

OC hopeful after wind deal reached

Partnership could save ratepayers money

Matthew Prensky Salisbury Daily Times
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Last week Gov. Larry Hogan announced that Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina would work together to develop the offshore wind industry off the three states. Now Ocean City is hoping that same collaboration trickles down to their level.

The agreement between the three Mid-Atlantic states will form a joint partnership called the Mid-Atlantic Regional Transformative Partnership for Offshore Wind Energy Resources (SMART-POWER), according to a copy of the agreement.

The new partnership goal is to help more rapidly develop the offshore wind industry and “promote the Mid-Atlantic and southeast United States as an offshore wind energy industry hub.”

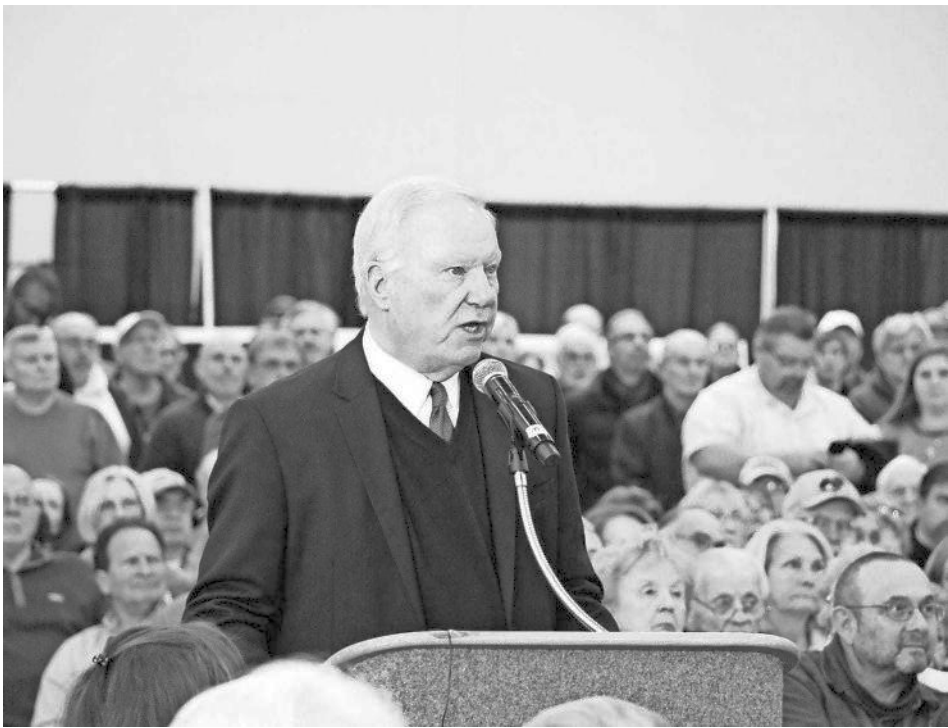
Maryland is currently in the process of building two offshore wind projects off the state’s coast.

The Skipjack Wind Farm, which is being constructed by Ørsted, will be located northeast of Ocean City. The MarWin Wind Farm, being constructed by U.S. Wind, will be directly east of Ocean City. Both projects are slated to be at least 17 miles offshore.

Ørsted supports state efforts to create more regulatory certainty as the wind company continues to develop offshore wind farms, said Brady Walker, Ørsted’s Mid-Atlantic market manager.

“The three-state agreement has the potential to advance offshore wind jobs and investment by strengthening the regional supply chain and by providing more regulatory certainty,” Walker said.

Ørsted was also involved in the construction of a 12 megawatt wind farm off



Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan asks the Maryland Public Service Commission to reevaluate two offshore wind projects after the developers in both projects changed their plans to use larger wind turbines. MATTHEW PRENSKY

the coast of Virginia. The project was slated for completion this fall.

U.S. Wind also approved of the SMART-POWER agreement, saying it could save Maryland ratepayers money by increasing local supply chain options, according to a brief statement by Salvo Vitale, country manager for the offshore wind company.

Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan believes the multi-state agreement “makes sense” for Maryland as the state continues to pursue the deployment of offshore wind energy.

“The town of Ocean City’s position has always been we’re not in opposition,” Meehan said. “We would just like to see the turbines moved further to the

east, and out of the view shed of Ocean City.”

The offshore wind projects being planned in Virginia and North Carolina are both slated to be at least 27 miles off the coast of each state.

Both of Maryland’s projects are planned to be at least 17 miles from shore, but Meehan points out U.S. Wind can build its wind farm as close as 13 miles from Ocean City’s beach.

Officials hope the agreement will help Ocean City convince regulators and the wind companies to push the projects further offshore to match those in Virginia and North Carolina, Meehan said.

“The next step for us will be with the

federal government with the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management hearing,” Meehan said. “We will be persistent in our position that we support these projects, we just want them move further to the east, so that they don’t have a detrimental effect on the town of Ocean City.”

Ocean City officials also hope the deal creates more communication between the town, Ørsted and U.S. Wind.

To date U.S. Wind and Ocean City haven’t had any conversations recently about the MarWin Wind Project, Meehan said. Ocean City officials have had a brief conversation with Ørsted since August.

