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 **For Immediate Release**

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**CHALLENGES, DELAYS LEAD TO PAUSE ON LAKE ERIE WIND TURBINE PROJECT**

**Cleveland – December 8, 2023** -- Citing considerable challenges and increased costs resulting from years of delays and obstacles, the Lake Erie Energy Development Corp. (LEEDCo) board of directors made the difficult decision to temporarily halt the Icebreaker Wind project. This innovative project, consisting of six wind turbines, was planned to be located eight miles off Cleveland’s shoreline.

The board is exploring various avenues that might allow the project to move forward in the future.

“We join with many civic leaders, businesses and environmental organizations in being disappointed in having to suspend this project,” said Will Friedman, LEEDCo board member and president & CEO of the Port of Cleveland. “This pause is necessitated by a confluence of adverse circumstances and numerous delays resulting in a financial climate where the project’s commercial viability is in question.”

The project’s development efforts began around 2009. Since that time, it received approvals from numerous local, state and federal agencies. But there were significant regulatory and legal hurdles.

Specifically, LEEDCo pointed to a project killing condition by the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) which significantly impeded the project by mandating that Icebreaker cease operations in the evening, making it financially untenable. The State’s own experts testified under oath the shutdown mandate wasn’t needed. This provision was ultimately reversed, but the lengthy delay significantly dimmed prospects for advancing the project.

Friedman emphasized that LEEDCo invested great amounts of time reviewing any potential impact on birds. Siting Board staff determined after 18 months of extensive study and review that with certain conditions, Icebreaker Wind “serves the public interest” and poses “minimal adverse environmental impact.” After thorough review, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stated the project poses “limited direct risk” to migratory birds. And many environmental groups have endorsed Icebreaker, including the Sierra Club, the Environmental Defense Fund and the Ohio Environmental Council.

Additionally, Icebreaker Wind faced frivolous and costly lawsuits funded by dark money tied to fossil fuel interests. This burdensome litigation caused years of delays and significant expense. The delays have led to a constrained economics for the project:

* Higher interest rates have driven up financing costs. General inflation and global circumstances have significantly increased capital costs, especially for materials like steel, making offshore wind particularly susceptible to economic fluctuations. While LEEDCo is a small non-profit, other projects being pursued by the world’s leading offshore wind developers, with government support, are being stalled by similar factors.
* LEEDCo’s private development partner, which was to construct and operate the project, ceased financial support for Icebreaker due to the numerous obstacles presented. Friedman said LEEDCO is open to the possibility of other developer-owners taking over the project.
* LEEDCo and the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy have mutually agreed to terminate a funding award given the delays and the practical inability to meet the Department’s award milestones. While this award has terminated, the federal government continues to prioritize offshore wind and there might be future opportunities for funding.

LEEDCo Board Chair Ronn Richard, who was central in conceiving the project, said Northeast Ohio was poised to be a leader in innovation with this potential first of its kind offshore wind project in North American fresh water.

Richard said the community’s efforts have not been in vain. “LEEDCo has conducted extensive, expert research about the environmental sustainability of offshore wind, laying the groundwork for future projects,” he said. “We have sparked a meaningful community conversation about the potential offshore wind can provide and the importance of renewable energy. “

Richard noted many companies in Northeast Ohio and throughout the state have set ambitious renewable targets, underscoring the need for clean energy.

“I maintain my belief that – just as Ohio was the first in flight – the day will come when Ohio will be a leader in advanced energy. I am disappointed by this pause on Icebreaker, but I believe that there will be a significant number of offshore wind turbines in the Great Lakes in my lifetime. Climate change will necessitate it,” Richard added.

Chris Tavenor, associate general counsel for the Ohio Environmental Council, also is optimistic.

“LEEDCo was ahead of its time when it proposed the Icebreaker Wind Project, the first freshwater offshore wind farm in North America. This innovative project has persevered through significant legal and regulatory challenges that in some cases were funded by the fossil fuel industry,” he said**.** “For decades, the Ohio Environmental Council has worked to grow Ohio’s renewable energy future by advocating for smart investments that provide Ohioans with clean, affordable energy. That includes the Icebreaker Wind Project, with its potential to reduce carbon emissions and inject millions into the local economy. While we are disappointed by the temporary pause of this innovative clean energy project, we remain optimistic about the potential of offshore wind for Ohio and other Great Lakes states.”

The LEEDCo board extended its thanks to multiple partners including local and state elected officials who were advocates, environmental groups, labor organizations and others who were staunch advocates.

**About Icebreaker Wind**

Icebreaker Wind was anticipated to create over 500 jobs and pump $253 million into the region’s economy. Ohio already has the largest wind energy manufacturing base of any state in the US, according to the American Wind Energy Association. More than 275 manufacturing companies had expressed interest in being part of the project.

The project received approvals from agencies including the Ohio EPA, the Federal Aviation Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and the Ohio Power Siting Board. The U.S. Department of Energy conducted an Environmental Assessment and issued a Finding of No Significant Impact.

Eight miles from shore, the proposed turbines would not be visible on most days. On a clear day, a person standing on the downtown Cleveland lakeshore holding their arm out would have seen turbines no taller than half a thumbnail.   The small project would have only occupied .000002% of Lake Erie’s surface area.

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