

The city has visions of a large-scale wind farm off our shoreline. And how could anyone in 21st-century Toronto be opposed? Ask the people of Scarborough **By Andrew Westoll**

# A Mighty Wind

**THE VILLAGE OF GUILDWOOD, IN SOUTHEAST SCARBOROUGH,** is home to some of the more stunning vistas in the city. Viewed from a perch high up on the Scarborough Bluffs, Lake Ontario stretches out like a shimmering mirage. To the east and west, the Bluffs peel back into a dramatic exposition of nature's force, centuries of wind, rain, ice and snow having pummelled the cliffs gradually northward. Near their lip is some of the most sought-after real estate in Toronto; far below, their eroded faces crumble into a rugged lakeshore.

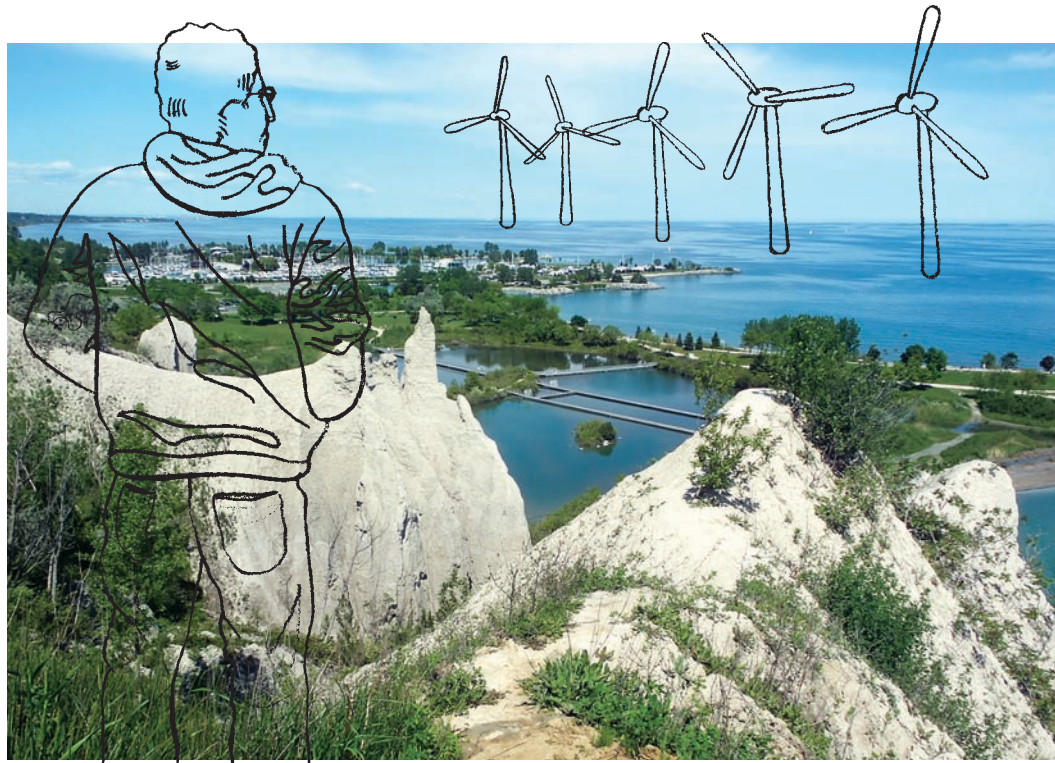
The heart and soul of Guildwood is the Guild Inn. The Guild had a short life before and after World War II as a progressive artists' colony, a place where freethinkers could escape the soulless, capitalist strivings of downtown Toronto to embrace creativity, gaze down upon a calming stretch of lake and wander rural Scarborough in peace. Today, although the Guild is little more than a sorry collection of dilapidated buildings, its legacy lives on. Guildwood residents still pride themselves on standing up to abuses of power, perceived or otherwise, and on a strong naturalist ethic that is uniquely tied to the Bluffs.

Lately, they've galvanized around a shared hatred of Toronto Hydro and its plans. The city-owned corporation is preparing to survey the winds that blow offshore, a study that involves anchoring a small steel platform to the lake bed between two and four kilometres out. Rising from this platform will be an anemometer, an instrument that measures wind speed and direction using light-imaging radar. Including a power source, a communication system and navigation lights, the whole contraption will be five metres wide and eight metres

tall, unlikely to be visible from the shore.

