

Overland Park considers rules for windmills



WRITTEN BY LOREN STANTON

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Ben McCall/Sun Photo ... The Overland Park Planning Commission has recommend adopting guidelines for the installation of wind turbines like this one that went online this month at A.L. Huber, just northeast of Interstate 435 and Roe Avenue.

With alternative energy expected to become increasingly more common, Overland Park wants clearer guidelines for governing it.

The city's Planning Commission voted recently to recommend that a Development Ordinance amendment be adopted by the City Council that will outline a permit process for windmills.

The city planning staff called for the guidelines as the frequency of wind installation proposals rose from non-existent to a trickle.

"The staff felt we needed something on the books," said **Danielle Zeigler**, a city planner.

The resulting proposed ordinance amendment states when or whether a permit must be secured for

windmills.

Three windmills already have been approved by the city. The most recent to begin operation is a unique 90-foot-tall tower at A.L. Huber Construction Co. northeast of Interstate 435 and Roe Avenue.

Rather than a traditional propeller-style windmill, the Huber installation features blades that look like a steamboat paddlewheel and that pivot atop the pole as the wind changes direction.

Smaller demonstration windmills have been erected on the Sprint-Nextel and Shawnee Mission West High School campuses.

Under the proposed new ordinance, some wind turbines would be allowed "by right." That is, no city permit would be required, but the installations would need to conform to certain height and location limitations and standards.

On agricultural and industrial properties, a single roof-mounted windmill would be allowed by right if it is not more than 20 feet high. A ground-mounted turbine would be OK if not taller than 100 feet.

A special use permit would be needed for any windmill proposed in a single-family housing area. A church or school in a residential area could have a roof-mounted turbine by right, however, if the building is at least three stories or 35 feet high. If the building is shorter than that, a final development plan would need to be sought. On those same types of properties, a windmill on a parking lot light pole would be allowed.

Some concerns were raised about windmills being allowed on non-residential buildings in residential areas because of possible complaints about the appearance and noise.

It also is proposed that special use permits be granted for an indefinite period. That was recommended, the staff stated, because research indicates it can take up to 20 years for a windmill to yield full payback on the investment.

The ordinance amendment is scheduled to go before the City Council for consideration at its Dec. 7 meeting.

Contact Loren Stanton at 385-6068, or e-mail lorenstanton@npgco.com .