



# Sangamon County could see first wind farm soon

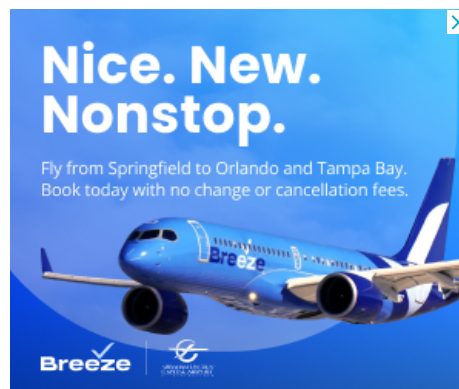
German company seeks approval for first phase of three-county project

By [Dean Olsen](#)

A German renewable energy company plans to file applications with Montgomery and Macoupin county officials early in 2024 for approval to construct the first phase of a multi-county, \$450 million wind farm development known as Grand Prairie Energy Park.

UKA Group's North American Affiliate, based in Stuart, Florida, would build about 60 wind turbines in Montgomery County and Sangamon County over the next several years. Transmission lines would run through Macoupin County.

The total project would eventually create 350 megawatts of electricity. That amount is equivalent to about half of Springfield's power needs, though the electricity would be sold on the local power grid, according to UKA North America Project Developer Adam Wilson.

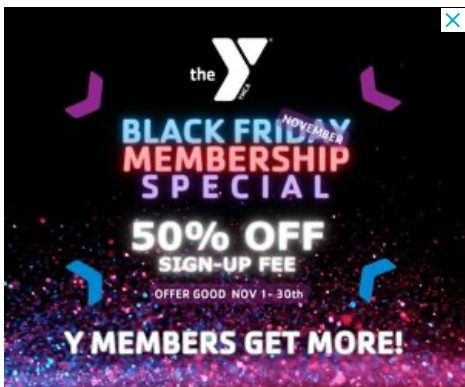


Many rental agreements with landowners on which the wind turbines would sit already have been secured, and the company is working on the rest of the required rental pacts, Wilson told *Illinois Times*.

A state law that took effect in January 2023, largely removing the ability of local governments to block or severely restrict the development of wind and solar projects that meet state guidelines, will make it easier for UKA to operate in Illinois, Wilson said.

Grand Prairie would bring Sangamon County its first wind farms.

Wilson said UKA, which has operated overseas for 22 years and began operations in the United States six years ago, is committed to working with individual communities to boost economic development while helping Illinois reach its long-term goals for reducing climate change-causing fossil fuel emissions.



"We're not just coming in here to build something and then walk away from it," Wilson said. "We intend to be good neighbors. So it's important for us to let everybody know that we intend on being part of this community going forward."

UKA set up an office in the Montgomery County village of Farmersville in mid-2022 and already has taken part in community events in Raymond and Farmersville.

No significant or organized opposition has emerged at this early stage, but UKA officials said there's always the chance members of the public may raise concerns about potential disruption of the rural landscape, and possible humming and sunlight flickering that can be caused by the windmill blades.

Company officials said the distance the turbines would be placed from people and structures outside the project area would alleviate those concerns.

UKA says the project will be safe, quiet and won't pose significant harm to wildlife.



"Honestly, we're talking about such large tracts of land and such significant setbacks," Wilson said. "You really don't know the effect of a wind turbine in terms of sound unless you're standing under or close by one. The decibel level is not that big, primarily because they're so high up."

Wilson added: "The biggest complaint is the visuals. Some people think a wind turbine looks majestic. Others think they look awful."

The largest phase of the project – 17 to 23 wind turbines, mostly in Montgomery County and some in Sangamon County – would create 67 construction jobs that would last 12 to 18 months, and nine permanent jobs once the project is operating, Wilson said.

Annual lease payments to local landowners in this phase would likely be more than \$1 million.

"This translates to reinvestments in local farms, spending more money on local businesses, continuing family legacies and more," a UKA fact sheet on the project said.

The first phase would likely generate more than \$1.05 million in total annual property taxes for Montgomery and Sangamon counties every year for more than 30 years – the expected life of the wind turbines, according to UKA.

"This means significant funds for schools, health care, tax relief – or freezes – infrastructure and more," the fact sheet said.

The wind turbines would be in unincorporated rural areas, and not in incorporated cities and villages.

The first phase of the development would cover the Virden area in Montgomery and Macoupin counties. That phase, involving the construction of 14 to 17 wind turbines and possibly some solar-power panels, would produce 100 megawatts and be connected to an electrical substation in that area. UKA hopes to complete this project in 2026.

The second and largest phase, involving wind turbines in Montgomery and Sangamon counties and transmission lines in Macoupin County, could be completed in 2027, UKA officials said. The turbines would connect to major power lines at City Water, Light and Power's Westchester substation on Springfield's west side.

The third phase, in the Pawnee area in Sangamon and Montgomery counties, would produce 100 megawatts with 14 to 17 wind turbines and possible solar arrays. That site would connect to a substation in the area and possibly be completed in 2027.

Some turbines from all three phases would be visible from the east and west to drivers along Interstate 55, UKA officials said.

Using the newest technology and construction innovation, the wind turbines in the project would be larger than most in central Illinois and the rest of the state, UKA officials said.

Each turbine would generate more power, as well, while taking up about the same amount of farmland – about one acre apiece, once completed, officials said.

Most wind turbines operating in Illinois generate two to three megawatts, while UKA's wind turbines each would generate between 6.5 and 7 megawatts, Wilson said.

UKA's wind turbines would be 377 feet tall at the "hub," or the center portion of the structure where the blades are attached. That's more than 40% taller than most earlier-generation wind turbines and taller than the Statue of Liberty.

The UKA wind turbines would extend 656 feet tall at the tip of the top blade, or about 55 stories high.

Rural Farmersville resident Tom Murphy, 72, a retired farmer whose brother farms the 320 acres Murphy owns in Montgomery County, said he would receive more than \$100,000 in annual rental income per year for the two UKA wind turbines the company plans to build on his land.

Murphy said he supports the project, noting that he generates about \$90,000 a year in rental income for all of his farm ground now.

Montgomery County chairperson Doug Donaldson, a Republican from rural Hillsboro, said he is "not a fan" of wind farms and didn't appreciate state lawmakers taking away most local control from county governments on wind and solar power developments.

He said Montgomery County officials have received numerous inquiries from alternative energy developers since the state law was passed, mostly along partisan lines, by the Democratic-controlled General Assembly.

Rural Chestnut resident Bobby Jackson, 56, who opposed a Top Hat wind farm that received Logan County Board approval in 2022, said state officials were "willing to ignore safety concerns" to further a clean-energy agenda.

There is "room for questions" about the potential drawbacks of wind turbines, said Jackson, a computer software architect. "They're not as appealing as what it appears on the surface."

Some people in Montgomery County don't want wind turbines coming to the area, and some farmers don't welcome the prospect of having to farm around the structures, Murphy said.

"It seems to me the majority of people are for it," he said. "I see it overall as a good thing, not only for me, but for the community and the county tax-wise."

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