the county, hoping to conduct more interviews on behalf of the facilitation team, I found a seat in a packed fire station on a sweltering evening in late June 2021. Since my trip coincided with the second of three public input meetings convened by the APC, I attended the event in hopes of better understanding community dynamics and local interests. I was hoping to understand perhaps well enough to see our way to the design of an appealing forum for truly collaborative discussion and joint learning. The Exploring Wind Vermillion process was a few months behind, and maintaining a respectful distance from, the APC's own community engagement process. The town of Dana had offered up what I presumed was its largest public building. There was standing room only, with every available folding chair occupied, late arrivals leaning against walls or clustering in the shadow of a hulking fire engine, and doors and windows open to allow any grudging amount of air circulation on a still summer night when the air conditioner had conked out.

Finding a seat near the back, I realized I was situated amid a concentration of red “Friends IN Vermillion” shirts—campaign shirts portraying a turbine with a not-welcome-here diagonal slash through it. I began introducing myself to attendees, explaining my role and my hopes. Some individuals glanced at me warily, apprising me uncertainly and ready for hostility should I bring it or appear to deserve it. One red-shirted woman amiably handed me a one-pager with the heading “Rethink Wind: Look before you jump!!!” Its assertions included that wind energy would annihilate hunting fowl, cause depression and cardiovascular disease through infrasound, create psychological distress and physiological stress due to turbine noise, and produce seizures and disorientation due to shadow flicker. The page bore no citations but provided the phone numbers of all three county commissioners. When I asked after the source of the information, I was told, “Someone gave it to me.”

Five members of the APC sat at a rectangular table facing the assembled public. At the outset of the program, the chairman read a statement acknowledging the commission’s particular focus on setbacks and pledging to hold a public hearing before voting on a proposed final ordinance. Once the APC voted, it would forward its recommendation to the county commissioners for their vote in turn. Except for opening and closing remarks from the chairman, the row of APC members remained silent throughout the event. Another county official served as moderator, calling on registered speakers one at a time. Individuals interested in addressing the APC—and, perhaps just as important, the crowd—were asked to state their name, indicate whether they resided in Vermillion County, and limit their remarks to a few timed minutes.

Only one speaker opined on the matter of optimal setbacks, as everyone else consistently chose to focus on whether they supported or opposed wind development. By my count, those choosing to speak in opposition slightly outnumbered those speaking in favor, but they were roughly three times more likely to reside outside the county. More than half of the “con” voices appeared to belong to wind energy opponents from elsewhere, especially from across the state line in Illinois.

As the evening unfolded, I was impressed by the turnout, the attendees’ endurance, and in many cases the restraint of the locals who spoke—whether pleading for a better future or championing a continuation of the present. The assembly was served up multiple sets of contrasting and competing narratives. Voices from different communities spoke enthusiastically or direly of their respective experiences living with wind turbines, but we had no opportunity to examine and learn from the differences and similarities (e.g., details of leases and ordinances, public involvement in directing funds, age of technology, scale of project). The economic development commissioner of another Indiana county told of the wind development that ultimately brought his community a better-funded school board, a fuller staff of paramedics, increased property values, several upgrades in emergency services and medical personnel, and the imminent installation of fiber-optic cables. There was no chance to challenge his assertions, to parse data, or to hear stories from those living near turbines.

One fellow assured the crowd that the American Bird Conservancy and State Ornithologist of Indiana would validate concerns about the threat of turbines to birds. He was followed by a local young man who helps build turbines for a living and who spoke of experience on the ground in communities across the country, asserting that he was surprised to observe that turbines do not kill birds. One speaker contended that turbines do not belong on agricultural land and should be allowed only in industrial districts, and another speaker said, “I see hope

when I look at a wind turbine." A middle-aged woman, choking through tears of fear and anger, claimed that the World Health Organization and state health departments in Michigan, Iowa, and Wisconsin have declared wind turbines hazardous to human health. (I have scoured the websites of the entities in question for evidence to support such claims, and as of this writing have found none.) A high school student then summarized findings from a school project in which he reviewed peer-reviewed studies and found no deleterious health impacts caused by wind turbines, but rather concluded that ailments blamed on turbine proximity are psycho-social—perhaps stress and anxiety caused by the belief that turbines would cause serious health problems.

I sat as residents talked past one another or addressed each other directly but with no way to sculpt a productive conversation in the moment. Suggestions of terms and conditions (e.g., an upfront commitment to full funding for decommissioning, or a study of potential impacts on property value) went unaddressed and unexplored, as did various projections and speculations about the Indiana of the future that would be pressed for energy options in the face of climate change and shifting global markets.

Two moments in particular have stuck with me. One young man, a resident of the host township that was observably dwindling in population, infrastructure, and amenities, stood before the assembly and bellowed in a stricken voice, "Why are you doing this to the town of Dana?" He was not alone in his fierce conviction that Apex intended to surround his community with towering wind turbines, despite the company's assertion (somewhat undercut by Apex's presence in the area securing easements as discussed elsewhere in this report) that no location had been decided upon and frequent efforts to solicit input on the question of siting.

Another man, wearing a plaid shirt, blue jeans, and a baseball cap, stood at the microphone and leveled the same situational assessment I later learned he had issued at the other two town meetings: "This is a conflict between populism and plutocracy!" Different from and more than a debate over land use or economic development, he perceived a class war in Vermillion County, perhaps a microcosm of an existential struggle he believed to be playing out on a national scale in a society constantly told it was divided.

I sat there yearning for an even-keeled discussion of the most explicit themes of the night—economics, health, repair and decommissioning, preservation of wildlife, visual impact on rural vistas. But I also reflected that to avoid repeated tugs of war over source selection and dueling experts, such a conversation might need to bring to the surface underlying currents of cultural identity, social stability, and a desire for assurances of autonomy and agency. It may be logical to begin by asking, "What do you think will happen if \_\_\_\_, and why do you believe that to be the case?" But the conversation may be incomplete without also finding an opportunity to ask what an individual or community is afraid of, resentful of, or reassured by—questions that highlight deeper underlying, and often unspoken, motivations that influence who we listen to and what sense we make of what we hear.

That night I witnessed what Apex had hoped to avoid, with the assistance of a small team of independent facilitators—a community in tumult over the question of wind energy development. Months later, as we probed one last time for interest in dialogue free for a time from divisive narratives, a county official said plainly, "We have the ordinance we want." In that light, perhaps, I experienced the public meeting they wanted. Turbines or no turbines, I have to hope we can all do better.





# OUTCOMES

Apex attempted a rare experiment to give a community the ability both to help design and site a wind energy project, and ultimately to make a (hopefully well-informed and well-reasoned) decision to accept or reject a project—with a commitment to honor the rejection of a project. The collaborative process offered to share control, ownership, and, to some degree, profit with the community at large. Success likely would have required conditions for candid and creative deliberation, joint learning, and principled navigation of tradeoffs.

Apex and the facilitators struggled to engage the community in Vermillion County, perhaps due to timing and the lack of respected local champions for a collaborative process. Instead, the county's APC undertook its own existing process to develop a local wind energy ordinance. This process relied on conventional structures, rather than engagement formats that could have offered residents who held different views an opportunity work together to consider sources, bring in additional jointly selected expertise, examine evidence, test claims, and evaluate costs and benefits of a wind project.

The resulting 36-page ordinance requires a turbine base to be set back at least two miles from roadway rights of way and the property lines of nonparticipating landowners, as well as requires a two-mile property value guarantee and a 32 dBA noise restriction—altogether one of the nation's most restrictive wind ordinances. The setback alone effectively

prohibits the siting of wind turbines given the county's relatively small parcel sizes. An Energywire article detailing Apex's experiment observed, "While there was vocal opposition to a wind project in Vermillion County, there wasn't a popular vote. Ultimately, it was the decision of two county commissioners to effectively prohibit wind development."<sup>7</sup>

A collaborative process never gained meaningful traction. Apex discontinued the effort and determined instead to learn from what had transpired.

Aside from unusually restrictive local legislation, the outcome for the community was an atmosphere fraught with tension—precisely what Apex had hoped to avoid through respectful listening, evidence-based dialogue, and an expressed willingness to walk away. Many residents, especially around Dana, were angry at the prospect of their community changing visibly in unwelcome ways and without their consent. Several residents supportive of or open to wind chose not to advocate for a project or participate openly in the collaborative process due to other priorities and fear of social repercussions.\*

Despite efforts to do so, Apex was unable to satisfactorily address concerns about the potential for deleterious health effects, the threat to birds or other wildlife, and the impact on property values. Apex was similarly unable to catch the community's imagination about the potential for a project to attract other development or help stabilize an uncertain financial future.

\* This concern wasn't without cause. At least one landowner threatened to evict any tenants who signed leases on land they owned elsewhere in the county.



# LESSONS LEARNED

## CAUGHT BETWEEN PROJECT AND PLANNING

The Apex process was intended to be engaging, inclusive, and problem-solving, allowing residents a chance to weigh in on fundamental features such as location, revenue, and even project scale. These activities are typically thought of as the purview of a project's developer, or, when considered at very broad scales, of community planning processes. With Apex involved in some traditional elements of project development and community planning, the company found itself caught between two traditional land use processes.

Most project developers come to local authorities with their projects relatively far along in design, or with an understanding that local decision makers will not be asked to act until a final design is presented. This is driven by both internal dictates around applying expertise, controlling design, managing costs, and securing access to land in a competitive environment; and by local decision-making bodies that tend to advise: "Don't bring an idea for us to react to; bring us a project we can evaluate." This kind of propose-and-dispose approach is well-entrenched in most land use decision making. While it has been heartily criticized in many forums, the approach remains customary practice across the United States and is typically written into state statutes and county codes.

On the other end of the spectrum is the notion of comprehensive planning. Local bodies, at the county or town/city level, engage their citizens to identify community values, articulate a vision, and lay out the spatial arrangements for economic development, open space, conservation, transportation, and quality of life. These plans then serve as the basis on which local zoning is assigned or revised. In practice, however, many planning processes are not robust, are sometimes perfunctory, are not sufficiently resourced to ensure broad community deliberation, fail to reconcile actual tensions in land use visions—many community plans call for renewable energy but demand protection of their viewsheds—and are not well-linked to the actual zoning or approvals process of local decision makers. Further, these planning processes are explicitly intended not to be project-based to avoid spot planning and zoning and to broaden the conversation beyond any one development interest.

When Apex began its work in Vermillion County, it entered a local conversation that was already following a well-worn path for proposing and reviewing projects. This made it hard for Apex to break out of the roles already expected of a company proposing a project. At the same time, the county had a relatively outdated county plan that did little to define "good projects" or "good project review processes." As a private actor, Apex tried to engage county officials and their constituents in a project-based planning process that was not familiar to residents or officials, and,

since it was being introduced by a company that was located outside the county, seemed foreign and suspect.

