

OFFSHORE WIND

# Nantucket officials demand action, answers from Vineyard Wind



By **Anastasia E. Lennon**

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Wind turbines from the Vineyard Wind farm in November 2024. Nantucket and a Nantucket-based activist group are challenging three offshore wind projects off the Massachusetts coast. Credit: Eleonora Bianchi / The New Bedford Light



The Town of Nantucket on Tuesday issued a series of demands to offshore wind developer Vineyard Wind over what it says has been a lack of transparency and a failure to meet the conditions of an agreement signed between both parties in 2020.

“Since the immediate aftermath of the blade failure and since the last presidential election, Vineyard Wind’s leadership has essentially gone into hiding,” Nantucket Select Board member Brooke Mohr told reporters during a virtual press conference.

In July 2024, a blade on a project turbine catastrophically failed, sending foam and fiberglass debris ashore in Nantucket and Southeastern Massachusetts.

“We believe they are concerned about the change in federal policy at the federal level and drawing scrutiny from the new administration,” Mohr continued. “However, hiding is not the solution to their problems, nor is it the solution to our problems.”

The blade failure was the catalyst of the town’s widely publicized criticisms, but its issues with the project predate the incident. A core issue officials highlighted was the lighting system that Vineyard Wind in 2020 agreed to install.

The skyscraper-tall turbines require a lighting system at top for safe navigation of aircraft. Called an aircraft detection lighting system, it is meant to turn on only when an aircraft is passing in order to minimize light pollution and visual impacts from shore. Vineyard Wind estimates that once the detection system is operating, the lights would only be on fewer than four hours per year. Nantucket officials say the system hasn’t been fully implemented, so turbine lights are often on at night.

“They’ve been polluting our night skies with dozens of blinking red lights for several years now,” said Mohr. The project sits about 15 miles south of Nantucket and can be seen from shore.

The officials’ demands come weeks after the town settled with GE Vernova, the turbine’s manufacturer, over the July 14, 2024, incident for \$10.5 million — a settlement that also benefits Vineyard Wind as a third party. The multi-million dollar settlement “finally and forever” releases GE Vernova, Vineyard Wind and the town from “any and all” claims and suits related to the 2024 blade incident. At the time, town officials chastised Vineyard Wind and suggested that further action would be coming against the company.

The town is requesting Vineyard Wind to immediately adopt 15 measures. These include notifying town officials within one hour of an emergency, providing monthly project updates to the town’s Se



quarterly updates to the public, and disclosing correspondence with regulatory agencies within 15 business days.

The other demands have a financial component: Nantucket wants Vineyard Wind to pay \$25,000 per day for every turbine that is not operating with the agreed-upon aircraft detection lighting system; establish a \$10 million fund to be placed in escrow in case of another failure that requires cleanup; and pay \$250,000 per violation of any of the communication demands.

It appears some of the town's demands, as of now, don't have much teeth. For example, asked how it could enforce a \$25,000 per day per turbine fine, the town's outside counsel said the demands are an "attempt to have Vineyard Wind relieve itself of the risk of potential further action."

Greg Werkheiser, the attorney, said enforcement could come from litigation or federal agencies via "closer scrutiny" on the project's operations.

"We're not going to prejudge what and who will enforce that afterwards... We're asking them within two weeks to get back to us... with a very specific line item by line item response," said Werkheiser. "If they say we can't comply with that one, we want an explanation why and a reasonable alternative to adopt."

Town officials are giving the company until Aug. 12 to respond.



Foam debris found at Elephant Rock Beach in Westport in 2024 that appears to be from the damaged Vineyard Wind blade. Credit: Anastasia E. Lennon / The New Bedford Light

Vineyard Wind did not respond to questions. In a statement late Tuesday, the company said the recent settlement agreement resolved all claims and any harms regarding the blade failure.

“As it has always done, Vineyard Wind will continue to meet all state and federal permit requirements” and coordinate with the town per the 2020 agreement, the statement read. “Following the conclusion of the settlement process, Vineyard Wind has anticipated resuming traditional communications and coordination with the Town in a manner that supports a productive dialogue.”

