

Glare: Years of behind-the-scenes wrangling leads to solar glare warning sign

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After some back-and-forth between ODOT, Chrisman, and a representative from the solar farm's owner, Cypress Creek Renewables, he got his answer a month later.

ODOT permit specialist Thomas Lapp wrote that the department didn't have any solar study requirements, but that didn't mean it wanted glare to become an issue.

"We don't want any light directed to the highway due to onsite lighting though," he wrote. "So with this in mind we won't ask for any glare study for approval."

A week-and-a-half later, the Pendleton Planning Commission unanimously approved the solar farm without deliberation, according to meeting minutes.

Community Development Director Tim Simons said the commission could have made glare mitigation a condition of approval, but it wasn't seen as an issue at the time.

"The FFA (sic) has submitted a letter that declares no issues with regards to glare," the meeting minutes state. "ODOT has also stated no issues with glare."

Growing concern

ODOT wouldn't get another email about the issue until 2018.

As complaints started cropping up about the glare reflecting off the solar panels, a Cypress Creek spokesman vowed that the company was taking the issue seriously.

"We are currently working with a third party consulting partner to further analyze the project's reflective light and take the appropriate mitigation measures if necessary," Public Relations Director Jeff McKay told the *East Oregonian* in July 2018. "Cypress Creek is 100 percent committed to ensuring we follow any



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Traffic passes a sign warning of potential glare from a solar array off of Interstate 84 on the outskirts of Pendleton.

and all safety measures on our projects. It's our top priority."

Later that month, correspondence between the city and ODOT resumed as Pendleton Public Works Director Bob Patterson relayed complaints he was getting from the public.

"From my discussion with a few of the callers, the glare is really bad right now at about 7:45 am coming into Pendleton from the solar array," he wrote. Also, from my last caller, the glare is coming off the panels, not just the structural support metal."

ODOT District 12 Manager Marilyn Holt thanked Patterson and said the department had been fielding complaints too.

As Holt started trading emails with Cypress Creek, the city and ODOT were pulled back into the fray when a truck driver emailed in a complaint about the glare while looping in Patterson and a Portland-area television station.

As ODOT tried to collect more information from the city, Patterson suggested to Holt that the department install a sign by the highway.

"I still recommend consideration of a simple warning sign at the top of Rieth Ridge conveying "Solar Array Ahead - Summer Seasonal Glare - Keep Eyes on Road" or something like that if ODOT believes the glare is too much of an issue," he wrote.

Holt seemed skeptical of the study while also reiterating her interest in Cypress Creek's third party study.

Inquiring about the study would become an issue all its own.

An elusive study

Amy Berg Pickett, a regional zoning and outreach manager for Cypress Creek, emailed Holt on July 19, 2018, to tell her about the glare study the company was commissioning.

"Please Note Cypress Creek Renewables has hired a 3rd party reflective light expert consulting firm to study the potential for reflective light as it relates to the Pendleton Solar farm," she wrote. "The consultant has a sophisticated tool that quantifies levels based on a number of key inputs (slope, terrain, type of PV panels, angle). The firm has

also conducted independent research on reflective light and will help put context to the levels occurring."

By mid-September, Holt was inquiring with Patterson whether the city had the study, but he redirected her to Cypress Creek.

As she tried to arrange an in-person meeting with Holt, Pickett wrote that the study was still being conducted.

Holt then reminded Pickett that Cypress Creek was supposed to have delivered the glare study in August.

In an interview, Holt said she eventually ended up viewing the study. But ODOT reported that it could not locate the glare study in its files, and as a result, didn't produce it as a part of the records request.

Patterson said in an interview that he hasn't seen a glare study for the solar farm, but added that Chrisman, the airport manager, might know.

Reached by phone on Thursday, Chrisman said he was on the East Coast but could field questions on Friday. He did not return a message left on his phone on Friday.

Pickett referred multiple inquiries to Paul Whitacre, an asset manager for the solar farm's new owner: New Energy Solar.

A new sign

The exchange between ODOT and the solar farm's owners culminated in the fall of 2018 with a letter from Craig Sipp, the ODOT manager for Eastern Oregon.

Sipp wrote that ODOT was concerned that the glare would cause a traffic accident and reiterated the department's desire to review the glare study.