Maryland regulators criticized Ørsted in August for not working more with the project’s stakeholders, which included Ocean City.

“Skipjack’s duty to reach out to stakeholders was not contingent on the stakeholders’ enthusiasm for the project,” according to the Maryland Public Service Commission. “Ocean City is an important stakeholder whose economy is vital to the state. Nor should Ocean City be punished for its lawful advocacy of a bill that would have required offshore wind turbines to be located at least 26 miles from shore.”

The Maryland PSC ruling did help Ocean City and Ørsted open up better lines and communication, Meehan said. That should also happen when U.S. Wind goes through its regulatory process with the PSC.

“As long as the projects are permitted to be placed closer to our shore it’s more difficult for us to have them moved further offshore,” Meehan said. “It creates more of a challenge, but I think it’s worth having those discussions. I think that if we can make this a win-win for both the wind companies, the town of Ocean City and the state of Maryland, we’ll all be better served.”

Lawsuit

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Bullock, pastor of Canaan Baptist Church near New Castle, filed his lawsuit in May – about two months after Carney imposed COVID-19 restrictions on across the state. The restrictions on communities of worship that Bullock took issue with, included:

- The preparation and distribution of communion.
- No holding or touching during baptisms.
- The clergy having to wear a mask while preaching.
- The amount of people allowed in places of worship during services.

Under the settlement, the state is forbidden to impose a 10-person attendance limit only on houses of worship and, if “essential businesses” or essential activities are listed in the future, churches will be included as essential.

Other requirements in the settlement include:

- Restrictions solely applying to religious rituals such as baptism or communion are forbidden.
- No age-based attendance limits can be imposed solely on religious worship.
- Mask wearing and social distancing cannot be applied solely to churches.
- No church can be limited to just one service a week.
- No limits on other use of its building can be imposed solely on churches, such as its other charitable ministries
- No specific time limit on length of the service can be imposed solely on church use of its building.

Carney, and other governors nationwide, imposed blanket restrictions as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the country. But as states began easing some of the restrictions on businesses and other groups, religious freedom arguments quickly grew as churches and other religious institutions sought equal treatment.

Legal battles in several states led to showdowns in California, Illinois and elsewhere on the eve of Pentecost Sunday, when churches largely shuttered prior to Easter were eager to greet worshippers.

The discussion on how much to open houses of worship continues, even internally. Places such as Wilmington’s Congregation Beth Shalom are seeing a split, with some suggesting a safe entry by following the precautions in place and others opposed to re-entering the congregation as COVID-19 numbers spike.

“Two weeks from today, we’re going to have our first in-person morning service,” said Michael Beals, rabbi at Beth Shalom.

Beth Shalom’s restrictions will in-



Beals



Canaan Baptist Church’s pastor, the Rev. Christopher Bullock, filed his lawsuit in May – about two months after Gov. John Carney imposed COVID-19 restrictions across the state. JERRY HABRAKEN/DELAWARE NEWS JOURNAL



Members of Canaan Baptist Church near New Castle celebrate services during the pandemic. COURTESY OF DEBBIE BULLOCK

clude having congregants RSVP, taking their prayer books home and wearing masks while in attendance. Beals said he will also be behind plexiglass.

Beals, who in the early stages of the pandemic opposed opening places of worship, said Bullock was ahead of where he was at the time.

“We’re all going to try to put our foot back in the water,” he said. “Maybe Rev. Bullock was just like the one who has to go in front of everyone else. Maybe that’s what he was doing.”

Bullock’s lawsuit sought to have Del-

aware’s places of worship open by Pentecost Sunday, but U.S. District Judge Colm F. Connolly denied his request for a temporary restraining order. Third Circuit Court judge affirmed Connolly’s ruling.

While Connolly denied the temporary order, he wrote that his legal decision “has no bearing on the merits of Dr. Bullock’s claims.”

“Those claims implicate one of our most treasured rights protected by the Constitution –the right to exercise freely one’s religion,” Connolly wrote. “And

they implicate as well the fundamental right of a state ‘to protect itself against an epidemic of disease which threatens the safety of its members.’

“These important principles make this an important case.”

Thomas S. Neuberger, one of Bullock’s attorneys in this case, said Carney relied on Delaware Council of Faith-Based Partnerships, which “lacked members from clergy to represent historic Protestant and Catholic Christianity.”

“The governor made many mistakes here, but it was an emergency,” Neuberger said. “No one questions his good faith, he just got bad advice from his purported expert religious advisers.”

The council does have Protestant and Catholic members, according to its website.

Rabbi Beals, who chairs the governor’s Delaware Council of Faith-Based Partnerships, called this “wrongheaded.”

“*Pikuach nefesh*,” he said in Hebrew. This is the principle in Jewish law that means do whatever you can to save a life.

“Jewish law is meant to enhance health, not to put health in danger,” Beals said. “So I’m coming from a 3,600-year-old Jewish tradition, which is a foundation for all these other houses of worship you are talking to, and health comes first.”

Contact Esteban Parra at (302) 324-2299, eparra@delawareonline.com or Twitter @eparra3.