The company concluded that it hopes the town “will move forward in the spirit of that settlement and work together towards a constructive, positive relationship.” The statement did not directly address the lighting system.

A Vineyard Wind spokesperson told the Nantucket Current in February that the project was in compliance with its 2020 agreement with the town. A second agreement from 2021 calls for the aircraft detection lighting system to be activated prior to commercial operation of the project. The spokesperson told the Current in February that commercial operation had not been achieved.

Vineyard Wind is well underway after a monthslong construction pause, and is nearly at 30% operation. As of this month, 17 turbines are delivering power to the Massachusetts grid, according to Iberdrola, the project's parent company. Altogether, about 40 of the 62 turbines are in the water, The Light reported last week.

The Light asked whether the town has calculated the economic impact of the July 2024 blade failure.

“We won't know the true cost until the process of considering resident business claims is concluded by the independent Administrator,” said Werkheiser, an attorney at Cultural Heritage Partners, in an email.

Under the agreement, the town will establish a “Community Claims Fund” to be administered by a third party, which will review claims submitted for cleanups, property damage and lost profit, and dole out compensation.

## More towns oppose renewable energy

In Nantucket's settlement with GE Vernova, as well as its suit against the federal government, the town is being represented by Cultural Heritage Partners.

The Virginia-based firm is also representing the Preservation Society of Newport County, which owns Rhode Island's famed waterfront mansions, in its challenges against Revolution Wind and South Fork Wind. The former is under construction, while the latter was completed in 2024.

The Preservation Society of Newport County says the visibility of the turbines from the shore will obstruct the ocean views and have a lasting impact on Newport's tourism economy, mirroring the points Nantucket officials are making about the Vineyard Wind project.

The Town of Nantucket joins a growing chorus of municipalities challenging renewable energy projects.

By the end of 2024, about 500 renewable energy projects were contested in 49 states, an increase of 32% over the previous year, according to a report just released by the Sabin Center for Climate Change at Columbia University. The report also identified more than 450 counties and municipalities that have “severe local restrictions” on the siting of projects, an increase of 16% from the previous year.



The cumulative impact can be significant, leading to a slowdown in the uptake of renewable energy sources or an outright cancellation of projects amid quickly growing demand.

Local opposition and local ordinances or zoning have been the leading causes of project cancellation, the report states. Massachusetts, though without any state-level restrictions, ranked seventh nationally for the number of contested projects over time. Among them are eight wind projects (land-based and offshore).

Nantucket County made the list for “contested projects” in the Commonwealth, with regards to its lawsuit against the [SouthCoast Wind project](#), filed earlier this year. Barnstable also made the list, with municipalities in the county taking action to stop the installation of transmission lines for New England Wind 1.

Asked by a reporter if Nantucket has the ultimate goal of stopping the project, Werkheiser said the town is committed to clean energy and is not anti-offshore wind, but “pro-developers complying” with federal law and agreements.

But at least one official, the Select Board chair, expressed strong opposition to offshore wind, and the desire to see it stopped.

“We were really led to believe this would have a much lesser impact on an island that is a historic landmark, is a fragile place and is completely reliant on tourism,” said Dawn E. Hill. “My choice would be with our new federal administration to really wake up and try and put an end to these things, because they’re not worth it to the coast of the United States.”

Federal regulators, at the behest of President Donald Trump, have taken a 180 from the Biden administration’s approach to offshore wind. Opponents of offshore wind development have jumped at the opportunity to have their requests heard by officials and agencies operating under Trump’s executive orders to freeze permitting and scrutinize projects.

The Light in an email asked Werkheiser what communications the town and the firm have had with the federal government regarding the Vineyard Wind project since Trump took office for his second term.

(In February, the Select Board wrote to Interior Secretary Doug Burgum about the SouthCoast Wind project, and in its March lawsuit, the town asked the federal government to withdraw its approval of the project.)

“Phone meetings, emails, too numerous and too many topics to detail by what is likely your d  
Werkheiser responded. “But the primary focus was on blade failure aftermath and secondary focus on



concerns like the ones you heard about today.”

Email Anastasia E. Lennon at [alennon@newbedfordlight.org](mailto:alennon@newbedfordlight.org).

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