



# County of San Diego

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April 26, 2019

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Mark Wardlaw, Director  
Planning & Development Services

SUBJECT: **Follow up from March 22, 2019 Director's Report Item H: Public Health Position Statement on Human Health Effects of Wind Turbines**

## **REGULAR AGENDA ITEM NUMBER 2**

### **Purpose**

At the March 22, 2019 Planning Commission (Commission) Hearing, Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) presented their findings on the 2019 Public Health Position Statement on Human Health Effects of Wind Turbines. The Commission conditionally accepted the Position Statement. As part of the action, the Commission asked Planning & Development Services (PDS) and HHSA to report back under a regular agenda item to describe a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and options for conducting an HIA for future projects. This motion carried 7-ayes and 0-noes.

The Commission asked staff to report back on two items: (1) discussion of the Wind Energy Waiver and distance requirements adopted in the County Wind Ordinance, and (2) the steps to conduct a Health Impact Assessment. These two topics are discussed below.

### **Distance Requirements and Waiver**

The Wind Energy Zoning Ordinance Amendment and General Plan Amendment to the Mountain Empire Subregional Plan (Boulevard Subregional Planning Area) and Borrego Springs Community Plan to Allow Wind Energy Development (POD 10-007) was approved by the Board of Supervisors (Board) on May 15, 2013 (8). In this amendment, a minimum distance between the nearest property line and Large Wind Turbines was established at a ratio of 1.1 in relation to the height of a proposed wind turbine.

The ordinance also requires an evaluation of A- and C-weighted noise, which could increase the distance between the turbine and the nearest property line. A-weighted noise is defined as noise audible to the human ear and is measured in decibels (dBA). The higher the dBA, the louder the noise is as perceived by the human ear. C-weighted noise is often referred to as low frequency noise and is

measured in decibels (dBC). Low frequency noise is “felt” rather than heard, such as the vibrations felt from the sound of a bass guitar.

During the public review process and adoption of the Wind Ordinance in 2012, the Commission discussed whether a waiver to the C-weighted noise requirements should be allowed. In the ordinance recommended by staff to the Commission, a waiver was included to allow decision makers to waive distance requirements for C-weighted noise if decision makers find a project’s benefits outweigh its impacts. On May 11, 2012, the Commission deliberated and recommended the distance waiver provision related to noise be limited to utility scale wind resource areas north of I-8 within the Boulevard area. The waiver was limited to wind resource areas north of I-8 because of the larger number of homes south of I-8. The Board adopted the Commission’s recommendation when the ordinance was approved on May 15, 2013.

### **Health Impact Assessment (HIA)**

On March 22, 2019, the Commission asked questions about the process, timeline and cost to complete a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for wind energy development. An HIA is defined by the Center for Disease Control as “a process that helps evaluate the potential health effects of a plan, project, or policy before it is built or implemented.” An HIA can vary in time, scope and cost, but typically includes six steps to screen, scope, assess, recommend, report and monitor health impacts. If directed by the Board to conduct an HIA, HHSA would go through a procurement process to hire a consultant to conduct the HIA. HIAs can vary in scope, timeframe and cost; we estimate the timeframe will take between one and a half to three years and cost between \$150,000 and \$300,000 depending on the scope.

At today’s hearing, now that the Commission has received the requested 2019 Public Health Position Statement on Human Health Effects of Wind Turbines and the item is on the agenda, the Commission can consider the options it discussed at the last meeting:

1. Direct staff to prepare a memo for the Chairman to send to the Board requesting:
  - a. Amendments to the Wind Ordinance, and/or
  - b. A Health Impact Assessment of Wind Turbines associated with the County Wind Ordinance be prepared.
2. Take no further action on the 2019 Public Health Position Statement on Human Health Effects of Wind Turbines.

The 2019 Public Health Position Statement and all other relevant documents can be viewed on the following website: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/pds/ordamend.html>