

**Michigan House Energy & Policy Committee  
Chairman – Aric Nesbitt & Committee Members**

**May 7, 2015**

**Testimony – Gratiot County experience of commercial grade wind development  
Don Schurr, President, Greater Gratiot Development, Inc.**

The development of commercial-grade wind energy in Gratiot County is an extension of a multi-decade, continually evolving, countywide collaborative engagement. It is also part of a growing awareness of the need to expand collaborative activity to a regional, multicounty level. Wind development in Gratiot County has driven new personal and governmental revenues, spurred new opportunities, and fulfilled local, widely-stated, public goals. Gratiot County is now home to two wind farms: Beebe Community Wind Farm, LLC (55, 2.4 megawatt turbines) and Gratiot County Wind, LLC (133, 1.6 megawatt turbines). Gratiot County Wind, LLC is the state's largest wind farm encompassing parts of 4 townships. We have one more development scoped and permitted but not yet initiated.

True to its renewable nature, wind development has assisted in reinvigorating Gratiot County. During the "Great Recession," the Gratiot Community came together to find new opportunities for economic growth after a number of industry closings. The possibility of wind development was presented to Gratiot County due to its flat, open areas and collaborative nature. Leaders throughout the county community found this opportunity to be a worthwhile one as it meant diversification of the County tax base and a stable and predictable stream of revenue. This has funded county & township services, schools & RESDs (ISD), roads, public safety, and a number of other community services critical to the County's success. This ability to plan for the future as a collaborative unit was a key component in attracting wind development.

Gratiot area community and municipal leaders came together in 2008 to develop a Master Plan identified as the *Gratiot Regional Excellence and Transformation (GREAT) Plan*, the first countywide, locally developed, ground up, shared, adopted, and implemented Master Plan in Michigan. Simultaneously with the GREAT Plan, the same community and municipal leaders

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came together with landowners and citizens to determine if there was a desire to accommodate commercial grade wind development and, if so, to understand what it would take to make it a viable opportunity for developers. We did work closely with developers to understand their point of view and see if their POV matched ours. Out of that was created the state's first countywide model wind energy zoning ordinance designed to be used by local jurisdictions so all of Gratiot County would use the same rules and process. Creating an umbrella regulatory policy made it a collaborative community process that led to community acceptance and the ultimate success of wind development in Gratiot County. Both countywide initiatives made the county appealing to wind energy developers, as it ensured that Gratiot County was a predictable place to develop commercial scale wind development.

Wind development has unquestionably brought increased economic prosperity to the county. Since construction began in 2011, Gratiot County's tax base has increased by \$330 million due to wind development. Gratiot County government, townships, and schools realized a total of \$10.37 million in new tax revenue since 2012 from wind development. The local economy is also directly and positively affected by land payments to 350 families and 21 permanent full-time jobs at the new maintenance and operations facilities.

In addition to the direct economic benefits, Gratiot citizens have also experienced a number of indirect benefits. The initial wind investment was used to leverage a grant to complete infrastructure for the Breckenridge Industrial, Technology and Agribusiness Park. Previously there was a field by the edge of town and now there are over 50 FTE positions and growing. Additionally, due to necessary electrical transmission upgrades and the construction of four new substations by ITC, the entire Mid-Michigan area has increased power capacity and reliability. Finally, production agriculture, a crucial part of Gratiot's economy, has been ensured through careful placement of the wind turbines. With turbine placement, farming is about all you will do in those areas; which is what the citizens stated in the Master Plan was their preference.

Perhaps the most significant benefit that wind development has offered Gratiot County is a renewed drive toward the future to explore new opportunities. The wind farms have increased awareness of Gratiot County for increased manufacturing possibilities and even wind tourism. As a result, Gratiot County has been appropriately identified as a forward-looking community that continuously positions itself for a successful future. As I mentioned, it is anticipated that we will have one more wind farm in Gratiot County. The southwest corner of the county is permitted for wind development in two townships. Gratiot County is ready and waiting for this development as wind energy has proven to be a very successful community development option now and for the future.