## THE “SEQUENCING” PROBLEM

All projects face complicated strategic decisions about how to sequence components of project development, especially regarding community engagement. Some project developers first seek to quietly acquire all necessary easements before coming forward publicly. Some seek to grease the skids by first meeting quietly with local decision makers, whether planning staff or locally elected officials. Some choose to start by talking to local media, conducting a public relations campaign, sponsoring local events, funding local causes, and getting to know and be known in the community. Some choose to hire local personnel to build relationships and trust to advance the project.

Regardless of the order, each project involves complex questions of land easement acquisition (a private transaction), technical project development, political engagement, public engagement, and media and public relations. Some developers try to bring a fully developed project quickly to the front and seek to get review and approval before opponents have time to organize effectively. Others seek a slower process to build support with patience and investment. The Exploring Wind Vermillion project still needed to consider most of these traditional components, but also had a goal typically not borne by developers—offering the community significant input and influence outside of the standard planning and decision processes.

To do this, Apex had to balance several simultaneous development activities:

- The acquisition of easements;
- The technical development around interconnections, placement of meteo-

rological towers, project financing, and the like;

- The introduction of the project to decision-makers and residents; and
- Engagement in state-level political activity around proposed legislation affecting energy projects.

Each of these activities influenced local decision maker and resident perceptions. First, community word of land leasing activity, one of the earliest steps needed to assess the feasibility of a project, gets around regardless of the private nature of these conversations. When it does, it is not uncommon for local officials and residents to conclude that the decision about where to site a project has already been made. In Vermillion County, it quickly became the public perception that the project would be built in and around Dana, and opposition in that area quickly formed. As Apex moved into the Exploring Wind approach, the company emphasized that though it had started looking at the area under the traditional development approach, it was changing its plan and wanted to engage in siting location discussions across the county. But the die in people’s minds had likely already been cast.

Second, Apex, along with other wind developers, was engaged in a statewide discussion around proposed legislation that, when first proposed, would have limited local decision-making authority over local energy projects. Some locals felt that this simultaneous statewide activity, which fed a perception that developers want to take away local authority, contradicted Apex’s local and public assertions of interest in engaging the Vermillion County community as a partner in siting decisions. Third, Apex’s early participation in some local meetings left some county commissioners wary of the developer. At the time, these commissioners had recently made a contentious decision about another land use proposal in Vermillion Rise, a local industrial park, where they felt the developer had not been forthcoming or transparent. These simultaneous activities likely conveyed confusion at best and hypocrisy at worst.

## THE “LOCAL CHAMPION” PROBLEM

In a traditional project development process, a developer builds local public support through whatever legal means are necessary. But the traditional development approach does not typically seek to give the public input on fundamental project design decisions. Generally, it is the local government that controls and manages the process (the disposer), while the developer (the proposer) participates in the process and conducts additional influence activities around that process. Apex attempted to do something quite different in Vermillion County: engage the community in co-designing both a process for realizing a project, as well as the project itself.

Apex sought to use messaging and media to convey this different approach. The company created a website that was different from a traditional project website and attempted polling on a variety of questions typically not asked of a community, such as how people would want their portion of project revenues to be spent. Apex retained a nonpartisan facilitation team to improve communication and give up some control over engagement and process. It tried to identify venues and entities within Vermillion County that would be willing to help lead this process design and approach. Candidates included the County Commission, the APC, the Vermillion County Economic Development Council, and the Vermillion County Community Foundation.

But Apex was never able to identify a strong and locally trusted community-based partner willing to help initiate and manage the process. The county commissioners met with the developers and facilitators but declined to handle the matter any differently than they typically would. The APC also undertook a standard process of wind ordinance drafting, public hearings, and review, rather than entertaining the more deliberative process Apex was proposing. The Economic Development Council was only willing to play a role in better understanding the project’s impacts

on the county’s finances, and the Community Foundation was not only too small and understaffed to assist but was also concerned about the apparent conflicts of interest that might emerge if it became too involved. Thus, Apex was left standing alone, trying to advance a novel local process in Vermillion County that would inevitably be viewed as suspect by the community because the developer itself was promoting it. As the attempt at a collaborative process advanced, it became clearer that without a trusted local partner organization to lead the effort, Apex would be unable to encourage participation in an approach that differed so greatly from the familiar and expected contentious approach, however flawed and limited that typical approach might be.

## BALANCING PROCESS AND PROJECT ADVOCACY

The choice and sequence of activities increased the complexity of advocating for and implementing a different kind of process for community engagement. On the one hand, Apex was stepping out far beyond the traditional project development role to advocate for community engagement and interaction around key design elements. On the other hand, Apex was also hoping this process would pave the way for a development opportunity, offering the community greater-than-usual financial benefits to incentivize such an outcome. Because Apex was committed to a different kind of process, where it did not take on the “project advocate” role, its ability to promote the project, build project allies, and conduct the typical public relations and influence strategies was self-constrained. Apex was seeking to avoid those more traditional approaches in the hope that a more inclusive and deliberative problem-solving process would reduce conflict and increase community cohesion, if not lead to agreement. But by doing so, Apex forfeited its ability to actively pursue influence

strategies such as ally-building that might have increased visible local support for the project.

## THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE PROBLEM

Almost all project developers face the challenge of “opposition bias.” That is, those who show up to public meetings are often motivated by fear, perceived potential harm, and opposition. This has been well documented in the public opinion and is called the “spiral of silence theory.”<sup>8</sup>

Although those opposed to a project may only represent a small minority of residents in a jurisdiction, they are often highly motivated to resist change and therefore command greater influence on the ultimate decision. Supporters, especially of private projects, tend to hold less strident views of these projects (i.e., weaker attachment) and, if not afraid of harm, are unlikely to take the time to support a project with little to modest benefits to them.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the loudest, most oppositional voices almost always have greater levels of influence in public processes. In a relatively rural area like Vermillion County, this is compounded by the fact that strong disagreements between neighbors can exact a higher social and psychological cost for those speaking up than they would in more populous and/or transient communities.

In private conversations in Vermillion County, several residents told the facilitation team that although they supported the project generally, since their neighbors did not, they were hesitant to speak publicly, to take the risk of creating more conflict, and furthermore, to erode relationships that might be needed for addressing other issues more important to that individual. Apex sought to invite opponents as well as supporters to open houses, online surveys, and conversations, but it was project opponents who mostly

dominated the county’s official public processes and supporters or those open to wind who participated in private conversations with the facilitators. Theoretically, a different kind of process supported by Apex could have allowed for more diverse voices and engagement of a broader range of views, but that process was never able to be effectively executed, given that the traditional ordinance development process proceeded relatively rapidly and overtook any alternative.

## SITING, SOCIAL SCIENCE, AND IDENTITY CONFLICT

Based on the experience of the project and facilitation teams, as well as a wealth of social science research, Exploring Wind Vermillion sought to apply several theories about the factors that increase public acceptance and interest in the idea of a wind energy project. In each case, the team attempted to integrate these theories into the process design.

**Theory One: If projects give local communities meaningful economic benefits, the communities are more likely to be open to the projects.**

Traditionally, many energy siting issues have been seen as an interest-based, economic allocation problem. Large-scale energy projects of any kind may have concentrated negative impacts (both perceived and measurable), concentrated positive impacts (depending on the type of facility, jobs, economic development, and/or contribution to the local tax base), and other important, but more diffuse, positive impacts (clean, reliable, and/or affordable energy delivered to the grid).<sup>10</sup>

Logically, the more a developer can advance concentrated positive impacts and mitigate concentrated negative impacts, the more likely a project is to be sited in a particular location.

In Vermillion County, Apex offered the community key “concentrated” benefits in the form of influence over project design and the actual siting of the project and specific financial benefits (the community would receive a portion of the project revenues on top of taxes). A key consideration then became whether the local benefits—or exactions as some call them in the land use literature—would be sufficient in the community’s eyes to outweigh the (perceived and measurable) concentrated negative impacts of the project, or at least whether enough voters would find them sufficient.

**Theory Two: If community members have a sense of agency in meaningfully influencing the elements of a project’s design, they are more likely to be open to the project.**

Social science research indicates that people are more likely to accept or be open to a land use outcome if they believe they were fairly involved in the decision-making process, a concept often called “procedural justice.” Local community members tend to perceive processes as fair when they are given the opportunity to help shape a project, rather than simply being “informed” about it.<sup>11</sup>

Partly based on this social science, in Vermillion County, Apex hoped to offer community members a meaningful role in the process of siting and designing the project through informed and deliberative dialogue.

**Theory Three: If members of a community have access to accurate and complete information about wind energy, project benefits, and/or project-specific plans, they are more likely to be open to the project.**

Although the idea that access to science-based information alone is sufficient to change minds or lead to consistent conclusions has lost favor,



renewable energy proponents still believe that some communities reject projects due to unsupported fears simply because they don’t have access to accurate information.

In Vermillion County, Apex attempted to ensure that all interested residents had access to accurate information about renewables, the company, the process, and the project through a variety of means, including digital, print, phone, and in person. The company used traditional and new media to attempt to make accurate information available and to answer all incoming questions from community members. It also brought in independent experts to do the same, based on the interests

and concerns voiced by community members. Finally, it used novel tools, like its GIS storymap-based “Siting Survey,” to give interested individuals the ability to integrate information into their understanding by interacting with it.

In the end, none of these theories produced an increased openness to a wind project in Vermillion County, or even increased interest in participating in a collaborative process. This may be because the idea of wind energy in Vermillion County fell victim to a common fate of many land use projects—it became intermingled with identity conflicts.

There are many examples of this tendency, both within and outside the energy space. It is not uncommon, for example, for upscale neighborhoods to oppose the introduction of a Walmart but support a Target, even though the practical local impacts are quite similar (traffic, noise, etc.).\*

Energy projects that impose a dramatic change to the local landscape, especially wind projects, can encroach on residents’ sense of place, space, and home. While some may see the turbines as elegant technology representing progress, economic development, and emissions reductions, others may see turbines as a blight on their landscape representing industrialization, economic gain for outsiders, a subsidized form of inefficient energy, and a global solution imposed on a local, helpless community (i.e., populism vs. plutocracy).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, even generous offers of more control over project siting and revenue-sharing may fall short if the conflict is more fundamentally one of identity than of interests.

