

## Buyer's Remorse: Nantucket Officials Rue Aggravating Offshore Wind Project

'These wind turbines are bigger, brighter, and much more impactful than we ever thought'



Dozens of

Massachusetts residents are reporting health problems they believe are caused by nearby wind tunnels / AP

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If they could go back in time, officials in Nantucket, Massachusetts, wouldn't sign the legal agreement that helped bring the nation's first large-scale [offshore wind farm](#) 15 miles from the island town's picturesque shoreline.

That was the common sentiment expressed during a Nantucket select board meeting this week about the August 2020 [community benefit agreement](#) the town entered into with developers of the Vineyard Wind project, which is currently under construction. "These

wind turbines are bigger, brighter, and much more impactful than we ever thought—and not to mention the environmental hazards from failures," said Dawn Hill, the chairwoman of the select board, which serves as the town's executive body.

The agreement represented Nantucket's formal endorsement of the project and satisfied Vineyard Wind's [legal responsibility](#) to consult with the town. Because Nantucket is a federally designated national historic district, regulators and developers must consult with the town on new projects that may threaten its protected status.

"Hindsight is 20/20," added Greg Werkheiser, an attorney who represents Nantucket. "Every lawyer in the world wishes 5 or 10 years into a negotiated contract that they could take the knowledge they have, fly back in time, and renegotiate—but communities make the choices they have with the information they have at the time."

Hill, Werkheiser, and the other officials present accused Vineyard Wind of cutting off communications with the town, failing to reduce light pollution emitted by its turbines, slow-walking reports on environmental impacts of the project, failing to disclose construction delays, and failing to work with officials on a plan for emergency scenarios—all of which they said are violations of the 2020 agreement. The Nantucket officials then directed 15 public demands at Vineyard Wind.

The issue is a microcosm of the resistance offshore wind projects have faced in coastal communities along the East Coast and could serve as a warning for communities where developers are considering future projects. But while communities in Delaware, New Jersey, and New York have successfully stymied offshore wind development, Nantucket's options are more limited—Vineyard Wind is permitted, already under construction, and expected to begin operations by the end of the year.

As such, Nantucket has opted to issue its public demands first before considering other options. Officials, though, said they haven't ruled out litigation to enforce the terms of the 2020 agreement if Vineyard Wind fails to meet their demands.

"To Vineyard Wind, we say lead or leave. As the first industrial-scale offshore wind development permitted in the United States, the entire offshore wind industry takes note of what you do—or fail to do. If you treat your project's host community as an afterthought, you create a bad precedent for the industry," Brooke Mohr, a member of the select board, remarked during the meeting. "This is unacceptable."

Tensions between Nantucket and Vineyard Wind reached a boiling point in July 2024 after a football field-sized blade on one of its wind towers fell apart during construction, sending 50 tons of fiberglass and industrial-grade foam into the ocean, forcing the island's beaches to close. Project developers waited until debris washed ashore three days following the

failure before they informed Nantucket about the incident, sparking fury from officials, businesses, and residents.

In the 12 months since the blade failure, the developers haven't provided the town with information about changes to the construction timeline or the progress of environmental reviews related to the blade failure. As of this week, Vineyard Wind's leadership remains in "hiding," according to Mohr. Alas, Vineyard Wind issued its most [recent press release](#) in October, and its only public update this year appears to have come during an [earnings call](#) held last week by one of its developers, the Spain-based energy firm Iberdrola.

"They were not uninformed. Local groups were informing them five years ago that they should not do this deal and gave them all the reasons why they now regret it," said Dave Stevenson, the director of the Center for Energy Competitiveness at the right-leaning Caesar Rodney Institute. "The folks in the town didn't fight, they didn't look at all the negatives, they just didn't listen."

Stevenson, who helped found the American Coalition for Ocean Protection in 2021, has advocated against Vineyard Wind for years and contributed to successful efforts blocking offshore wind projects in Delaware and New Jersey. "I don't know why it's taken the folks in Nantucket so long to figure out. Perhaps it was the broken turbine blade that finally got their attention," he said.

Although Nantucket hasn't sued Vineyard Wind, the project has faced litigation from the commercial fishing industry. On Wednesday, plaintiffs in that case filed an administrative petition with the Department of the Interior, listing 13 federal statutes that the Biden administration allegedly violated [when it approved](#) Vineyard Wind and requested Interior Secretary Doug Burgum to open an investigation into the matter.

"We're asking not only for stopping any further construction activities, but for full decommissioning and remediation to the area in the condition it was in when the construction operation plan was first approved," said Ted Hadzi-Antich, a senior attorney with the Texas Public Policy Foundation who represents fishing industry plaintiffs in the case.

Led by Burgum, the Trump administration has halted new [offshore wind development](#), but has [opted against blocking](#) existing projects like Vineyard Wind. "There's not an easy, legal way to stop those," Burgum said in an interview on Fox News on Wednesday.

The Department of the Interior [signed off](#) on Vineyard Wind in May 2021, less than four months after President Biden took office, making it the first utility-scale project approved in the United States. Once complete, the wind farm will consist of 62 turbines and have a total capacity of 880 megawatts, enough to power 400,000 homes.

In addition to the Biden administration, Massachusetts state leaders have been vocal proponents of Vineyard Wind. Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey (D.) [said last year](#) that the project "will make the air we breathe safer and healthier, save customers money, and bring us one step closer to achieving net-zero emissions."