

Falmouth Veteran Battle Wind Turbines – and Health Woes

By [Bella English](#)

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FALMOUTH — Barry Funfar is a 67-year-old Vietnam veteran who spent most of his waking moments since retirement a decade ago working with the hundreds of flowers and trees he planted around the Colonial-style house that he built. Gardening was his exercise, therapy, and passion, and his doctors agreed it was beneficial to combat his post traumatic stress disorder.

A Marine, Funfar flew 127 combat missions as a door gunner on Huey helicopters and was awarded seven Air Medals for meritorious service.

Years later, he is battling another enemy: two wind turbines near his home, which he says have ended his gardening, caused him unremitting health problems, and exacerbated the PTSD that has plagued him for decades.

Last spring, he and his wife, Diane, filed a complaint against the Town of Falmouth, and the Zoning Board of Appeals recently agreed with the couple that the green energy turbines create a nuisance for them. A year earlier, the board had issued a similar ruling in another turbine case.

But instead of complying with its own zoning board, the Town of Falmouth is suing the board — again.



In the earlier case, Barnstable Superior Court Judge Christopher Muse issued a temporary order, while the case is pending, that the turbines run only between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Dozens of other Falmouth residents have also testified before the local health board about negative health effects.

These residents are not alone.

Seeking cleaner and cheaper sources of power, governments around the world have been turning to wind power. But as the turbines increase so have complaints about health problems. There remains significant disagreement about the medical legitimacy of those claims, but there is no doubt in the minds of Funfar and others who suffer.

Funfar, who was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder in 2003 after decades of nightmares, anxiety, anger, depression, and alcoholism, was treated by doctors and counselors at the VA Medical Center in Providence, sometimes attending group and individual therapy sessions four days a week. He still goes weekly.

Funfar joined the Marine Corps in 1965, a farm boy from North Dakota. At boot camp graduation, his drill instructor handed him a military ID and said: "Here's your license to kill." It's a statement that still haunts Funfar.

But by 2008, after the intensive therapy, he says, he was feeling much better.

"It took a lot of therapy to change those nightmares that I was killed," he said on a recent day in the house he built in 1999. "In those dreams, my copter would be shot down; the enemy would chase us and kill us, and I'd be at my own funeral."

In Falmouth, where the Funfars have lived since 1979, gardening became a big part of his life, and his doctors encouraged it as a healthy outlet for his PTSD. As the oldest of five boys growing up on an isolated farm, Funfar had always had a passion for plants.

You might call it an obsession. His lot, not quite an acre, has 128 varieties of clematis plants, 500 rhododendrons and azaleas, eight varieties of magnolias, and this year, he put in 10 Japanese maples. That doesn't include myriad other plants; Funfar reckons he's got "thousands of them out there." He has given away hundreds.

In fact, he did the master plan for his garden before he even built the house.

Funfar has carved paths in what he calls his "wild woodland garden," and built a greenhouse on the property as well as a gazebo with a wood stove and microwave, where he sits and peruses some of the dozens of gardening books he has amassed. He also has several photo albums of his plants, with notes scribbled alongside each picture. He makes his own greeting cards with pressed flowers from his garden, and his home was included on three garden tours.

"Any moment I wasn't working, I was with those plants," says Funfar, who in 2003 retired from his carpet-cleaning business.

But these days, the property is overgrown and neglected, the greenhouse and gazebo abandoned. In March 2010, the town installed its first wind turbine and added another the following year. The first is 1,662 feet from the Funfar home, the second 1,558 feet. Both can be seen from their roof deck.

"The first time I heard it, I couldn't believe it could make that much noise," he says. It's also the inaudible low frequency and infrasound waves that he says have made him ill, with symptoms such as heart palpitations, surges in blood pressure, migraine headaches, and sleep deprivation.

“I feel a quivering in my chest,” he says. “I get panic attacks. My pulse is 180, and three hours later it’s still 130. I’m on blood pressure medication, and my pressure was down to 120 over 70. But now, I’ll get 155 over 115. I feel my life is being shortened by this.”