If the winds prove strong and reliable enough, Hydro will begin drawing up plans for something more ambitious: a large-scale wind farm. They chose the site because it has a 15-metre-deep underwater shelf running parallel to the land, making it one of the few feasible areas off our shoreline for turbine installation. The farm would likely stretch for 25 kilometres along the eastern lakefront, from east of Ashbridge's Bay to Ajax. By some estimates, it would cost upward of \$500 million to build and bring on-line. The turbine towers—perhaps 60 of them, each 90 metres

**The big bluff: Hydro kept Guildwood residents guessing about its wind farm ambitions**



tall—would be drilled into the lake bed. Together, and at full capacity, they could generate approximately 180 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 47,000 homes. This energy could be pumped directly into the GTA's power grid, eliminating the astronomical costs involved in long-distance transmission.

Given the social climate out there—hell, given the actual climate out there—one might expect Torontonians to be ecstatic about this. We live in a province that recently introduced into its legislature the Green Energy Act, a landmark bill aimed at making Ontario a leader in clean, renewable energy. David Miller is the chair of the C40, an international group of cities united in the fight against global warming. And Dalton McGuinty has committed to phasing out all coal-fired power plants in Ontario by 2014.

But in Guildwood, Hydro's little wind study has resulted in a firestorm of anger, controversy and near-tribal levels of contempt. A small, organized group is determined to quash Toronto's first large-scale residential renewable energy project.

**THE PREVAILING WISDOM** of the post-Al Gore era is that “going green” is never as easy as the cutesy phrase suggests. City councils and municipal power utilities around the world are learning that although the buzzwords “sustainable” and “renewable” are political winners, voters' good intentions don't necessarily translate into taxpayer support—especially when it comes to wind projects. In most cases, the government and its wind energy partners face a long battle before the grid turns green.

As some European cities have learned, citizen buy-in is key. Copenhagen's Middelgrunden offshore wind farm, located just off the city's harbour, has been remarkably well received thanks to a strong public information campaign and an innovative ownership strategy. When they first heard about the project, Copenhagen residents were worried about their view of the harbour, low-frequency noise and heavy-metal pollution, and potential disruptions to the shipping industry, among other things. To alleviate their concerns, the city undertook a comprehensive environmental assessment and included residents in every step of the process. They even organized a field trip to another wind farm, which eliminated fears about noise. (Later studies also dealt with the common concern about migratory birds—which, clever beings that they are, tend to avoid wind turbines. As do ships.) It was eventually agreed that the

turbines would be placed three kilometres from shore and laid out in an arch, thus mirroring the shape of the historic defences surrounding the city.

Today the Middelgrunden farm is co-owned (with the municipal utility company) by 8,500 Danes, who bought 40,500 shares at \$568 Euros each. The project provides clean, renewable energy to more than 40,000 homes. This model holds across Denmark, a country that derives 20 per cent of its total energy mix from wind; approximately 70 per cent of all turbines are owned by private investors.

Late last fall, Hydro began its own public consultation process. As required by the Ministry of Natural Resources, it placed ads in newspapers explaining the wind study and asking for feedback from the

turbines in his précis. “They told me this isn't about wind turbines,” he says. “They said it's only about an anemometer.” Hydro's evasiveness made people suspicious. “If you're sneaking something in here,” says Laforet, himself a former candidate for city council at the ripe old age of 20, “we figure it can't be good.”

Many area residents were still on the fence about the proposal. They just wanted some answers. “I urged Hydro to hold a public meeting,” says Ainslie. He provided a list of possible venues in or near the community. What unfolded next will likely go down in the annals of community consultation as a supreme botch job.

**HYDRO HELD THE FIRST MEETING** at a small church at Markham and Eglinton—far from

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community. The ad said the study would “determine the potential economic viability for the development of wind energy facilities.” Councillor Paul Ainslie, who represents Ward 43 (which includes Guildwood), photocopied the ad and mailed it, along with a brief explanatory letter, to his constituents. His note mentioned that if the study was successful, a wind farm might be proposed for the area. “I wanted to make sure my residents understood as transparently as possible,” says Ainslie. “There's no need to hide anything.”