If the city or the owners didn't address the issue, ODOT would hold them responsible.

"In the event there is an accident due to the solar glare and a claim or law suit is filed against ODOT, we will look to the City and Norwest Energy 9, LLC (the subsidiary that operates the solar farm) to defend and indemnify the state against any and all liability," Sipp wrote.

Sipp also suggested the owners take a look at installing a sign. After responding to Sipp and ODOT, New Energy Solar seemed responsive to the idea.

As both sides began organizing plans for the sign, the tone from ODOT became more conciliatory.

"ODOT would also like to thank you for your understanding of the effect that the solar panels are having with glare along I-84 in Pendleton, and for your effort to help make the traveling public more aware of potential glare issues with the placement of warning signs at this location," Paul Howland, an ODOT manager, wrote to Whitacre in December.

Howland emailed Whitacre in February to announce a sign reading "CAUTION Possible Solar Glare" was installed. An invoice states that ODOT charged New Energy \$6,260 for the sign.

In a March email to the *East Oregonian*, Whitacre wrote that New Energy became aware of the issue when it purchased the solar farm and reviewed Cypress Creek's study in addition to commissioning a study of its own.

"Our study noted that similar visual impairments occur for highway drivers from building, water, or highway reflections and to more extreme levels from direct sun and oncoming headlights," he wrote. "Following consultation with ODOT in December 2018, it was determined that a sign advising of the potential for glare would enable drivers to better understand the landscape and driving conditions. Similar signage advising of temporal environmental hazards, high winds, and blowing dust that may impact vision is already present in the area."

The *East Oregonian* reached out for additional comment on Thursday, but Whitacre said no one from the New York-based company was available for comment by deadline.

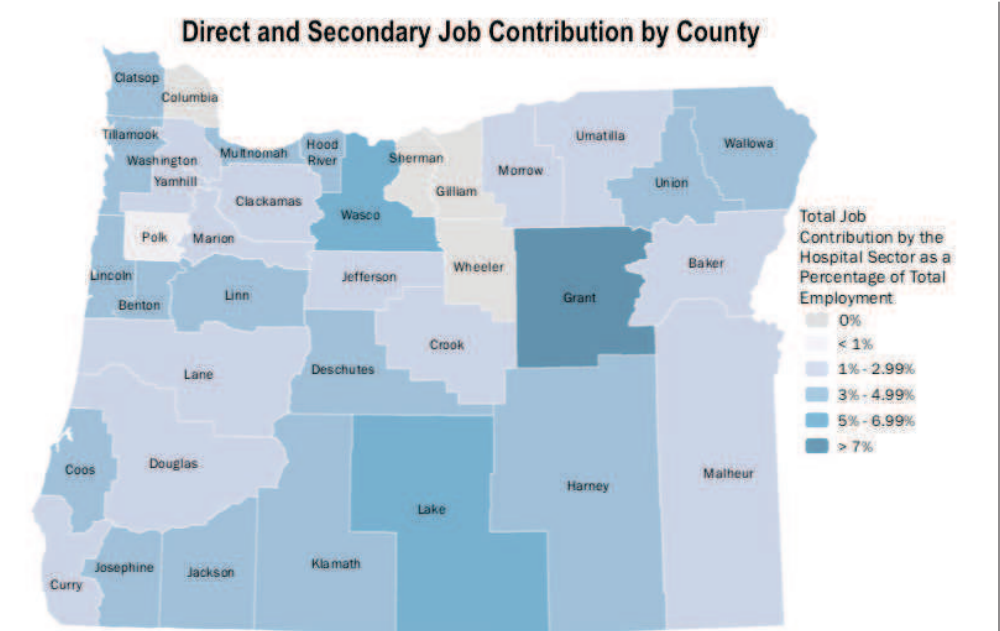
In an interview, Holt admitted that she was initially skeptical about the effectiveness of a sign, but she came around when she reviewed the studies that concluded that the glare didn't pose a hazard to traffic.

Holt said ODOT doesn't have any glare mitigation requirements for roadside solar farms, but they are becoming more prevalent across the state.

She added that ODOT would follow the lead of the federal government for solar glare traffic regulations.

Patterson said he was glad ODOT and New Energy Solar eventually followed his recommendation.