Furthermore, and unfortunately, energy projects are increasingly viewed through a partisan lens. Nationally, although a majority of U.S. adults think the government is doing too little to reduce the effects of climate change (some 67% of those polled), only 39% of those identifying as Republican support this view while 90% of Democrats do.<sup>13</sup>

When asked if renewables should be prioritized over fossil fuels, 77% of respondents agreed, as did a majority (62%) of those identifying as Republican or leaning Republican. But within that Republican cohort, more conservative, older, and male respondents showed the least support for that statement.

The Vermillion County polling data suggests that opposition to the Apex project was driven, at least in part, by these types of identity conflicts, some of which may match to partisan perceptions. More men than women typically responded, “Wind should not go here,” which lines up with national polling data around gender and views of renewables. When Apex’s polling attempted to assess how much various strategies (e.g., providing “good neighbor” payments, granting influence over project design, allowing residents to direct local giving, etc.) might affect public support for a wind project, results showed that even among the most favored strategies, about 50% of respondents stated that they “would make no difference.” These results suggest that identity and values-based factors may be driving opposition. Perhaps most telling is that when asked, “Is there anything else a project could offer that would increase your support for wind energy in Vermillion County?” a number of respondents wrote “Nothing.”

It is hard to pinpoint one single reason why these approaches didn’t work in Vermillion County. Although identity conflict seemed to supersede some of the theories motivating both Apex’s and the facilitators’ approach to a more collaborative process, we cannot say for certain that identity conflict is why the process did not succeed. The fact that these processes did not succeed, however, will hopefully encourage future creative approaches to collaborative land use decision making.

\* Experience relayed to a facilitation team member by a major Rocky Mountain region developer.



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## FACILITATOR'S REFLECTION: CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

For many decades, public-sector facilitators like us have advocated for more inclusive, engaging, and meaningful processes through which affected stakeholders can learn, share, debate, and influence outcomes of projects and policies that affect them. The Vermillion County process put this advocacy to work on the ground in a robust way.

As noted earlier, much of the literature on public decision making and siting related to project development theorizes that engaging communities by sharing information from trusted sources, providing economic benefits, dialoguing in collaborative processes, and granting residents a direct say—that is, agency—in key elements of project design will benefit both the community and new project development. Alas, Apex's Exploring Wind Vermillion offers a sobering lesson. Even the best of intentions and process design, a developer serious about changing business as usual, and a sincere intention to operationalize evidence-based best practices were not enough to result in a different outcome—an approved, tailored project with a satisfied community—than more traditional and contentious processes.

From community leadership's perspective, the outcome might be just right: a new solar project but no new wind project "blighting" the horizon. From a developer perspective, risk, resources, and time have been spent without a successful outcome. From a national perspective, there is one less wind project in development to ease our dependence on fossil fuels for both emissions reductions and for greater energy independence.

In final reflection, we facilitators draw three broad conclusions. First, the entry point for innovative processes is critical. This report talks extensively about timing, sequencing, local sponsors, and the like. But the entry point—when, with whom, by whom—is essential to the trajectory of a project. Second, instigating collaboration takes more effort than achieving it. Because no one within the county was asking for an innovative siting process, let alone a wind project, the facilitation team could have shifted to a much more intensive engagement—been on the ground more, built more relationships, and worked harder to instigate and influence a good process. Finally, although not successful in this case, robust community engagement for successful project siting takes significant time and resources. If the United States is to meet its decarbonization goals, it will need more wind, solar, and transmission infrastructure in a hurry. It will also need more experiments like this one, more resources on the ground to engage communities early and often, more state and national clarity on backstops or bounds for how and when to say no, innovations in permitting, and continued evolution of project communications, collaborative processes, project contributions, and project design. Setting national and state goals is one thing, but permitting projects one by one on the ground is quite another.



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

## COMMIT TO YOUR STRATEGY EARLY AND HOLD TO IT BOLDLY

In negotiation theory generally, and the prisoner's dilemma problem specifically, it is well known that early moves seen as "competitive" or "antagonistic" can easily swamp future moves intended to be "collaborative" or "cooperative."<sup>14</sup>

This seems true in Vermillion County.

We learned that status quo strategies, or the perception of such, can easily swamp the best of intentions to engage a community in a collaborative fashion. Thus, we recommend that should a developer choose to pursue an alternative, more collaborative strategy, they do so as early as possible. In the Vermillion County case, several specific examples were cited by local officials or residents suggesting that Apex was not "serious" about collaboration. These examples included the work at the Indiana legislature on the bill that would limit local control, the early seeking of easements in the western part of the county, and the decisions about whether or not to show up at early commission meetings. In the end, Apex was often criticized by proponents for not trying to actively shape the narrative and by opponents for not being present and active enough at public meetings.

No project developer can control how a community views that developer's actions

elsewhere in the country (i.e., the internet tells all), but one can work very strategically and carefully to lay out a plan to build trust. Signaling cooperation might include such moves as:

- Postponing easement acquisition to reach out to key decision makers first;
- Not developing project maps with a proposed project site early in the process;
- Explaining the intent and process to local groups, where possible, prior to creating more formal materials like websites and fact sheets;
- Identifying and bringing forward a local process sponsor quite early;
- Stating the clear intent of wanting to build a project in the area, but an openness to where, under what conditions, and how it will be sited, as determined through a collaborative process (and stating it over and over and in all messaging);
- Putting the facilitators on the ground more frequently and regularly; and
- Maintaining a more vocal, active, and repeated presence on the ground, extolling the collaborative approach.

While unknowable from the Vermillion County experiment, we think these actions might have helped win (or at least cajole) some more hearts and minds. A developer can always revert to a more traditional political and

public relations campaign approach if needed, but it is quite difficult to do the opposite.

## **PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO SITE HISTORY AND CONTEXT AND BUILD TRUST**

When developers enter a site where they wish to develop a project, they must recognize that they are entering a place that is embedded in a history, a culture, and a background of politics, past economic development failures and successes, relationships, and internal cleavages. Apex was aware from its early analysis that Vermillion County could be a difficult place to develop. The county had relatively recently, like many other rural areas, made a substantial political switch from conservative but leaning Democratic through old labor union ties to conservative and strongly leaning Republican. The county had faced several setbacks in launching new projects at Vermillion Rise while also expressing satisfaction with large existing industry in the form of the Elanco plant and the Duke coal-fired power plant. Vermillion Rise was the result of an effort to clean up, reuse, and expand economic development in a very large section of the county taken forcibly by the federal government in World War II for chemical munitions, but it was a site that left many with seared memories of displacement from home and farmstead. Dana had often felt ignored or outvoted by the more populated town of Clinton farther south and east. Some residents tended to resent highly successful businesses, even if those businesses were based locally.

Although a developer cannot be expected to heal some or all wounds in the community in which it develops, it must be aware of the social context where it lands and consider how to tend to or mitigate some of those existing cleavages to avoid becoming another worn piece of plywood in the local buzzsaw

of community conflict. Thus, we recommend paying very close attention to trust building with an explicit strategy to do so in a methodical and structured way. As the moniker says, projects move at the speed of trust.

One definition of trust involves other actors perceiving the proponent as authentic, reliable, competent, and possessing good will toward them. Reliability and competence can be somewhat easily quantified and measured: Does the proponent provide documents on time when they say they will? Do they show up when asked to show up? Do they display technical and permitting competence by bringing in engineers, communications, and others who demonstrate experience and expertise? Any developer must ensure the most basic project management and good communication skills are exhibited over and over to demonstrate reliability and competency and build a measure of trust. When Apex came to some meetings but not others, already skeptical actors perceived the company to be unreliable. The two other criteria of trust under this framework are inef-fable and more difficult to measure: authenticity and goodwill. By pursuing a statewide policy push for reducing local control while offering a process for more local input and collaboration, Apex struck decision makers in the community as disingenuous or not authentic (or at least this behavior provided a fact pattern that reinforced the community's prior beliefs about wind developers). Skilled project managers with extensive prior experience attended many public meetings but may have messaged a more sales- and influence-driven approach. Thus, it is possible that in an already skeptical environment, Apex's ability to convey authenticity and goodwill was quickly eroded. Might it have made a difference if the company had had a different lead on the ground? Would a decision to stay out of state policy have reduced mistrust? We cannot say for sure, but we can say with some surety that such "mixed" messages did not help shape a positive view of the collaborative process.

## **OBTAIN EARLY ENDORSEMENT OF THE PROCESS, NOT THE PROJECT**

**A**pex intentionally did not ask for a strong endorsement of the project as it set out to launch Exploring Vermillion. But the company was never able to obtain a clear and definitive response from the county commissioners (or others with influence in the county) about simply supporting a better process.

The company and the facilitators both met with elected officials and key staff of boards early on, and the strongest message received was individually, yes, we'll listen to your ideas. Relatively quickly, however, the county decided to develop a wind ordinance through its own traditional meetings and public hearings. In retrospect, it might have been better to make the "pitch" for a better and different process publicly, boldly, and early, and then ask the elected body—in this case the County Commission—for an endorsement of that process (not the project). If that endorsement was not received, it may have been best to consider whether this was a viable project site at all, or whether a more traditional, status quo approach would be more warranted. Without an endorsement for an alternative process, Apex and the facilitators were left to try to stand one up on their own, which was not successful, and the community dialogue, such as it was, was carried out through the existing APC ordinance public process.

The challenge in general is that traditional local decision-making processes are not typically established for collaborative enterprises. Many local processes are governed by the nineteenth-century Roberts Rules of Order, intended to get to a decision in a methodical and sequenced way but without easy means or formal steps to explore interests and options. Public comment periods provide forums for critics and position-taking, not problem solving. "You propose and we dispose"

institutional processes tend to exacerbate an "us and them" mentality, creating proponents and opponents, and reducing opportunities for mutually exploring an idea, project, or approach.<sup>15</sup>

The Apex process offered a different way—more exploratory, engaging, and interest-driven—but it was not able to receive the support it needed outside of Apex to proceed successfully.

## **IDENTIFY AND SECURE A LOCAL PROCESS CHAMPION**

**F**inding a local proponent and convenor or sponsor of a different process is difficult but essential. A local process sponsor could be a community college or academic institution, extension office, community foundation, local board, or committee established by elected officials. As noted in our findings, Apex tried to identify entities within Vermillion County that might be willing to help lead the process design and approach while remaining neutral about the outcome and the project's merits itself. Candidates included the County Commission, the APC, the Economic Development Council, the County Council, the League of Women Voters, and the Community Foundation. It is possible that having one of the county bodies more focused on economic development (i.e., the Economic Development Council) or the long-term fiscal health of the county (i.e., the County Council) lead the process would have led to more credence and time being given to exploring wind energy in Vermillion County in the context of its long-term fiscal implications, especially in relation to other factors like the foreseeable closure of the Duke coal-fired plant. If the goal was to engage in a longer-term engagement and education process, the county extension could perhaps have played a role. It is possible that cultivating a process partner early, even before seeking endorsement from county leaders, might have eased the path for



at least one county commissioner to say yes to a different process.

