

JAY INSLEE  
Governor



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October 17, 2018

Kathleen Drew, Chair  
Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council  
1300 S. Evergreen Park SW  
PO Box 43172  
Olympia, WA 98504

RE: Columbia Solar Project  
EFSEC Recommendation dated August 21, 2018

Dear Chair Drew:

Pursuant to RCW 80.50.100, I have approved and executed the enclosed Site Certification Agreements for the Columbia Solar project in Kittitas County, with the terms and conditions as recommended by the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council. After considering the record, I believe that the Council evaluated this application in a manner consistent with the requirements and intent of Chapter 80.50 RCW, including the expedited process authorized therein, and I concur with the Council's recommendation to approve the application.

I find that the Council carefully considered both the environmental impacts of the project and its consistency with the land use plans and ordinances in effect in Kittitas County at the time of the application. Further, I believe this project is appropriately sited, and that the site certificates are legally adequate in all respects as drafted. While I find ample evidence in the record to support the Council's recommendation, I am particularly impressed with the applicant's commitments to preserving land for future agricultural use, and reducing the visual impacts of the facilities on the landscape.

As one who has raised hay, I recognize the value of agricultural land to rural communities. As preserving rural landscapes and agricultural land is important, and one that I do not take lightly when considering the need and appropriateness of projects such as this. Here, the applicant has committed to site restoration and financial assurance requirements to ensure that the sites can be returned to agricultural use at the end of the useful life of the facilities. The site certification agreements also incorporate obligations for the applicant to plant native vegetation to prevent offsite drainage and erosion and control the spread of noxious weeds at the sites. These measures will help ensure that facility sites may be returned to agricultural use in the future.

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I am also impressed by the technology selected for these sites, and the measures that will be taken to reduce the visual impact of the facilities. The solar panels selected for this project are designed to absorb about two-thirds of the sunlight, and feature an anti-reflective layer that will minimize glare. The applicant has provided analysis demonstrating that there will be no dangerous or detrimental visual impacts from glare and that, when viewed from a distance, solar arrays such as this look like bodies of water.

In addition, the site certification agreements include mitigation measures to further minimize light and glare impacts. The Council has adopted the applicant's proposed vegetative screens, which include plantings of native trees, bushes, and other vegetation around the perimeter of the facilities at key locations. These plantings serve to both mitigate the visual impact of the facilities and help preserve the rural landscape. However, simulations provided by the applicant show that, even with the proposed vegetative screens, some of the sites could have moderate visual impacts from key observation points that will affect those living or working in the area and traveling along major transportation routes. While I believe that the Council has properly considered the project's consistency with local land use plans and ordinances, and I concur with the Council's recommendation, I am sympathetic to the perspective that simply meeting the legal requirements of preserving rural landscapes may seem unsatisfactory to some.

I am therefore asking that the Council work with the applicant to consider exceeding the legal requirements in response to concerns raised by Kittitas County and other interested persons regarding the issue of the aesthetic impacts of the project. When finalizing the vegetative management plan, I encourage the Council and the applicant to consider including additional plantings to further mitigate the visual impact of the project on the landscape to the extent practicable, given other site-specific constraints. As these trees, bushes and/or other vegetation mature, it will help preserve the rural landscape in the valley for future generations, even beyond the useful life of the facilities. To be clear, my approval of this application is final and it is not contingent on any changes that might be made in response to my request that additional visual mitigation measures be considered.

Finally, I believe that the Council's use of the expedited process was appropriate in this instance. The Council's consideration of this application demonstrates that energy projects can be sited in Washington State within a reasonable amount of time while still allowing for thorough review and public input. I commend the Council for using its authority to consider this project under an expedited process, and I look forward to the Council identifying additional opportunities to streamline siting for energy facilities where appropriate as part of its ongoing review of RCW 80.50.

Sincerely,



Jay Inslee  
Governor