



Commissioners urged to oppose solar energy park

ALBANY — Three people representing a group called “Friends of Gap Road” asked Linn County Commissioners Will Tucker and Sherrie Sprenger Tuesday morning to oppose a proposed solar energy park project about eight miles south of Brownsville near Harrisburg that would be sited on 1,500 acres of prime farm land.

Board Chairman Roger Nyquist was not present.

Farmers and others recently packed the Community Room of Brownsville City Hall, opposing the proposed Muddy Creek Energy Park which would be developed and operated by a company called Hanwa Qcells, whose U.S. headquarters are in California and international headquarters in South Korea.

Because the project would encompass more than 160 acres, its siting and land use process falls under the Oregon Department of Energy’s jurisdiction, although Linn County commissioners can provide oral and written comments.

Present Tuesday morning were Troy Jones, Stephanie Glaser Hagerty and Arnold Kampfer. All own property near the proposed project and have long family histories in the area.

Although the proposed project would be on Class I and II soils, solar projects are allowed as a conditional use under state law use laws. The developers plan to graze sheep on the property under the solar panels.

Jones asked the commissioners to oppose the project.

“We are concerned about wetlands, wildlife and the fact this would be on EFU (Exclusive Farm Use) land,” Jones said.

The group also believes the siting process would “circumvent” Linn County’s Planning & Building Department.

He added that the state has long-valued EFU land to keep “farming alive.”

Glaser-Hagerty said her family has lived and farmed in the area for five



Harrisburg area farmer Troy Jones outlines his opposition to a proposed solar energy park on 1,500 acres at the Linn County Board of Commissioners meeting Tuesday morning.

generations.

She considers the project as a 1,500-acre experiment that will have a negative effect on the area for decades.

Kampfer encouraged the commissioners to execute “more leverage” on the siting process and to be “more forceful.”

“This is not good for the community or the neighbors,” Kampfer said. “There is a place for this, but not on EFU ground.”

Commissioner Tucker said he doesn’t know enough about the project to come out in opposition, but he does “know enough to be concerned. As commissioners we can express our concerns, but we don’t have the ability to change the course.”

Commissioner Sprenger said she has had conversations with numerous people and although she has to be cautious and let the process work its way through, she is “not a fan”.

“It’s a very big project on prime farm land,” Sprenger said.

The proposed facility would gener-

ate 199 megawatts of power, enough to service about 34,000 homes in the Willamette Valley. One of the issues that makes the site viable is there is a Pacific Power substation nearby with capacity to carry electricity produced at the park.

The property would be leased for 40 years from local landowners.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Were informed by Planning & Building Director Steve Willis that a Community Wildfire Protection Plan meeting was held with officials from area towns on Aug. 2. The focus was learning about opportunities and concerns related to wildfire resilience in their communities. Two more meetings will be held on Aug. 24 for the Linn County Fire Defense Board and community organizations/service providers. 254 total permits were issued in July. There were 17 new code enforcement cases and 14 cases were closed.
- Approved Transportation Di-

rector Reagan Maudlin’s request to apply for \$400,000 in State Transportation Improvement Funds to be used as match money for the following projects: Council of Governments, mobility hub, \$122,470; Albany, Linn Benton Loop Bus, \$90,000; Albany, paratransit vehicle, \$15,800; Linn County, Senior Citizens of Sweet Home Inc., vehicle, \$35,000; Lebanon, secure parking, \$106,730; Lebanon, scheduling software, \$30,000.

- Approved an Intergovernmental Agreement with Lincoln County to provide beds at the Juvenile Detention Facility at a rate of \$175 per day for the 2023-25 biennium.
- Approved a Comprehensive Plan Map Amendment and Zoning Map Amendment for 28.2 acres at Lyons.

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