In its complaint against its zoning board, the Town of Falmouth said that the wind turbines do not constitute a nuisance under either town or state law. Moreover, Falmouth called Funfar’s symptoms “a preexisting condition known as post traumatic stress disorder.”

Funfar replies that yes, he has had PTSD “but never did I have this quivering in my chest, these migraines and flashes in my eyes.”

The pro-turbine camp has spent a lot of online ink maligning patients such as Funfar, while the anti-turbine camp also uses the issue as a rallying cry. “This is a medical puzzle plopped into the middle of a very political environment,” says Dr. Steven Rauch, a hearing and balance specialist at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and professor of otology and laryngology at Harvard Medical School.

Caught in the middle of political and financial interests, he says, are patients like Funfar, who are experiencing significant symptoms. “I personally have no doubt that there is a real physiological phenomenon going on and some patients are vulnerable to it,” says Rauch, who has seen two such patients with a plethora of symptoms, but has not treated Funfar. “There’s a lot of science on it, and it’s growing.”

Humans have varying sensitivities to sound, and a subset of those exposed to wind turbines suffer from the low-frequency pressure waves that penetrate walls and homes, says Rauch.

For Funfar, the only way he can elude the turbines’ effects is to leave the area. He spends much time between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. helping out at his daughter’s or son’s homes, which aren’t near the turbines. He takes his grandsons to the library. Sometimes, he sits in church.

And a year ago, he and Diane bought a house in the Dominican Republic with mango and avocado trees where he can garden “to my heart’s content” for several months of the year.

Diane Funfar, a retired math teacher at Falmouth High School, says her husband’s PTSD had improved with treatment. “He was happy, working in the yard,” she says. “But then the turbines came and turned him into a different person. He got panic attacks and anxiety; his blood pressure went up, and his meds increased.

“The thing he loved to do most was working in the yard, but he can’t be here when the turbines are going. He can’t even put the trash out when the turbines are loud.”

As for her own health, Diane says she wore contact lenses for 42 years but since the turbines, she has had to give them up because of eye discharge that she never before experienced. “And I get headaches now and I never, ever got headaches.”

In letters included in the Funfars’ complaint, his treatment team at the VA hospital supported his claim. Psychologist Christy Capone reported that Funfar had been making great progress with his PTSD symptoms until the installation of the turbines. “His symptoms have worsened significantly. . . . His backyard, previously his ‘sanctuary’ where he spent many peaceful hours gardening, is now a place of stress and conflict,” she wrote.

In its May 2013 annual election, the Town of Falmouth put a tax initiative on the ballot for funds to decommission the turbines. But though the initiative had passed in Town Meeting, it failed 2-to-1 at the polls.

The cost of removing the turbines was estimated at \$3.4 million, and the town would lose about \$400,000 in revenue from the sale of electricity generated by the turbines, which is used to pay municipal electric bills.

The town borrowed nearly \$5 million to build the first turbine, and received a \$5 million state grant for the second one. But if the latter is taken down, the grant must be repaid.

“These financial consequences are part of the basis of the town’s decision to appeal [the ZBA ruling],” says Town Counsel Frank Duffy.

The Funfars have looked into selling the house that he hand-built “from concrete to the electrical” but say that the property value has decreased nearly 30 percent, according to appraisals done before and after the turbines came in. (The zoning board agreed with the Funfars, but the town responded that the claim is “based upon insufficient evidence.”)

The Funfars also say they’ve spent more than \$20,000 on lawyers to fight the turbines.

The wind turbine issue has divided the Falmouth community into two camps. One letter to the local newspaper “told me to suck it up and do something for my country,” says Funfar, visibly upset. “Personally, I feel I did my duty for this country.”

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Read the original article at: <http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/2014/01/24/falmouth-veteran-battles-wind-turbines-and-health-woes/dVF6q3ur3oO4706FRpKPLJ/story.html>