



## Nora UU Church breaks ground for new wind tower

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Although they started pouring concrete footings for Nora Unitarian Universalist Church's new wind tower last Thursday, the official groundbreaking ceremony wasn't held until this past Sunday. "Bless this site with wind," Reverend Lisa Doege prayed as several dozen church members enjoyed a break in the sleet that morning and gathered around the construction site.

The 120-foot wind tower, which will be located on the south side of the Mount Pisquah Cemetery behind the church, is expected to produce enough electrical energy to meet one and one-half times the needs of the church. "We're still connected to the grid because the wind isn't constant and the excess energy can't be stored," church member Darrell Hinsman noted. However, when the wind is blowing, Alliant Energy is required to buy back the excess electricity Nora doesn't need at the same rate that it sells electricity. That's because it's a relatively small wind turbine—20 kilowatts. The same rules don't apply with larger turbines or wind projects.

The rural Hanska church has actually been working on this project for about three years. The initial idea came from members of the congregation. "We have a Social Justice Committee and the congregation picks some areas of interest they want us to look into," Hinsman explained as one of the members of the committee. "One of the areas they wanted us to explore was alternative energy for the church." The committee includes Darrell and Jeanie Hinsman, Mark and Brenda Wiger, Pat Kunerth, Angie Becker and Lee Drugmueller.

"We (the church) strive toward being good stewards of the earth and contributing to the sustainability of the planet," Hinsman wrote in a church newsletter article. "Generating clean energy would be putting our money where our mouth is."

Although the committee also looked into solar and geo thermal, they finally picked a wind energy project to present to the congregation. "We're up on the hill here," Hinsman said. "We're probably one

of the higher points in the area. I think we have a real advantage." They also liked the idea that they could utilize a wind turbine that was manufactured in Minnesota.

Last February, the committee presented their idea at a congregational meeting and 80 percent of the voting members approved further exploration of the idea to install a Jacobs 20 kw wind turbine on a three-legged, lattice tower. Hinsman said that Jacobs is an old windmill company. Their tower has a look that is similar to the old style windmills you can still see standing on some farms. Another aspect the committee liked about the Jacobs wind turbine was that it uses a mechanical inverter instead of electronic. According to the company's website, the Jacobs 20kw is the quietest of wind turbines, not even audible under most conditions.

After the congregation gave the approval to explore the project, the committee wasted no time. There have been surveys to complete and zoning applications to submit. Because the church property is small, they had to get a variance so they would not have to meet the usual requirement to set back the wind tower to one and one-half times the tower height from the property line. They also needed approval to use a 120 foot tower instead of a 100 foot tower in order to put the turbine above the tree tops where the wind is stronger and more steady. The committee also had to work with an attorney to work out an easement agreement with the neighboring property owner.

Then, there was the issue of funding the project. Hinsman said that



Since the ground for the wind tower at Nora Unitarian Universalist Church had actually already been "broken" on Thursday by the construction crew, congregation members help back fill the trench instead.

they could not find sufficient grants that the church would be eligible for as a non-profit. That led to another congregational meeting, in May, to approve forming a for-profit enterprise for the purpose of energy production. The result? The formation of Prairie Beacon Incorporated with the Nora church as the only shareholder. (The name came about because they felt that the wind tower would be a visible, liberal beacon on the prairie.)

This move paid off. The corporation was recently awarded a \$20,000 USDA Small Winds Project Grant. Another factor that kept the motion going forward was the 30 percent rebate funded through the recent stimulus bill. The project needed to be started in 2010. It also has to be paid for and operational before either the grant or the rebate can be received.

Although how fast the tower gets up and running depends upon the weather, the church can expect to start producing their own electricity—and passers by can expect to start seeing the 31-foot diameter propeller rotating in the wind—some time this spring.



By next spring, the blades of the wind tower will be peeking up from behind the grove of trees surrounding the church.

Numerous members in attendance took turns reading excerpts from poems or songs about the wind.