



Meijer looks to Cascade Engineering for wind to power offices, stores

by Aaron Ogg | The Grand Rapids Press

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WALKER -- Wind power might be coming to Meijer Inc.'s corporate offices and two of its Lakeshore stores.

The Walker-based retailer plans to install six Swift Wind Turbines, manufactured by Cascade Engineering Inc., atop its corporate offices at 2929 Walker Ave. NW.

Company officials said Meijer also looks to fit its Grand Haven and Norton Shores locations with the small-scale devices, given local zoning approval.

"We focus on being the best retailer we can be, but we're also mindful of our impact on the environment," spokeswoman Stacie Behler said.

Walker's Zoning Board of Appeals will review Meijer's request at its meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday at City Hall, 4243 Remembrance Road NW. City officials are in the early stages of crafting an ordinance regulating wind turbines, Planner Frank Wash said.

Demand is picking up for Cascade Engineering's product, said Michael Ford, head of the Cascade Township company's renewable-energy business unit. It expects installation of 60 turbines over the next several months, he said.

Area clients include the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist in Vergennes Township, along with local residents and schools, Ford said. One also sits on the roof of the Frauenthal Center for the Performing Arts in Muskegon.

"The interest is great," Ford said. "It's finally a perfect time to have a product and to be actively working on others for future development."

Including installation, the device costs between \$10,000 and \$12,000, Ford said. In a location with ample wind, one can generate up to 2,000 kilowatt hours of electricity -- about 20 percent of an average house's annual usage. It's designed to utilize wind speeds between 8 and 40 m.p.h.

The 8-foot rotor's life expectancy is 20 years.

With energy costs increasing an average of 5 percent annually, some homeowners may expect to reap \$200 per year in savings, Ford said.

"It all depends on what they're paying for energy," he said.

Tax breaks are available, too. The new, \$787 billion federal stimulus package offers a 30 percent investment credit for renewable energy. Additional incentives are available for corporate taxpayers, he said.