Nonetheless, Apex was not able to identify a strong and locally trusted community-based partner that was willing to help initiate and manage the process. As the attempt at a collaborative process advanced, it became clearer that without a trusted local partner organization to lead the effort, Apex would be unable to encourage participation in an approach that differed so greatly from the familiar and more antagonistic approach, especially as an actor with a clear interest in a particular outcome.

## CAREFULLY SEQUENCE AND COORDINATE BUSINESS AND PUBLIC PROCESSES

This is perhaps one of the more challenging aspects of establishing an effective collaborative process—sequencing and integrating business needs and processes with public interest, perceptions, and processes. For instance, typically, a developer needs to gain land control or easements in any project early to determine even the basic viability of a project. At the same time, especially in a small community, word travels fast and quickly. However “private” land easement conversations may be, chances are that neighbors will talk to each other, those

neighbors will talk to others, and so forth. So even in the spirit of preliminary easement acquisition with no commitment to a site, perceptions about where a project should or might go can become firmly set early. The Vermillion County project team thought that siting would be the most difficult conversation they would have to have with the community, so they introduced the opportunity for the community to weigh in on siting questions later in the process. This was intentional—the rationale was to meet residents where they were—seeking to identify and address their concerns about public health, noise, sound, wildlife, and potential other impacts before engaging them in siting conversations.

In retrospect, it might have been best to start with the most fundamental question about the project—where it was going to go. Perhaps it would have worked better to bring in other aspects of the project, including taxes, community benefits, and answers to common questions after the community had been given the chance to weigh in on the project’s location and design. If that had been done, easements might have referenced the collaborative process themselves in writing from the beginning. Land agents might have been trained in conveying the broader idea of community engagement in explaining why they were seeking a specific lease, and Apex might have been more public and vocal about the intent and purpose of easement acquisition early to be as transparent and clear as possible. By delaying the siting conversation, the question of location got

delayed and swamped by the APC process, the commission's hands-off-until-the-end approach, and public controversy (e.g., the Dana town hall). Based on this experience, we recommend finding ways to engage the community very early in siting exercises. A developer can be forthcoming about their needs and constraints (the wind resource, proximity to interconnection, avoidance of wetlands, etc.) to help the community wrestle with the siting choices themselves, but they should begin this conversation as early as possible.

All that said, the joint siting exercise conducted in Vermillion County was instructive. Joint siting exercises can allow the public to engage in the heart of the matter—project location and design. They can give the community a chance to engage in problem solving, exploration, and “doing,” versus just receiving information, listening, or being the subject of persuasion. They also invite the community to tackle something concrete and physical, rather than the more complex issues of adverse impacts and financial benefits. This kind of workshop approach to siting and imagining options is well documented in the planning literature through public charettes and other tools.

Whatever the exact sequence of activities, the business and public process strategies must be strategic, well thought out, integrated, and likely shared more publicly in a collaborative process than might be desired for business reasons, to increase transparency and the likelihood of gaining a modicum of trust.

## **BE CAUTIOUS OF PROJECTS WHERE THERE IS NOT A BACKSTOP TO A LOCAL “NO”**

**I**n an increasingly contentious national political environment, we all long for more collaborative, cooperative processes to solve some of our biggest problems.

But in our experience as mediators, goodwill and desire for cooperation and advancing mutual interests are insufficient to incentivize collaboration. The reality of the Vermillion County wind project is that the county suffered no visible or immediate consequences for saying no to the project. Local control was absolute, and the “no” was unbounded, even more so by the time the local wind ordinance, perfectly legal, was passed. The county's tax base would remain the same at least for a decade or so. Existing facilities would continue to produce jobs and taxes. The landscape would remain the same mix of small towns, forests, fields, and meadows with just a few visual impacts on the horizon, and only in a few places in the county. Furthermore, local conflict, neighbor mad at neighbor, and local public meetings filled with rancor (except at the developer) were avoided. As we know from the risk literature, to further exacerbate the development challenge, potential losses are usually more heavily weighted than potential gains.

Apex offered significant gains as compared to other development projects in local influence and participation and direct royalties or payments to the county. But compared to comfort and familiarity of the status quo, Apex could not compete. But Apex is hardly alone.

This is a common problem in siting any large energy facility, from a gas-fired power plant to a large-scale wind project to a transmission line. Therefore, in many states, the backstop has been created by statewide energy facility siting boards that set out rules and can to some degree overrule local opposition. In Indiana, this is not the case—and ironically, the state legislature had recently failed to pass a bill that would have created such a backstop. In Vermillion County and counties across Indiana, then, without social license from the local community, siting is not possible. Without a more favorable social and political context, it might be foolhardy to pursue future projects in locales without a reasonably strong legal or statewide backstop—and yet, developer advocacy for such backstops at the state level may rankle skeptical locals such that a proj-

ect could no longer advance in that county without such a backstop. This is a fundamental dilemma: can you bound local control and advocate for meaningful, influential local influence? The answer in Vermillion, at least, appears to be no.

## THINK TWICE ABOUT RUNNING “TWO HORSES”

There was one other factor at play in Vermillion County that might have put Apex in competition with itself. Apex was pursuing a large-scale solar project at the same time as the wind project. Many of the same Apex team members were involved in both siting efforts. The solar project moved more easily and readily through the political and permitting process. To be sure, solar tends to have fewer visible impacts and is generally faced with less siting contention than wind nationwide. But Apex itself offered the county a way out of just “no.” The county was given the opportunity to support renewables and local economic development by supporting the solar project. Local elected officials could avoid the accusation of “always saying no” or being “against clean energy” by throwing their support behind solar versus wind. This support cost elected officials little in political capital and staved off their detractors’ heftier criticisms. By offering this easy “yes” on solar, Apex inadvertently made wind an easier “no.”

## CONSIDER DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO GET FROM “IF” TO “HOW”

Most interest-based negotiations advancing mutual solutions are successful when they explore how to do something, as opposed to whether to act. “How” questions—where, when, how big, how located, how managed, how mitigated—allow

for a myriad of interests and options to be explored and a potential package approach that can appeal to or at least mitigate many people’s concerns. “Whether” questions tend to pose stark choices and drive people into corners of support or opposition. Thus, it behooves developers to think about the moves that might increase trust (as noted above) and help move a project from a “whether” question to a “how” question. Apex tried to do this, in part, as described in the process and method section, but it failed to shift the narrative in Vermillion County.

One could argue that the county provided the “how” by developing a county ordinance, but in the Vermillion County case, the ordinance was a de facto “no” to the question of “whether” through excessive setbacks and other requirements. In seeking to complete its process before an ordinance was drafted, Apex sought to invert the process such that the “how” could be explored before the “whether,” though in practice the two got mixed up with each other.

What else could have been done to initiate a “how” conversation before the “whether” conversation in Vermillion County? Perhaps some county-based, pre-project planning might have answered the question of whether wind energy had a place in the county, prior to Apex expending capital and resources there. Perhaps offering the county the opportunity to jointly hire facilitators to lead a pre-project process, rather than pre-selecting such facilitators on the company’s dime, might have increased the facilitators’ effectiveness and trustworthiness. Maybe Apex might have invested earlier and for longer in slow, steady education about wind power, respectfully but directly debunking myths and misperceptions. Maybe the company could have invested earlier in the creation and use of visual or noise modeling simulations to give residents a more concrete sense of what a project might look like to help residents take their imaginations beyond what was already held in their minds’ eye and fears.

Of course, it is important to note that Exploring Wind Vermillion was only one experiment, and an imperfect one at that. We cannot



know, from this one experience, whether any of these suggestions might have made sufficient difference to lead to a different outcome. We are also aware that although it is tempting to think that better planning will lead to better project siting, better planning does not necessarily lead to actual projects. A county or a state ruling out certain areas (due to impact concerns) can be prudent and can also drive development to areas where it is more technically feasible, causes less adverse impacts, and may be acceptable in regard to community values and character.

But at the same time, these processes can also eliminate projects before they have a chance to begin. Northeastern towns and counties with a strong acceptance of planning abound with local plans touting the need to reduce carbon emissions and site renewables. But these same locales have often been the very place of highly contentious siting battles around viewsheds, community character, and adverse impacts to wildlife, property value, and tourism. The Orton Foundation, for example, sponsored an elaborate local process after a small, proposed wind project on the shoulder of beloved Mount Equinox pitted a recently completed comprehensive plan against the project, and citizen against citizen, and village against village. This effort, though equally committed to finding a more constructive process for making these decisions, still resulted in the abandonment of the wind project. Conversely, many of the states with the greatest number of wind projects, Texas being one, tend to be opposed to rigorous planning and zoning and have little planning in place. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that this is where projects are getting built.



## APPENDIX 1

# ANALYSIS OF VALUES SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

## Facilitator Report: Themes and Takeaways from Interviews and Surveys, August 2021

### Background

Apex Clean Energy, a renewable energy company, is exploring the potential for solar and wind energy projects in Vermillion County, Indiana. Apex retained a team of facilitators—Patrick Field of the Consensus Building Institute, and Mallory Huggins and Brad Sperber of the Keystone Policy Center (collectively referred to as “we” or “us”)—to help Apex work with the community to consider a collaborative process for determining whether wind energy should be developed in Vermillion County, and, if so, how a project could be designed to reflect the community’s interests and values. This process began with facilitator interviews with Vermillion County residents and an accompanying survey with similar questions conducted by Apex.

As facilitators, we are serving as an independent and nonpartisan resource to help county residents and Apex engage with one another in a collaborative and productive way as they deliberate about wind energy in Vermillion County. We have no stake in the outcome of the process or the ultimate determination made about wind in the county. We are all bound by a professional code of conduct to behave in a nonpartisan fashion and work on

behalf of all stakeholders involved.

Our hope has been that a collaborative process could allow participants to explore ideas and options, identify key concerns and issues, and seek to arrive at a decision that is fair, transparent, evidence-based, and reflective of the community’s interests and values.

Through interviews, we began to introduce ourselves to the community, better understand Vermillion County residents and their values and interests, and explore how a collaborative process might be useful in informing decisions about whether and how a wind energy project might be developed in the county. In parallel, Apex created a survey to solicit feedback on similar questions related to community values and wind energy, as well as recommendations for a collaborative process. The survey was made available on Apex’s “Exploring Wind Vermillion” website and on paper at various events. The following report incorporates themes and takeaways from both the interviews and the surveys.