Both the city and ODOT will be waiting to see whether the complaints will spike again as the sun starts to align with the solar panels this summer.



Source: AHA 2017

Hospitals: Medical facilities provide employment that helps local economies

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The report also calculated the economic contributions from hospital community benefit expenditures like providing free or discounted care to low-income individuals, conducting education or research to promote community health, or donating funds and/or services to community groups.

"EOCCO is a prime example of area hospitals coming together," Reding said. "We are very proud to be making sure people have the coverage they need."

Health care providers aren't only making partners with other businesses to streamline administration and other services, but the industry trend is creating partnerships to deliver the best care.

"What we are finding right now, if we are really going to meet the health care needs of the community, our hospitals are finding partners with our independent clinics, Interpath



EO file photo

At hospitals in Umatilla County, including Pendleton's Catholic Health Initiatives St. Anthony Hospital, above, and Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston, 950 people work directly for the hospitals, providing more than \$89 million to the gross state product and \$3.5 million to state and local taxes.

Laboratories as well as mental health and our local police," Reding said.

ECONorthwest's study revealed on average, from 2004 to 2016, the growth in rural health care jobs averaged 1.3% while total employment has grown only 0.4%. The only year during this time period

when growth has been negative was 2011, which was the year after the 2010 passing of the Affordable Care Act. Between 2013 and 2017 hospital employment in Oregon grew from 59,709 to 68,362, approximately 14%. Of that growth, 10% occurred since 2015.

Painting: Participants show up to a party where supplies are provided

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The most famous step-by-step painting instructor was Bob Ross, an American artist who hosted an instructional television program from 1983 to 1994 on PBS. Since his death in 1995 his legacy in pop culture has grown, aided by his show's availability on Netflix and the Instagrammable nature of paint nights with friends (and, usually, wine).

Kathy Spears has been hosting "paint parties" around Umatilla and Morrow counties for about three years now, including one Thursday a month at the bowling alley.

She started painting after she finished treatment for cancer.

"I needed something to think about besides the cancer," she said. "I'm five years cancer-free. I don't want to think about it every day — is the cancer going to come back? Every cancer survivor needs a hobby."

Eventually she attended a couple of paint nights with friends up in the Tri-Cities, and decided it was something she could do. She started building up supplies and creating paintings that she could teach others to recreate.

"Pinterest is a great inspiration," she said. "Or someone will say to me, 'I want to paint a tree,' or whatever and I'll see what I can come up with."

Thursday's participants — 10 women and one man — had a choice between painting a sunflower or a jellyfish, both of which rested on the same streaked background in various shades of blue and green. A couple of participants brought their own picture they wanted to reproduce and Spears merely helped them as needed.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Bobbie Kleng works on her background Thursday evening during paint night at Desert Lanes in Hermiston.

Alia Munoz said it was her second paint night she had attended.

"It's just relaxing," she said. "It's something fun to do with my mom and grandma, and it's not something you would do every day."

She said she didn't try to worry too much about doing everything exactly right, but just had fun.

When the group was arriving, Spears told the newcomers that some people were more abstract and would finish sooner and others were more meticulous about trying to recreate the painting exactly.

"It's your painting," she said. "It's not going to look like mine and it's not going to look like Tom's."

Tom Daulton and his wife Carol Daulton both chose to paint the sunflowers. They each worked on their own canvas, but shared tips back and forth. Tom said it was his fourth time at one of Spears' paint parties.

"I don't count last time," he joked. "Last time was a disaster."

He said when Carol wanted him to come to one he was curious to see if he

PAINTING PARTY

Kathy Spears is hosting a paint party fundraiser for the Stokes Landing Senior Center in Irrigon on June 14. The fundraiser begins with dinner at 6 p.m. at the senior center, followed by painting. For other paint party dates visit the "It's a Paint Party!" Facebook page or contact Spears at Kathy-spears3@gmail.com.

was "expressive that way" and found himself enjoying it so much he kept coming back to learn new techniques. A previous week, for example, they learned how to use Q-tips as small daubers to create a picture of lilacs.

Carol said they are "running out of wall space" at home and will have to start rotating which of their paintings they display. Originally she started coming to paint nights because she had done some painting many years ago and thought it would be fun to try again.

"I'm so glad I did because it gives us something to do together," she said.