

Solar moratorium lifted in Klickitat County

By Jacob Bertram
Columbia Gorge News

Klickitat County commissioners voted to lift the moratorium on solar developments subject to a conditional use permit at their regular board meeting May 24.

The motion to lift the moratorium was affirmatively voted for in a unanimous fashion, with the condition that staff will undergo a "cumulative impact analysis" on potential solar development projects, and that the board of county commissioners will work on recommendations for the county board of adjustments to follow concerning mitigation conditions they would use to judge a

conditional use permit application for solar industrial project.

In the lead up to the May 24 meeting the three commissioners listened to presentations, read through hundreds of pages of witness testimony, and sat in workshops presented by the county assessor's office to examine how large-scale industrial solar projects pay taxes to the county.

At the beginning of the discussion, Commissioner Jacob Anderson presented to his fellow board members a list of recommendations to give to the Board of Adjustment — a list of mitigatory actions that would be relayed to the BoA, who ultimately makes

judgements on approvals and denials of conditional use applications following approval by commissioners.

Anderson reiterated his position that was wholly against the enactment of a moratorium on industrial solar development, his argument being that the state's environmental process (through the State Environmental Policy Act) acted as a strong buffer against citizen concerns on the construction of solar farms in the county — and that should a moratorium be enacted, solar development groups may wind up going through the state's energy development siting process conducted by the

state Environmental Facility Site Environmental Council, potentially upending the local processes of undergoing an environmental impact statement and approval of a conditional use permit application.

Following a conversation on potential mitigatory features established in recommendations to be given to the Board of Adjustment on future decisions, namely setbacks and decommissioning bond rates, Board Chair Dave Sauter argued that a moratorium should be in place if the board agreed to create a new ordinance directly targeting industrial solar developments, voicing his position that a moratorium would not

be "fair" to private property owners "who are on hold" if the board chose not to take the path that would culminate in a new ordinance.

"I think we need to give direction as to what the board thinks might be too big for any projects that might come through," said Commissioner Dan Christopher. "I think the guidance needs to be publicly given to the planning director so that she's not making it up on the fly and that conversations are not being held out of the public."

While Christopher pushed back on sentiments expressed by the commissioners do more harm than good, he voted with the board to lift the moratorium

on the grounds that at least something will be done in the future to examine mitigatory acts placed on potential solar development applicants — namely, the "cumulative impact analysis" and the list of recommendations.

The vote did not finalize the list of recommendations — instead commissioners will undertake a discussion in coming weeks and eventually vote on the final list.

A draft list of the mitigatory actions recommended by the board has not been released. Dave McClure will be presenting to the board June 29 to talk further about the cumulative impact analysis.

Oregon legislators near end of session

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

"Sine die is imminent," declared Senate President Peter Courtney on Tuesday, using one of the secret decoder ring-needed terms of the Oregon Legislature.

Translation: We're almost through for 2021.

But not so close you can't pop a last-minute bill into the hopper, which Courtney did Tuesday morning with

a bill to ban horse racing in Oregon.

With just 25 days left before the Oregon constitution requires the Legislature to shut down the 2021 session, Courtney's dual actions reflected the frenzy of sometimes contrary activity in the House and Senate.

A day after Salem hit a record 96 degrees, the House and Senate were back to turn up the heat on the pace of legal manufacturing.

Gov. Kate Brown was signing bills at a steady pace, including a new concealed weapons ban for the Capitol. The announcement came as the Secretary of State issued a notification a proposed referendum for the 2022 ballot that would undo the law.

The House had 78 bills and resolutions scheduled for a final vote on Wednesday. House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, called a double session, with House

members called to the floor at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Committee meetings began at 8 a.m. with some scheduled to start as late as 5:30 p.m.

The Senate moved at a more sedate pace, with just 16 bills handled in a morning session. But it has 22 more scheduled for Thursday.

Courtney used a quote from Florence Nightingale, the nurse and social reformer born in 1820, to send the

message he wanted lawmakers to cooperate on getting through the session without any more delaying tactics.

"I attribute my success to this: I never gave or took an excuse," Courtney said.

In an unusually late move, two bills were introduced. Senate Bill 871 would essentially bar horse racing in Oregon. Senate Bill 870, authored by Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, would revise disclosures on campaign

finance contributions.

Courtney's office did not explain how the bills might be considered this late in the session.

The legislation became a blur on Tuesday and Wednesday, as bills churned out by the dozens. A tiny sample of topics included extending approval of take-out cocktail sales, residential rent assistance, extending a moratorium on foreclosures and scores of other issues.



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