We made this report available to all interviewees and Apex staff at the same time. Apex did not review the draft. We asked for feedback on the draft report from Vermillion County residents in July 2021 and did not receive any additional comments or feedback.

### Participants

We interviewed 26 people between April and June 2021. Interviews were conducted in person when the team was in the county in early

June 2021, by phone, or by video conference, and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. We spoke with landowners, farmers, engineers, business owners, attorneys, doctors, parents, grandparents, advocates, elected and appointed officials, and people active in various civic organizations. About one-third of the individuals we spoke with were women; two-thirds were men. A little more than half of the individuals we spoke with were from the southern part of Vermillion County; one-fifth were from the middle of the county, near Dana; one-fifth were from the northern part of the county; and a few participants were from outside the county. At least half of the interviewees were born and raised in Vermillion County. Over half of the interviewees were over 60 years old, about 10 were between 40 and 60, and only two were under 40.

Although we did not ask interviewees to state outright their position on wind energy, our impression is that most people we talked with (at least two-thirds) were supportive of wind energy for the county; the remaining individuals were against wind energy for the county or neutral/still deciding.

The 50 survey respondents were not asked for their age or where they live, but just over half of respondents said they had lived in Vermillion County for more than 40 years; one-fifth said they had lived in the county for 21 to 40 years; one-fifth said they had lived in the county for 5 to 20 years; and only two had lived in the county for under five years. Seven of the survey participants were also interviewed.

As with the interviews, survey participants were not asked to state outright their position on wind energy, but based on responses to survey questions, we estimate that about half of respondents were neutral, undecided, or still doing their own research on wind energy; one-quarter were against wind energy in Vermillion County; one-eighth were supportive of wind energy for Vermillion County; and one-eighth did not indicate their preferences.

## Limitations

The interviews and surveys *are not statistically representative*. What we summarize below represents input from community members who agreed to talk with us after being introduced by another party and/or who chose to fill out a survey. For a variety of reasons, some residents chose not to be interviewed after being offered the opportunity.

While the surveys represent a diversity of viewpoints, the individuals who spoke with us for interviews tended to skew supportive of wind energy, older, and based in the southern part of the county. If the collaborative process continues, we are interested in hearing feedback from individuals who have not yet made up their mind about wind energy for Vermillion County, are skeptical or against wind energy for the county, and are younger than 40.

## Themes and Takeaways

**B**elow, we summarize key themes and takeaways from our interviews with community members and from the survey responses Apex received. The sections below roughly track with the questions asked in interviews.

### Life in Vermillion County

All interviewees and survey respondents (later referred to collectively as “respondents” or “participants”) were asked to share what they value about life in Vermillion County. Overwhelmingly, respondents praised the sense of community in the county and the rural feel, saying that Vermillion County is a great place to raise a family. Many liked that, despite the rural feel, the county still has many towns. Respondents also emphasized their appreciation for the clean environment, open landscapes, peacefulness, low cost of living, and hard-working residents. The community was described as safe and wholesome. Many

**“You can’t put a price on this kind of lifestyle.”**

individuals we spoke with strongly value their family's deep roots in the community and love living close to several generations and/or branches of their family. Many also emphasized the importance of community cohesion and positive relationships among neighbors.

Most respondents spoke about Vermillion County's unique geography—"we're a long, skinny county"—and of the way that geogra-

**"It's almost like two counties."**

phy can lead to a feeling of two distinct regions, north and south. Several respondents referred to

Route 36 as Vermillion County's "Mason-Dixon line." Because the county is home to two different school districts, and because residents in the north tend to shop, dine out, and work in Covington or Danville, Illinois, while residents in the south tend to shop, dine out, or work in Terre Haute, some respondents felt there was a divide between the two parts of the county. Several people, however, observed that this "divide" has softened over the years.

Several interviewees remarked on the importance of private property rights in the county. These interviewees noted that landowners tend to have a "live and let live" attitude toward other landowners and respect that each has the right to determine the best use for their property. However, other interviewees and survey respondents expressed the importance of county-wide standards to protect residents' health, welfare, and safety.

## History of economic development and impact

A few interviewees noted that Vermillion County residents have lived with the presence of and risks from various industries for decades, including impacts from the coal-fired power plants and coal mines, the paper mill, pharmaceu-

tical manufacturing, and transmission lines, as well as from the explosives, nerve agent,

and heavy water that were produced at the Newport Chemical Depot. These interviewees noted that those risks were borne at a different time and in

a different era and observed that it can be easier to live with a familiar existing risk than to take on new and uncertain

risks. One interviewee noted that Dana was significantly affected by a different industry many decades ago: the acquisition of major lands by the U.S. government during WWII severely affected the residency base in and around Dana.

In our time in the county, we observed that there are some visual impacts scattered across the county, visible from state and county highways, including grain elevators, smokestacks from major facilities, communication towers, and electric transmission towers and lines. Siting a new wind energy facility would impose new visual impact at new scales in both height and breadth.

## The future of the community

Overall, respondents value the "quality of life" they experience in Vermillion County. They want to see that quality of life maintained and to see the county prosper and thrive. For some, quality of life is about economic development, jobs, and the county's ability to retain its younger population. Some respondents were worried about job prospects for future generations. As one person said, "It's rather bleak at the moment with job opportunities." For others, it's about preserving the local spirit by

keeping things friendly, rural, and quiet, without an influx of new people and the strain on infrastructure that

a growing population and new industries can create. As one respondent put it, "I would rather stay in a place that retains its values than prioritize money over values."

**"We're more afraid of small risks we can see than huge risks we can't see."**

**"We need to make it possible for bright young people to remain here or move here after college."**

Many people expressed that the county appears to be in good fiscal health at the present time. However, several people expressed concern about population decline in the county, declining enrollment at schools, and the lack of adequate jobs for younger people. Several respondents recognized that the closure of Duke's Cayuga Generating Station in 2028 will reduce employment opportunities in the county and impact the tax base. Many respondents are interested in economic development for the county, both to replace the revenue and jobs from Cayuga Station and to retain the younger generation, but they also observed that the county can be skeptical of change. These respondents pointed out that several new ventures have struggled to take off in the county, citing the recent unsuccessful attempt to build a hog farm at Vermillion RISE as one example. Other interviewees and survey respondents noted that they were interested in economic development like solar or expansion of existing industries but were very concerned about wind energy development in particular. They expressed specific concerns about the potential visual, health, and wildlife impacts that are unique to wind energy.

Although Apex has not declared a particular project area, many interviewees believe that the project is intended to be sited in and around Dana.

## Communication and decision-making in Vermillion County

We asked interviewees how decisions that impact the entire county are generally made. Several people explained that the politics of the county have changed significantly in the last decade or so, shifting from leaning Democratic to leaning Republican. Respondents expressed varying levels of trust in existing local institutions and boards. Most respondents noted that the County Commission remains an important center of discussion and decisions for the county. A few interviewees noted that because, in Indiana, county commissions handle policy and county councils handle budgets, it can be difficult to address

issues holistically across fiscal, development, planning, and county character considerations. We observed that views of wind energy development in the county do not necessarily fall in line with political affiliations.

Respondents observed that alongside this shift in politics in the county overall came a shift toward online civic discourse, sped along by the decreasing circulation of local newspapers. Several people said that many county-wide conversations happen on Facebook, especially for residents between about 30 and 65. Younger generations tend to engage more on other social media channels like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, while older residents and/or farmers still tend to communicate about important community decisions in person over meals (at home or in restaurants). Respondents acknowledged that unless there is a significant decision being made, few people tend to participate in official public meetings.

Many of the respondents expressed their desire for community cohesion and their respect for their neighbors. Some said they were reluctant to engage publicly in dialogue about wind energy, even if they feel strongly about it, because they do not want to cause or deepen community divides.

## Questions about wind energy

When asked about what they would need to know about wind energy to feel equipped to contribute to a community process on the topic, respondents collectively raised several questions about wind turbines/wind energy:

- How would wildlife like hawks, eagles, and vultures be affected?
- How would livestock be affected?

**The last few years "didn't do us any good with respect to the political/cultural divide in the county."**

- What would be the auditory impacts of the turbines? How loud are they, and at what distance?
- What would be the visual impact of the turbines (flicker, shadow, lights at night, etc.)? How would they affect the night sky?
- Would there be any impacts to human health due to vibrations, noise, or other factors? For example, do turbines create infrasound, and how might that affect people, including children?
- What would happen to the turbines after they are decommissioned? Who is responsible for decommissioning, and what measures could guarantee that those obligations would be fulfilled? Can the turbines be recycled?
- What would happen if a turbine needed to be repaired? Who would be affected and how?
- What would be the physical footprint of a project? In particular, how much cropland might roads and project infrastructure take up?
- What would be the economic impact on the county? Overall, who would stand to benefit from a project and who might be negatively impacted?
  - How would a project impact the tax base?
  - How would a project impact school funding? Would the impact on North Vermillion and South Vermillion schools be the same?
  - How would a project impact property values in close proximity to the turbines?
  - Would the presence of turbines/wind energy attract or discourage other industries?
  - How will the closure of Duke's Cayuga Station affect property taxes and tax revenue in the county, particularly for North Vermillion schools?
  - How much money would someone get for having an easement with a

turbine? Would neighbors or those who can hear or see the turbines be compensated?

- Would a wind energy project in Vermillion County lower local electricity bills?
- Is wind economical without government subsidies?

Respondents do not necessarily agree on who is best equipped to answer these questions, though some expressed frustration that information about wind energy is spreading widely on Facebook and in informal conversation without clarity on where the information is coming from. Many people expressed interest in hearing from other communities that host wind projects, and in visiting some of those projects to better understand the size and visual

and auditory impacts of the turbines. Some respondents were interested in hearing

**“Solar and wind are likely the future, but we shouldn't jump into it wholeheartedly.”**

from independent experts such as economists from Baker Tilly or experts from nearby universities, though it might be hard to find a single source of information that the whole community would trust. Respondents encouraged Apex to share as much detail as possible about its history and its plans.

## Relationship with Apex

Respondents were asked to reflect on what they would want to know about Apex as a company and how they would assess if Apex were acting in a constructive, good-faith, and community-centered way. Many respondents emphasized the importance of transparency, honest communication, consistency, and follow-through.

Some respondents expressed skepticism about Apex's willingness to proceed in a collaborative fashion due to past interactions: the company is already working with landowners to sign leases; the company lobbied for a state bill related to wind ordinances, which would have ceded some measure of

local control; and Apex representatives came to some but not all public meetings and answered some but not all questions asked of them. Some interviewees expressed doubt that an out-of-state, major corporation could be trusted to do right by a small, mostly rural county. For Apex to be trusted, several respondents said it is important for representatives to be present in the county and for staff to be transparent, honest, and consistent. If a project were built, some respondents called for good wages and good community partnership from the company.