That's when the trouble started. John Laforet, a 23-year-old political science student at the University of Toronto, helped launch a citizen's group called Save the Toronto Bluffs. They built a Web site and published newsletters highlighting the Bluffs' ecological sensitivity and susceptibility to erosion, and lamented the possible industrialization of a natural area. Incensed letters outlining a range of economic, environmental and aesthetic concerns were sent to the minister of energy and infrastructure, George Smitherman, and the minister of the environment, John Gerretson. Meanwhile, Hydro gave Ainslie grief for even mentioning the idea of wind

Guildwood, and a space too small to accommodate residents from the five affected wards, who showed up in droves. The church filled to capacity, with just as many people left standing outside. The meeting was cancelled before it could begin. The residents grew angry, the media jumped on the story, and Laforet began blogging about the situation. (His blog has since become a clearing house of news about the proposal, as well as vehement anti-Hydro, anti-wind power rhetoric.)

A second meeting was scheduled, this one at a site within Guildwood. By this time, though, the little get-together in east Scarborough had caught the attention of big environmental groups and student activists across the city. Busloads of pro-wind power activists wearing “Yes Turbine” stickers—many of them from the Toronto Environmental Alliance, the David Suzuki Foundation and the Ontario Steelworkers Union—descended on the meeting. Joyce McLean, director of strategic issues at Toronto Hydro, gave a presentation on the proposed anemometer study. Then, according to Ainslie, the activists effectively took over the show. During the Q&A session, they hogged the mike, heckled

(and got heckled in return), and did everything they could to keep area residents from voicing their concerns. McLean and her colleagues dodged the few questions Guildwood residents managed to squeeze in. Many of them left in disgust.

Finally, Hydro scheduled a residents-only meeting—which, surprisingly, only made matters worse. When asked questions pertaining to wind farms, McLean and her colleagues were no more forthcoming. “They just said, ‘Wind turbines it is, it’s great, it’s good for the environment, and you’ll like it,’” says Ainslie. People were shocked at the way their concerns were handled. “Anyone who walked in there undecided left on our side,” Laforet says. “If Hydro can’t even organize a simple community meeting, how can they be expected to manage a project of this scale?”

Then came the death knell for any chance at reconciliation. In a speech Premier Dalton McGuinty gave in London touting the fortitude of his impending Green Energy and Green Economy Act, he referenced the situation in Guildwood, calling all those opposed to the project NIMBYs.

Well, you could almost hear the cries of outrage drifting down the lakeshore, from the Guild Inn all the way to Queen’s Park. Premier McGuinty had gone and done it. He’d used the N-word.

**MAKE NO MISTAKE**, some people in Guildwood are NIMBYs. They’re protesting on purely aesthetic grounds, and simply don’t want a big industrial project ruining their expensive view or quiet community. Others, who might have the greater good at heart, believe industrial wind energy is too expensive for taxpayers. That’s the rallying cry for the anti-wind movement. To the industry’s more zealous opponents, the fact that North American and European governments pay huge subsidies to wind companies—and that Ontario is proposing to buy green electricity at up to four times the price of coal, nuclear or hydro—is untenable.

The counter-argument is that this represents exactly the sort of short-term thinking that got us into the climate mess in the first place. Wind and other alternative energies require government subsidies now because they’re still in a nascent stage of development. Such incentives once supported the aircraft, aerospace and auto industries, too. The difference with wind is that once the initial outlay is paid off and a price subsidy is no longer necessary, the benefit to the taxpayer—cheap, clean and limitless energy—is guaranteed.

Supporting the wind industry requires a paradigm shift in thinking, and policy-wise, this shift is already underway in both the U.S. and Canada. It’s expected that by the end of this year, the U.S. will officially adopt a cap and trade system and completely alter the North American energy market. To some extent, this system is already being used by the Western Climate Initiative, a partnership between seven states and four provinces (including Ontario) aimed at reducing greenhouse gases. In essence, cap and trade puts a price on pollution, thus creating a market for it. So the negative effects associated with burning coal (the cost to the environment and our health) will be factored into its price. This means coal could go up from its current four cents per kilowatt hour to, roughly, between 10 and 15 cents—more or less the same as wind. And, as wind technology becomes more advanced and widely used, it will inevitably become cheaper. In other words, it won’t take government subsidies to make wind economically viable.

