

Linn County commissioners hear land use appeal

ALBANY — The Linn County Board of Commissioners will allow written testimony until 5 p.m. on May 19, following a conditional permit appeal hearing Wednesday morning at the Old Armory Building.

At issue is whether a 12-acre solar energy facility can be constructed on Eicher Road, about four miles east of Albany off Highway 20. The property is owned by Duane Eicher.

The Planning Commission previously approved an application by Marble Solar Inc., but that decision was appealed.

Company representative attorney Damian Hall of Portland, said the original plan that called for 20 acres of a 92-acre farm field would be reduced to 12 acres.

He said the facility would contain no buildings and the only noise it would generate would be a fan in a piece of equipment that converts direct current into household current. He said the sound would be equivalent to a home heating and air conditioning system and it would be hundreds of feet away from the nearest neighbor.

Hall said there would not be any daily workers on-site and a truck with a maintenance person would be on-site quarterly.

Hall added that the solar panels would be surrounded by a fence and landscaping.

Paul Drushella, who lives on Eicher Road, spoke for several neighbors who oppose the project.

Drushella said the property contains wetlands, is zoned Exclusive Farm Use and is home to migrating geese as well as coyotes, rabbits, fox and wild eagles.

Drushella said approving the conditional use permit would “set a dangerous precedent” that could have a detrimental effect for future generations.

Another neighbor said he believes the solar project will decrease area property values, although an appraiser noted it would not.

Les Poole, who lives in Clackamas County, said there are emerging wetlands on the property, which he said means they are growing in size.

In rebuttal, Hall said the company does not plan to build on the wetlands, there is ample space between the solar panels and neighboring homes, there will not be a large expansion of solar farms because they have specific location requirements such as being close to a power substation and the panels are designed to absorb light, not reflect it.

The commissioners expect to make a final decision at 10 a.m. June 8 at the Linn County Courthouse.

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