## A credible, collaborative process

In interviews, we explained that we have been exploring the potential of developing a collaborative, deliberative process through which community members and Apex learn together about wind energy and Vermillion County, engage in dialogue and idea generation, and ultimately determine if and under what conditions a wind energy project might be a good fit for Vermillion County. If so, the community would remain engaged in project development to ensure that the project benefits the community and reflects the community's values to the extent possible.

We talked through this idea and solicited feedback from respondents. Some respondents have no interest in a collaborative process of any kind; they do not want Apex to build any project in the county. Some respondents are comfortable with Apex developing solar projects in the county but were firmly opposed to any process or project related to wind energy. In some cases, this was because an individual was opposed to wind energy altogether; in other cases, an individual was supportive of wind energy but did not want it in Vermillion County.

Other respondents were open to the idea of a process to explore wind energy in the county. Some were very interested in better informing the community about the benefits and drawbacks of wind energy, drawing on experts.

Some respondents felt very strongly that community members should do their own research and try to learn. Respondents encouraged any process to engage with the entire county, not just the north or just the south.

When asked about what kinds of people should be involved in a community process that engages with Apex, most respondents emphasized the importance of diversity, calling for participation from people of all ages, genders, occupations, and locations within the county. Respondents recommended we talk to clergy, business owners, farmers, informal county leaders, homeowners, high school students, teachers, local extension agents, 4H leaders, etc. Some respondents felt strongly that elected officials should be involved in any process; others felt strongly that they should not be involved. Some respondents suggested that we focus on individuals who have not yet made up their minds for or against wind energy. Some suggested that personnel from IEA and White Construction and landowners be involved, while others expressed concern that anyone who stands to benefit directly from a project would be biased and thus cannot participate in a process with an open mind.

**"I don't want my friends to be stuck with [turbines] if they don't want them."**

Overwhelmingly, respondents talked about the importance of prioritizing input from those who stand to be most affected by any project in terms of proximity. One interviewee stated, for instance: "I am looking out for the property owner with an acre or two, who won't be able to lease their land or benefit directly but is going to have to stare at a turbine from their property."

Respondents who were open to engaging in a collaborative process were interested in learning more about how a project could benefit the community—for instance, through royalties, by funding or enabling broadband infrastructure through the turbines, and/or by funding a community recycling program.

## What's Next?

### Facilitator recommendations

We believe that the community might benefit from a deliberative and collaborative process to explore the potential for wind energy in Vermillion County. That said, we recognize that some community members may be experiencing resource limitations and process fatigue after a spring and summer of town hall meetings and County Commission and Area Planning Committee (APC) meetings on the topic. We also recognize the importance of a foundation of trust, and not all community members may yet (if ever) trust Apex, the facilitators, one another, or a specific authority or organization that might serve as a local convener. Many community members remain very wary of creating additional divides in the community.

Many people who were interviewed or filled out a survey expressed interest in exploring a process to further consider wind energy. In response to that interest as well as potential wariness of a process from others in the community, we recommend focusing on information-sharing, idea generation, and trust-building for the next few months, rather than launching into a deliberative process with an assigned community advisory group.

If the community is open to it, we propose that we facilitators work with the community and Apex to:

- Begin to answer the community's questions about wind energy by first determining which people, sources, and/or experiences the community finds most credible and helpful
- Better understand the county's fiscal status, including how the closure of Cayuga Station will impact the county and how a wind project might impact the county's finances
- Explore siting options in the county, including which areas would be more

or less desirable for a wind project, and consider siting characteristics that reflect the community's interests and values

We suggest that these efforts lead up to a public workshop or short series of workshops in the fall, which we would hope to co-convene with county partners. Our goal is to supplement—not hinder or in any way interfere with—the thorough process the APC is undertaking right now.

We would first recommend bringing together interested Vermillion County residents, organizations, businesses, and officials to talk about pros and cons of wind development in the county and to share more information from trusted sources to address the questions that have been raised. The workshop would focus on learning and information-sharing to give all participants a chance to learn more and have their questions answered in a more formal and participatory setting. The structure might include small group discussions to determine key questions, presentations, posterboards, and informal "stations" with a chance to talk to a variety of experts on noise, wildlife, or other issues.

Our hope is that this first informational workshop would lead to a second one wherein community members would engage with one another more directly in large and small groups and informal, real-time polling. Depending on what happens over the summer with a wind ordinance and what comes out of a first workshop, this could mean:

- A visioning exercise to consider wind development in light of a broader sense of what residents want in Vermillion County in the next 5, 10, or 20 years—considering whether and how wind fits into that;
- A ranking of impacts to identify which are most important to residents;
- A specific siting exercise that seeks to refine community principles for siting and identify more preferred locations for actual development (in the event that a wind project does proceed);



- A specific exercise on how a prospective royalty payment might best be used by the county;
- Group deliberation on the structure and goals of a collaborative process should one commence; and/or:
- Deliberation on specific elements of a wind ordinance, should the APC or the County Commission want that feedback.

We plan to refine these ideas through additional dialogue with the community and hope you will collaborate with us and help guide this effort as the process evolves.

## Your feedback

Although this report is now final as we move to additional kinds of engagement, we still welcome feedback from residents on the following questions:

- Are there important perspectives or facts that aren't mentioned in this report?
- Would you recommend any resources for learning more about specific topics?
- Do you have suggestions for how the community can make a decision about wind power in a way that relies on credible information and helps neighbors stand together?
- If you haven't already done so, would you be interested in talking with one of the facilitators?

If you would like to provide feedback or set up a time to talk with the facilitators, please email [vermillioncounty@keystone.org](mailto:vermillioncounty@keystone.org) to get in touch.

## About the Facilitators

**W**e—Pat Field of the Consensus Building Institute and Mallory Huggins and Brad Sperber of the Keystone Policy Center—were hired by and are funded by Apex to facilitate the

engagement process. Our organizations work under statements of independence (Keystone's statement of independence is posted at [www.keystone.org/about](http://www.keystone.org/about); more on Consensus Building Institute's citizen engagement work is at [www.cbi.org/citizen-engagement](http://www.cbi.org/citizen-engagement)) and we do not have personal or professional stakes in the outcome of the project. We are accountable to all the stakeholders involved—the county, community participants, and Apex—and our job is to deliver a process, not a particular outcome.

## Breakdown of Participation in Interviews and Surveys

### Interviews

- How many people did we talk to?
  - 26
- Where do they live?
  - 4 live in the northern part of the county
  - 5 live in the middle of the county near Dana
  - 14 live in the southern part of the county
  - 3 live outside the county
- How long have they lived in the county?
  - 13 were born and raised in Vermillion County
  - 7 are transplants
  - 3 are unknown; we do not know how long they've lived in the county
  - 3 do not live in the county
- How old are they?
  - 15 people are 60+
  - 9 people are 40 to 60
  - 2 people are under 40
- What gender are they?
  - 17 are men
  - 9 are women

## Surveys

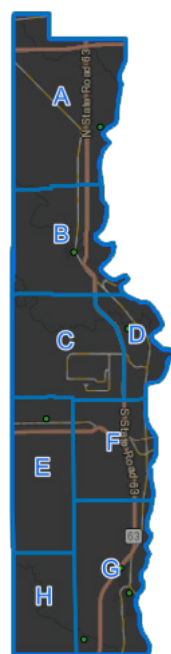
- How many people completed the survey?
  - 43 completed just the survey
  - 7 completed the survey and participated in an interview
- How long have they lived in the county?
  - 27 have lived in the county for 40+ years
  - 11 have lived in the county for 21 to 40 years
  - 10 have lived in the county for 5 to 20 years
  - 2 have lived in the county for fewer than 5 years

## Interview Protocol

We shared the following background information with participants at the beginning of the interviews:

- The purpose of the interview is to introduce ourselves and start to get to know the community members and the interests of various community members.

- We reached out to get your perspective and guidance as we determine how to make a collaborative process work for Vermillion County.
- How will this information be used?
  - We will prepare a summary of key themes from our interviews to share with Apex, county leadership, individuals who participated in the interviews, and the general public.
  - Nothing shared in the interview will be attributed to a specific person or organization.
  - We will consider what we heard from all stakeholders and make a recommendation about the community's overall interest and readiness for a community advisory process as Apex explores the possibility of developing wind energy somewhere in the county.
- From our interviews, we may make recommendations for individuals to be invited to participate on a community advisory team; this will not be about the "quality" or stature of the person, but more about trying to get a diverse and representative range of voices involved in the community advisory group.



Are you a resident of Vermillion County, IN? \*

- Yes
- No

How well do you believe wind energy fits in Zone A?

- 1 - Wind energy facilities should not go here
- 2 - It's not my favorite place for wind energy
- 3 - Don't feel strongly either way
- 4 - Wind could fit well here
- 5 - This is where wind energy belongs

How well do you believe wind energy fits in Zone B?

- 1 - Wind energy facilities should not go here
- 2 - It's not my favorite place for wind energy
- 3 - Don't feel strongly either way
- 4 - Wind could fit well here
- 5 - This is where wind energy belongs

**Online survey**

- A few things to note: 1) the site has not been selected; 2) Apex is committed to working through this collaborative process; 3) extensive conversations will lead to identifying siting criteria, potential sites and their pros and cons, and the necessary design and community investment parameters to move forward.
- We are happy to answer any questions you have.
- Before I begin asking you questions, do you have any questions about me or this process?
- What more do you want to know about Apex the company? How might you assess whether Apex is acting in a constructive, good-faith, and community-centered way?
- What needs to be true for this collaborative process to be credible and productive?
- Is there anything we haven't asked you about that you'd like to share with us?
- Is there anyone else you think we should make sure we talk to as part of this interview process?

## We asked the following questions in the interviews:\*

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
  - Prompts if needed: What do you do for work? What part of the county do you live in? How long have you lived in Vermillion County? Are you involved in any community groups or activities? If so, can you tell me more about them?
- What is important to you about life in Vermillion County?
- When it comes to issues involving the whole community, what's your sense of how people like to communicate? Through official public meetings like the APC or Commission meetings? Through organized in-person events like meetings, workshops, etc.? Online/through social media? In one-on-one or small group conversations?
- What do you want or need to know about wind energy in particular to feel equipped to contribute to a community process of engaging with Apex?
- What kinds of people—and interests, organizations, and values—would you want to be involved somehow in a community process to engage with Apex?

