

Marcus Gee

## NIMBYs oppose new forms of power generation

Local groups are fighting green projects like natural-gas power plants and even wind turbines



[Marcus Gee](#)

Published on Monday, Jun. 07, 2010 10:18PM EDT Last updated on Tuesday, Jun. 08, 2010 2:35AM EDT

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A new wave of NIMBYism is breaking out in and around Toronto. As Ontario moves away from coal as an energy source, the provincial government is planning new natural-gas power plants and wind turbines to help make that critical shift. Around the region, residents are saying: Not In My Back Yard.

In east Toronto, residents are rallying against a proposal to put a wind farm in Lake Ontario off the Scarborough Bluffs. In the west, Oakville residents say a new gas-powered plant on the lakefront would threaten the health of local neighbourhoods. In the north, a York region group says a proposed gas plant would gobble up valuable farmland and violate the province's own Greenbelt legislation.

The obvious question for these groups is: What would you have Ontario do instead? As part of its commitment to reduce [greenhouse gases](#), the province is phasing out coal-fired power generation by 2014. It says that will cut Ontario's emissions by the same amount as taking 7 million cars off the roads.

Unless we all go back to candle-power and the horse and buggy, the power lost by cutting out coal has to come from somewhere. [Natural gas](#), the cleanest of fossil fuels, is a good alternative. It produces about 45 per cent less carbon dioxide than coal and 30 per cent less than oil. Emissions of particulates, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides are lower, too, which means less danger of smog and acid rain. Wind, it goes without saying, is an even cleaner energy source, though the cost is high and the economics are dodgy.

Local residents who oppose these new wind and gas projects argue that they shouldn't have to sacrifice their health for the province's environmental virtue. But no such demand is being made on them.

In Oakville, residents say they don't want a gas plant within one kilometre of six schools. "Please don't put a power plant so close to my home," says an adorable little blond girl in one protest video.

But the 900-megawatt plant will go right next to the huge Oakville Ford plant, so the area has had an industrial presence for decades. With its population expected to grow by 40 per cent over the next 20 years, Oakville needs more power. It only makes sense to put the source nearby, avoiding the cost of new transmission lines and the wasteful loss of power from sending electricity over long distances. The safety record of natural gas in Ontario is good, with 20 plants operating around the province.

In Northern York Region's King Township, the new 393-megawatt gas plant will indeed go on land that it is part of the provincial Greenbelt, but less than 10 acres of farmland will be lost out of the 46,000 acres in the township. The site is in a secluded rural area away from towns or subdivisions. A consultants' report found that the plant will have only minor effects on noise levels and air quality, which will stay well within safety standards. As a "peaker"

plant, designed to run only at times of peak energy demand, the facility will run for less than five hours a day, five days a week.

The lobby against Lake Ontario wind farms is the most misguided of all. The province's chief medical officer of health, Arlene King, concluded last month that there was no evidence that turbines cause health damage. Yet turbine opponents claim that they cause headaches, high blood pressure, ringing in the ears and problems with sleep and concentration – troubles they call “wind-turbine syndrome.”

By their nature, Nimbies put their own concerns above the greater good. That's half-understandable when they are fighting, say, a new highway or a garbage dump. But when the target is something as innocuous as a windmill, or as necessary as power from natural gas, you have to shake your head a little.

