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OPINION | REVIEW & OUTLOOK

A Green New Deal in Profile

Falmouth spent \$10 million on wind turbines. Now it's losing money.

By The Editorial Board

Feb. 4, 2019 7:19 p.m. ET



Wind turbines near homes in Falmouth, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. PHOTO: OLEG ALBINSKY/GETTY IMAGES

Democrats are pushing a Green New Deal to end the use of fossil fuels and rely entirely on renewable energy. The Cape Cod town of Falmouth,

Mass., offers a cold gust of reality on such ambitions with its experience on a \$10 million wind-energy investment.

In 2009 and 2011, Falmouth broke ground on two wind turbines on 314 acres of city land next to the wastewater-treatment facility and dog pound. It paid for the first turbine with a \$5 million, 20-year municipal bond, and it received \$5 million in federal stimulus money to build the second. Falmouth planned to sell some of the energy it generated to the electrical grid of utility company Eversource, formerly known as NStar, so the city anticipated the turbines would generate \$1 million to \$2 million in annual profit.

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Residents quickly grew disillusioned. The turbines rose nearly 400 feet, and light flickered eerily through the blades, which whirled in a circle big enough for a 747. Barry and Diane Funfar, who lived fewer than 1,700 feet away, began suffering from headaches.

Ms. Funfar struggled to sleep, and her husband's heart started to pound. "The problems were unbelievable," Ms. Funfar says. "Barry couldn't live with them. He was bothered every minute [the turbines] were running. I was bothered, too."

The couple built their home themselves in 1979, and their adult children live nearby, so they didn't want to leave. Mr. Funfar complained to the city, and he was "no lone voice crying in the wilderness," according to court records. The Funfars sued, as did other residents who reported hearing "thunderous and thumping" noises and feeling "powerful pulses, which are characteristic of low-frequency sound." A real-estate appraiser testified that homes close to the turbines had lost 20% of their value.

In 2015 the Massachusetts Appeals Court ordered Falmouth to turn off one of its turbines, ruling that it lacked proper permitting. And in 2017 Barnstable County Judge Cornelius Moriarty ordered both turbines shut down as a public nuisance. "We had our home paid for

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before the turbines, and now we owe more than it's probably even worth—over \$500,000," Ms. Funfar says. "We wanted to leave it to our kids, but if we died today, our kids couldn't afford the home."

Falmouth is taking a "daunting" financial hit, says town manager Julian Suso. Insurance covered most of Falmouth's legal fees and nuisance settlements, but the remaining liability is "certainly in excess of \$100,000," he says. On Jan. 15, selectmen voted 4-1 against relocating the turbines within town limits, with one abstention. It will cost between \$1 million and \$2 million to dismantle and remove them.

Falmouth will also spend the next 11 years paying off the remaining \$3.6 million in bonds it floated to pay for the first turbine. The stimulus grant covered the cost of the second turbine on condition that it operates as an "energy efficient project." So unless Falmouth can find someone else to take the turbine, get it running, and persuade regulators that this meets its contractual obligations, the town will be on the hook for another \$5 million. That's a lot of wasted money in a town with fewer than 32,000 residents.

Environmentalists dismiss concerns that wind turbines may cause health problems, even as they peddle unscientific claims that shale drilling poisons water and causes cancer. But there's no such thing as zero-risk energy and, as Falmouth learned the hard way, not-in-my-backyard sentiments extend from drilling pads to wind farms. This green new deal was a bad deal all around.

Appeared in the February 5, 2019, print edition.

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