## Survey questions

Apex asked the following questions in its online and paper surveys:

- How long have you lived in Vermillion County?
- What is important to you about life in Vermillion County?
- Do you have a particular vision for the county's future?
- What do you want to know about wind energy to consider whether and how it might benefit Vermillion County?
- Who do you want to get that information from?
  - How do you assess whether a company is acting in a constructive, good-faith, and community-centered way?
  - If there was a county committee to explore wind energy development with Apex, who would you want to see on it?

\* Note: We did not always ask questions using this exact language or in this exact order, but we addressed all the general themes in each of the interviews.

## APPENDIX 2

# SUMMARY OF TRUSTED SOURCES SURVEY, COUNTY FINANCE SURVEY, AND SITING SURVEY

### Survey Timeline

- May 1, 2021: Community values survey opens
- June 30, 2021: Community values survey closes
- July 12, 2021: Trusted sources survey opens
- September 1, 2021: Trusted sources survey closes
- September 9, 2021: County finance survey opens
- September 30, 2021: County finance webinar with Baker Tilly
- October 2021: County finance survey mailer sent to all households in Vermillion County
- November 11, 2021: Siting survey opens
- November 2021: Siting survey mailer sent to all households in Vermillion
- January 2022: County finance survey conducted through phone calls by CampaignHQ
- April 2022: Siting and community finance surveys conducted through social media

### Trusted Sources Survey Results

From July 12, 2021, to September 1, 2021, Apex made available an online survey regarding the kinds of sources people trust

when seeking information regarding wind energy development. Twenty-five (25) individuals filled out the first question about trusted sources and five (5) people filled out the question about their preferred formats for receiving information. This was a self-selected, nonrandomized set of respondents, and thus it does not necessarily reflect the views of county residents as a whole. The two tables on pages 71-72 reflect the results on average. Please note that the lower the rating, the more respondents trust the source.

The survey was written as follows:

When it comes to answers to questions about wind energy development, which types of people, sources, or experiences should the Vermillion County community rely on? Please rank each with:

1 = should definitely rely on;

2 = might rely on some of the time;

3 = should not rely on.

### Trusted sources

The most trusted sources by those who completed the survey were technical experts from state universities, colleges, or other independent organizations. First-person accounts were ranked second on average. The least trusted source as named by respondents were websites and internet searches and social media. Local entities, such as the Farm Bureau or local governments, boards,

and commissions, were ranked slightly higher on average than state or federal government agencies.

### Trusted Sources Ranking

N=25

A few respondents made comments as well. These comments suggest that there is a broad spectrum of views from trusting studies and expert analysis to those who most trust themselves to gather unbiased information. One respondent stated: "But I also think there needs to be a comprehensive study done to illustrate how the energy generated here will serve the grid, how the turbines will impact the local economy, and how they will incorporate with other energy solutions." Yet another respondent stated: "Rely only on yourself."

One respondent questioned whether any source can be trusted since so much money is at stake. This respondent noted: "There are few if any trusted sources when it comes to putting money into the pockets of a select few people."

SOURCE	RATING
Technical experts from state universities, colleges, or other independent organizations	1.86
First-person accounts	1.96
Wind energy companies	2.00
Wind energy trade associations	2.00
Local entities like the Farm Bureau of Indiana Extension Service	2.05
Accountants and finance experts	2.05
Local government boards, commissions, and councils	2.09
State government agencies	2.17
Federal government agencies	2.17
Advocates or advocacy groups	2.25
Websites and internet searches	2.40
Social media	2.75

## Formats for information

Far fewer respondents completed the questions on formats for information. Of the five (5) who did, visually touring or experiencing wind turbines received the highest ranking, while website and longer reports received the lowest rankings on average.

## Formats for Information Ranking

N=5  
(see chart below)

FORMAT	RATING
Visually/experientially by touring an existing wind farm	1.60
Verbally through presentations	1.80
Short fact sheets or articles	2.00
Short videos	2.00
Verbally through conversations	2.00
Longer peer-reviewed and technical reports	2.20
Websites	2.20

## County Finances Survey Results

Proponents of wind energy generally believe that local communities hosting wind projects may receive several kinds of direct economic benefits. Since wind facilities pay property taxes, the addition of such a project to county property tax rolls can reduce the tax burden on residential property owners and so potentially lower their tax bills to some degree. In Vermillion County, Indiana, Apex committed to offering the community a “community royalty” for any wind project it would build in the county, with annual payments of 1% of income generated by the project. While tax revenues would be allocated as prescribed by law, the community would decide who should be recipient and steward of the royalty money and how it could best serve the community’s needs.

From September 2021 to April 2022, Apex used several means to survey residents of Vermillion County, to learn their perspectives on how a community royalty benefit generat-

ed by a potential wind energy project should be locally spent and managed.

Those steps included:

- September 9, 2021: Launching a county finance survey online via Apex’s process website, [Exploring Wind Vermillion](#).
- September 30, 2021: Conducting a webinar for community members on implications for county finances. Q&A followed a substantive presentation by subject matter experts from the public accounting and consulting firm Baker Tilly about the current and future fiscal situation of Vermillion County and how a wind project could affect the local economy. A recording of that webinar was made available on the process website after the event.
- October 2021: A survey mailer was sent to all households in Vermillion County via the U.S. Postal Service, directing recipients to the online survey. In total, 53 individuals responded.
- January 2022: A survey was conducted via direct phone calls by CampaignHQ, reaching over 1,600 households.

- April 2022: A final iteration of the survey was conducted through social media by Embold Research, which generated 245 responses.\*

This survey in its different forms explored the following considerations:

1. Who should be responsible for distributing and managing community royalty funds;
2. How community royalty funds should be spent; and
3. What benefits or factors, if any, would result in residents being willing to live with visual impacts of wind turbines in the county.

The online survey and phone survey posed all three questions. The social media format addressed only the third. The sections below show responses to each question by survey mode (direct mail, phone, etc.), as well as any open-ended responses.

## Q1: Who do you think should be responsible for distributing and managing community royalty funds (estimated to be about \$300,000 per year)?

	Web survey	Phone survey
Community foundation	24	41
Direct payments to taxpayers	16	93
School booster clubs	4	19
Other	10	50
Undecided	N/A	399
Refused / did not answer	0	1060
Total # of respondents	53	1662

“Other” suggestions mentioned multiple times:

- Appointed board
- Affected homeowners
- County commissioners
- Local extension
- School boards
- Township trustees

\* Embold Research surveyed 245 registered voters in Vermillion County, IN from April 12-16, 2022. Respondents were recruited via dynamic online sampling to attain a sample reflective of the population. Post-stratification weighting was performed on age, gender, education, and vote history. Weighting parameters were based on voter file data. The modeled margin of error is 6.5%.

## Q2: If you could choose how the community royalty would be spent, how would you suggest that money be used?

	Web survey	Phone survey
Improving local broadband	14	39
Upkeep/upgrade for local parks	9	17
Increased funding for youth sports	4	16
Support for local food bank	6	59
Other	8	38
Undecided		44
Refused / did not answer	17	389
Total # of respondents	53*	602

"Other" suggestions mentioned multiple times:

- Supporting education and schools. Specific suggestions included:
  - Enhancing programs such as band, sports (soccer, volleyball), and theater
  - Alternative education programs
  - Paying for curriculum development of high school students to learn wind energy basics
  - College scholarships
- Improve infrastructure in the county (e.g., ditches for proper road drainage, improvement of towns' main streets)
- Improve local downtown areas
- Bring business to more rural areas
- Small business investment
- Parks and trails
- Animal welfare. Specific suggestions included:
  - Humane shelter
  - Humane Society
- Fire department and local emergency services
- Supporting local law enforcement

- Payments to homeowners and abutters to the turbines

Exemplar quotes from respondents:

- "All of the above should be considered, but with guidelines for those making the decisions."
- "For years we haven't had any real ditches in the county. I believe with proper drainage the roads can last much longer. It would be a huge undertaking to do as every culvert in the county needs replaced."
- "Local broadband is a huge problem in Vermillion County. We have many rural families that still can't get internet and it is 2021!"
- "There are multiple ways to utilize the money as the need in Vermillion County is high. The foundation can set up funds for grants for all sorts of purposes here in the County."
- "Police, fire departments, education and schools, food banks, cities and municipalities."

\* Respondents could select as many choices as they desired, in addition to writing in other suggestions.



Q3: Please indicate which of these statements best reflects your opinions. "I would be more willing to live with visual impacts from a wind project if..."

	Web survey	Phone survey
The community received a share of project royalties	22	33
It meaningfully increased the county's tax base	16	17
Residents within 1/4 mile of turbines receive some compensation, even if they do not have turbines on their property	16	23
I could participate with other residents in deciding where turbines are sited	6	61
I would not want to live with the aesthetic impacts, regardless of financial benefit to the county and local landowners	1	7
Other		11
Undecided		31
Refused / Did not answer	25	30
Total # of respondents	53*	213

"Other" suggestions mentioned included:

- Nothing
- Donations to nonprofits
- Legally binding guarantees that the developer would have to follow through on their part, dispose of nonworking turbines at their expense, and must be accountable to the county and to individuals who are hurt in any way by the project
- Increase nonparticipant radius to 1/2 mile
- Decrease electric power bills ensuring locally produced electricity benefits local people

Exemplar respondent quote:

- "The truth is that I find turbines aesthetically pleasing so I wouldn't mind seeing them. Noise impact would be a greater concern to me."

The 245 social media survey respondents had the opportunity to register whether each of the options below would result in their being much more likely or somewhat more likely to support a wind project in the county—or whether it would make no difference in their degree of support.

	Much more likely	Somewhat more likely	Makes no difference
The community receives a share of project royalties from the project	48%	18%	34%
The energy created meaningfully increases the county's tax base	31%	26%	44%
Residents within 1/4 mile of turbines receive some compensation, even if they do not have turbines on their property	34%	25%	40%
Residents participate in deciding where turbines are sited	32%	21%	47%

\* Respondents could choose more than one option, and/or write in other suggestions.

## Reflections

Although the web-based outreach generated by far the fewest responses, it also preceded the phone and social media efforts by a few months, and community interaction with the Exploring Wind Vermillion website remained fairly low throughout the attempt at collaborative engagement. The social media approach generated the greatest number of responses. The phone survey reached over 1,600 households, but a strong majority did not answer any of the questions. The multi-modal survey approach does not account for the possibility that a given individual might have weighed in multiple times (e.g., both agreeing to a phone interview and completing an online questionnaire).

