

Linn commissioners OK solar energy facility

ALBANY — A proposed 12-acre solar power development on Eicher Road east of Albany will be allowed to proceed, pending a wetlands review and analysis, the Linn County Board of Commissioners agreed on a 2-1 vote Tuesday morning.

Commissioners Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker voted yes, although Sprenger emphasized she is not a fan of solar energy systems and Board Chairman Roger Nyquist voted no.

Sulus Solar of Portland had originally wanted to build the solar facility on 20 acres, but reduced that request to 12 acres.

A land use application was approved by the Linn County Planning Commission in February. An appeal of that decision was heard by the commissioners in May. The commissioners asked that the record remain open for three weeks.

Several neighbors oppose the plan, saying the array of solar panels does not fit in the farm neighborhood, will be sited close to homes, have negative effects on wildlife and a portion of the property is a wetlands.

In his opposition, Nyquist said he does not believe the solar project is compatible with Exclusive Farm Use zoning and neighboring houses, even though the state legislature has made such applications legal.

Nyquist said he believes electrical generation projects of this size are best suited in industrially zoned areas, which also have land values greater than farmland. He said this could set a local precedent that future solar facilities may be sited in farm areas.

Sprenger said that although she is not a fan of solar energy, she could not find any legal precedence or land use law criteria that would lead her to vote against the application.

Tucker said he has used solar power systems on his homes. He believes solar power will be an important component in long-term energy sustainability in the United States and siting will likely continue to be a concern among neighbors.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Learned that total planning and building permits are down 9% from the last fiscal year and revenue is down 12%, but Planning Director Robert Wheeldon said he anticipates contract revenues will be up enough by the end of the current fiscal year to balance the budget without General Fund money.
- Wheeldon added that the county has waived about \$57,000 in permitting fees for families in the Santiam Canyon. There are have 12 permits for single-family dwellings; 13 for manufactured homes; 30 for electrical services; and 18 temporary RV permits.
- Approved the sale of a 3.34-acre piece of property on Brewster Road that is landlocked. The county has owned the property since 1963. Owners of the Adams Family Ranch, which borders the property, offered \$3,340.
- Approved an internal transfer of \$8 million to support the Law Enforcement Levy and \$6 million for the General Fund, to support operations from July 1 until November 30, when taxes start coming in. Both transfers would be from the Road Fund.
- Approved the temporary closure of First Avenue and SE Kingwood Avenue — both Linn County Roads — from noon until 1 p.m. for the 4th of July parade in Mill City.

Media contact: Alex Paul, Linn County Communications Officer, 541-967-3825 or email apaul@co.linn.or.us.

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