This argument is the motivation behind McGuinty’s Green Energy Act—not that he and Smitherman have done a good job of explaining it. The government, in an effort to catch up to the rest of the world, has blown past the public education stage and assumes that everybody is unequivocally on board. That this young industry lacks long-term economic data supporting its effectiveness makes the need for public education even greater.

The goal of the Green Energy Act is to quickly foster the growth of such renewable energy sources as wind, solar, water, biomass and biogas, something the government claims will bring 50,000 new jobs. At present, the province derives 25 per cent of its electricity from renewable energy sources. There are about 589 wind turbines in operation in Ontario (up from 10 in 2003), enough to power 325,000 homes. Under the new GEA, the government plans to increase capacity by 10,000 megawatts by 2015, and 25,000 megawatts by 2025. On one particularly blustery day this year, Ontario set a record for wind energy, generating a total of 16,585 megawatt hours—or enough to power Peterborough for a week. Because wind and solar aren’t always available—the wind isn’t always blowing, the sun doesn’t always shine—75 per cent of our energy supply continues to come from nuclear and hydroelectric (with 20 per cent from coal-fired plants). That makes storage the holy grail of energy technology. Until we’re able to store excess energy from renewable sources, we will continue to rely

on the 24-hour-a-day, wind-or-no-wind standbys in our current mix.

Of course, all this talk of a wind farm in Lake Ontario will be moot if the wind doesn't blow off the Scarborough shoreline. The economic feasibility of any wind farm is, above all else, dependent on the adequacy of the resource—or how strongly and consistently the wind blows. Guildwood residents claim the wind off the Bluffs isn't promising. According to Joyce McLean, residents are missing the point. "We know the Bluffs are not among the highest wind-producing sites in Ontario," she says. "We're not saying they are. The question is whether it is a sufficient wind resource to proceed with a wind farm." And the only way to find out is to test it.

**TO PUT ALL OF THIS WATTAGE** into human terms, you might consult the 2,000 Watt Society, the brainchild of a Swiss research institute called the Council of the Federal Institute of Technology. Having established that average energy consumption worldwide works out to 2,000 watts per person per day, they're now challenging members of the higher-energy-consuming societies to meet that average. (Europeans currently use 6,000 watts per capita, while Africans

use only 500. Canada and the U.S. are at 12,000.) If Torontonians lowered their consumption enough to meet the 2,000-watt challenge—a stretch at the moment, but bear with me—the wind farm off the Bluffs would cover the continuous energy needs of 90,000 people.

The Swiss Council is pushing not for radical lifestyle changes, but rather changes in our thinking—smarter business practices, more efficient infrastructure, technological innovation. The ultimate goal may be ambitious, but judging from some of the "smarter living" models already practised in Europe, they seem entirely achievable.

Here in Toronto, it's not hard to imagine a day when there are small turbines on rooftops throughout downtown—something Mayor Michael Bloomberg is proposing for buildings and bridges in New York. McGuinty's green plan includes incentives for households to invest in their own alternative energy sources: a private turbine or solar panels. The renewable energy revolution is already well underway, and all those opposed to it—even Guildwood—will be swept up in its wake. Still, that doesn't mean we can't slow down the discourse enough to let public opinion catch up.

Hydro's Joyce McLean wants Guildwood residents to understand that there will be no wind farm in Lake Ontario without a thorough environmental assessment, something Guildwood residents believe Hydro is trying to avoid. Their leering is understandable: in Ontario, an environmental assessment is rather misleadingly called a "proponent-driven self-assessment." Every infrastructure project in the province is subject to such screenings, which are both rigorous and peer-reviewed. McLean insists that Hydro would conduct all of the necessary environmental studies before proceeding with a wind farm, examining the impact on water quality, air quality, fish habitat, noise, birds, bats—"all of the issues," she says, "that have been raised and are continually raised for wind projects in Ontario. That's just not the process we're in at the moment."

The question is, How transparent will the assessments be? Will the Scarborough stakeholders be included the way residents of Copenhagen were? Perhaps predictably, and perhaps for good reason, Laforet isn't buying it. "They've failed to gain the community's trust," he says. "And now it's really hard to believe anything they say." **END**