

## Eolian—A History of Failure

Eolian Renewable Energy of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, recently announced that it was [abandoning its Seneca Mountain Wind project in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom](#). Seneca joins unsuccessful Eolian wind projects in [Antrim, New Hampshire](#), and [Frankfort, Maine](#).

Eolian has a history of failure and a history of rewriting history. The company's latest revision is that it dropped the Seneca project because it lacked community support. Observers in the Kingdom don't think that Eolian gave a hoot about community support. They say that the decisive factor was a study that revealed that the Seneca project would require [\\$86 million in transmission upgrades](#). They suggest that Eolian's respect for communities is a fiction they're promoting to impress their current target: [Orland, Maine](#).

*Eolian's website says, "We are committed to engaging and listening to stakeholders." Their track record in Vermont suggests otherwise.*

The Seneca project was always a bad idea. It would have industrialized and fragmented Vermont's second-largest habitat block and degraded habitat for a number of rare, threatened, and endangered species. The project would have encroached upon thousands of acres of conservation land. It would have jeopardized the headwaters of four rivers.

Eolian showed little appreciation for the area's ecological value. [The company's environmental evaluation](#) appears to have been written hastily, as if to satisfy an unimportant, inconvenient requirement. When their assertions about the area's geology, the elevation of mountains, and distances to nearby bodies of water [were challenged](#), Eolian's environmental consultants excused themselves by explaining that [they had used old reference materials that were hard to read](#).

[Eolian's website says](#), "We are committed to engaging and listening to stakeholders." [Their track record in Vermont suggests otherwise](#). Eolian kept its Seneca project plan under wraps until March 7, 2012, the day after Vermont's Town Meeting Day. They failed to notify adjoining landowners. Their surveyors intruded upon neighboring properties without permission. Their attorneys fought to prevent and limit the participation of towns and neighboring landowners in Vermont's permit process.

[Eolian committed to leave any of the three Kingdom towns that voted against their project](#). But, in Vermont, towns don't get to vote on energy projects — the state's Public Service Board makes all decisions. The voting that Eolian encouraged would have had no legal standing and they could ignore it if it went the wrong way.

Newark, one of towns targeted for the Seneca project, adopted a town plan that clearly stated its opposition to industrial wind projects. (Vermont statute gives town plans “due consideration” in energy matters.) [A special town meeting approved the plan by a vote of 169 to 59.](#) But, where Eolian goes, litigation follows. Newark (like Frankfort, Maine) was promptly [sued](#) by the owner of land leased by Eolian.

[Brighton, another of the Seneca towns, voted 544 to 320 to oppose industrial wind development.](#)

The purpose of this vote was to guide development of the next town plan.

Neither of these votes was good enough for Eolian — they would only honor a vote on their specific project proposal.

Tiny Ferdinand, the third town targeted by the Seneca project, gave Eolian its chance. Ferdinand (population 31) has more hunting camps than residences. It is part of the Unified Towns and Gores. [Eolian persuaded the UTG’s board of governors to conduct a vote](#) of residents and property owners on a 60-megawatt project that would be located entirely within Ferdinand.

Eolian campaigned energetically, promising a bonanza. For 20 years they would pay the UTG’s municipal taxes and provide each UTG property owner with an annual payment of over \$900.

[The UTG stunned Eolian by voting 171 to 71 against the project.](#)

An Eolian vice president responded by saying, “It is very clear to us that there is strong support for the project.” He hinted that Eolian would try to build support for a reworked project. Maybe they’d move each turbine 10 feet to the west.

The UTG votes were counted in January. The \$86 million transmission cost was revealed in May. Eolian announced the abandonment of its Seneca Mountain Wind project in July

Shouldn’t Eolian have known long ago that the cost of connecting to the grid would be high?

They did — a Vermont transmission expert told them over two years ago that the [transmission system could not accommodate another utility scale generator](#) and that price of connecting would be prohibitive.

Why did Eolian pursue a doomed project for so long? Maybe their investors are asking the same question.

*This commentary is by Mark Whitworth, Energize Vermont’s Executive Director. It appeared in the print edition of the Bangor Daily News on August 25, 2014.*