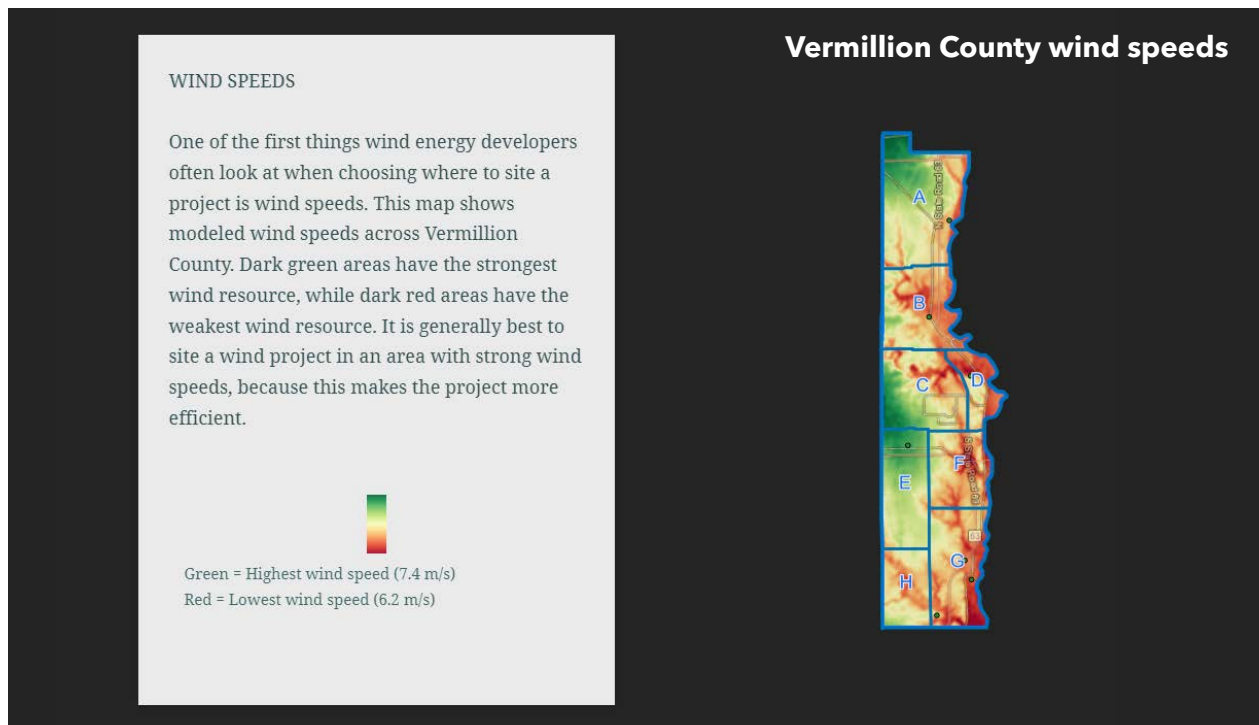
The web and phone survey responses did not appear to align meaningfully. Online respondents tended to show more support for a community foundation managing any funds resulting from a wind project, and for local broadband improvement as the most appealing use of such funds. Phone respondents tended to prefer direct payments to taxpayers, with funds going to a local food bank. Each of the four siting factors mentioned generated notable but not decisive interest across the three survey modes, with “the

community receiving a share of the profit” receiving most support overall.

Since efforts by Apex and the facilitation team to catalyze joint learning and deliberation—within the community, and between the community and Apex—were not successful, the survey results reflect existing beliefs, assumptions, and biases. The results therefore could helpfully inform dialogue and coordinated fact-finding going forward but did not benefit from them.

## Siting Preferences Survey Results

From the beginning, Apex’s invitation to the community to participate in site selection for the potential future project was an essential element of the Exploring Wind Vermillion experiment. Since it did not prove feasible to assemble and engage with a community advisory team, which presumably would have collectively served as the company’s conversation partner on project location, Apex elected to utilize various survey modes to solicit input on siting matters. Those steps eventually included:



- November 2021: Siting survey posted to the EWW website
- November 2021: Siting survey mailer sent to all households in Vermillion
- April 2022: Siting question added to the community finance survey conducted through social media\*

These efforts resulted in the collection of 38 responses via the interactive online survey posted on the Exploring Wind Vermillion website and 245 responses via the survey conducted through social media.

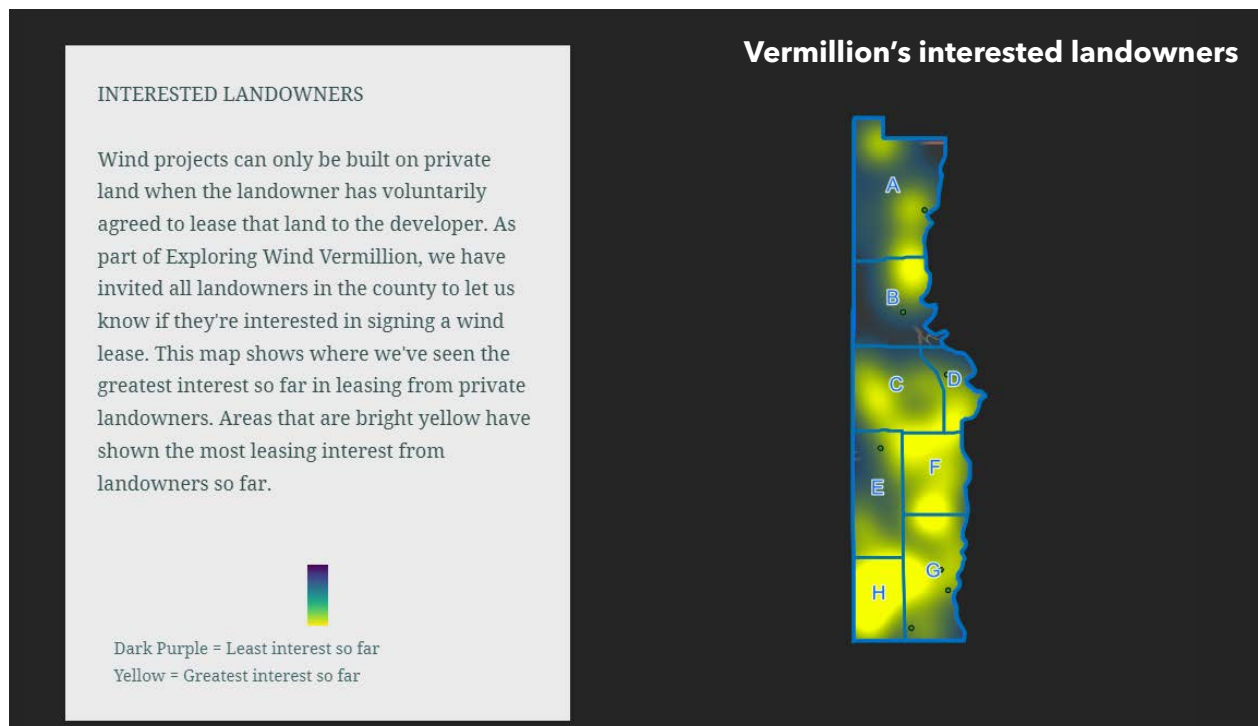
## Location Preferences

Of those from the social media survey (n = 245) who answered the question “Where should wind go in Vermillion County?,” the following locations per the results stood out (internet polling from the website survey is also noted below (n = 37)):

- Zone C: Western Vermillion Township, west of Highway 63, received the most

positive responses (42%) and some of the least negative responses (39%), though negatives remain high, and received the least “Don’t feel strongly” of any location (18%).

- This was also true of the internet poll with the most positive responses (12) (tied with Zone E) and the least negative responses (14) among other alternatives.
- Zone E: Western Helt Township, west of Rangeline Road, received the second most positive responses (38%) and the same negative responses (39%) as Zone C.
  - This was also true of the internet poll with the most positive responses (12) (tied with Zone C) but higher negative responses as well (19) among other alternatives.
- Zone G: Eastern Helt Township and Eastern Clinton received the most negative responses (58%) (either should not go here or not my favorite place) and some



\* Embold Research surveyed 245 registered voters in Vermillion County, Indiana, from April 12 to 16, 2022. Respondents were recruited via dynamic online sampling to attain a sample reflective of the population. Poststratification weighting was performed on age, gender, education, and vote history. Weighting parameters were based on voter file data. The modeled margin of error is 6.5%.

of the least positive (20%) (wind could fit well here or this is where it belongs).

- This was also true of the internet poll with the most negative responses (22) (tied with Zone F) but the fewest positive responses (2) among other alternatives.
- Zones B, E, F, and H: All also received relatively high negative responses (46% to 49%) and a relatively lower but broader range of positive responses (21% to 31%).
- This was also true of the internet poll, though not entirely consistent between these four zones.

There were some gendered responses overall. More men than women typically responded: "Wind should not go here." More women than men typically responded: "Don't feel strongly either way." One might think that age might be a predictor of more positive views of locating wind energy in the county given national polling on generational views of climate change and renewable energy, but the data for Vermillion County does not show that correlation. If anything, the strongest support for several locations came from respondents 35 to 49 years old. In addition, those respondents with a college degree tended to offer higher percentage responses for "This is where wind energy belongs."

When asked what factors went into the determination of preferable locations, responses were as follows:

- Wind energy is not appropriate for the county (a very large majority of responses)
- Effects on wildlife, particularly birds and specifically eagles
- Crop, farm field, or agricultural loss
- Visual impacts
- Noise impacts
- Health of civilians, wildlife, pets, and livestock

Respondents named a number of reasons why turbines would not be appropriate for the county anywhere, including: personal dislike, profit motive of developers, lack of belief

that wind energy is sustainable, destructive to the environment, unreliable, not cost-effective without subsidies, increases electricity rates, inefficient, and creates excessive disposal impacts (decommissioning of turbines at the end of a project's lifetime).

## Effects of possible wind developer's actions on preferences

When asked "Would you be more likely to support wind energy in Vermillion County if the following options were offered by a project, or would it make no difference?" the following approaches received the most to least responses:

- The community receives a share of the royalties from the project (66%)
- Residents within 1/4 mile of turbines receive some compensation, even if they do not have turbines on their property (60%)
- The energy created meaningfully increases the county's tax base (56%)
- Residents participate in deciding where turbines are sited (53%)

Three out of four of these approaches also received high numbers of "would make no difference" in the following order:

- Residents participate in deciding where turbines are sited (47%)
- The energy created meaningfully increases the county's tax base (44%)
- Residents within 1/4 mile of turbines receive some compensation, even if they do not have turbines on their property (40%)

These findings suggest that the most valued approach would be sharing of royalties, even above having a choice in where turbines are sited (often a key factor cited in the academic literature). However, given the high number of "would make no difference" responses, it should be noted that the above approaches may not be sufficient to win a strong and durable majority of residents' support for wind energy.

# ENDNOTES

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