

Outgoing commissioner upbraids EnXco **Bruce Coe says he would have favored project**

By TIM ENGSTROM

Kittitas County Commissioner Bruce Coe, who ends his term on Friday, fired a parting shot Monday at wind farm developer EnXco USA.

Coe accused EnXco officials of failing to heed a list of changes he sought in the company's development agreement for the Desert Claim Wind Power Project. He said if those changes had been made, he would have been prepared to approve the agreement on Monday. He provided the list at a Dec. 7 hearing.

Coe put his disapproval in plain language: "This is one of the laziest responses to a request from a jurisdiction for someone who wants to do business in that jurisdiction." And he said: "If you want to play in our sandbox, then don't leave a cat turd. This is a cat turd right here."

The meeting was a continuation of the hearing the county commissioners have been holding to negotiate the development agreement. The public comment period is over – the commissioners won't even accept e-mail messages on the project – but once the agreement is ready for approval, it is likely the commissioners will receive public input.

On Monday, the commissioners agreed to continue the hearing at 6 p.m. Jan. 11. Coe and Commissioner Max Golladay will be replaced by Alan Crankovich and David Bowen. Commissioner Perry Huston, the board chairman, remains.

The 120-turbine Desert Claim wind farm is proposed for a 5,200-acre swath eight miles north of Ellensburg. Desert Claim project manager David Steeb after the meeting said he had Coe's list from the previous meeting, written input from the other commissioners and an audio tape of the meeting. He said he formed a list of the requests and met with the county Department of Community Development Services, its consultant and a county attorney on Dec. 15.

Steeb said the staff could not shed light or clarify the intent of the commissioners. He said if the staff cannot understand what the commissioners wanted, how could he be expected to know. "That's why I am surprised at what Commissioner Coe said," Steeb said.

It's not the role of the Department of Community Development Services to interpret the commissioners' intent, said its director, Darryl Piercy. "The applicant needed to listen to comments and address them as they felt appropriate," Piercy said. He said the staff can answer questions, for instance, on the process, but in the end EnXco has to write the agreement, not the staff. He also noted that EnXco turned in its revised agreement one week before the meeting Monday, not giving his staff enough time to prepare. "We still want to cooperate with the board and the applicant," Piercy added.

EnXco might have had the two of three votes it needed to move forward Monday, Coe noted. Golladay requested only minor language changes to the agreement. During the meeting Coe said he favors wind farms. "If it's good for Kittitas County, then I see no reason why it can't be here."

However, he said EnXco isn't cooperating and said its agreement cover sheet "smacks of corporate

arrogance.” No one can accuse the county administration of dishonesty or playing games, Coe said. “No one in the county said, ‘Let’s suck ‘em along and see if they’ll go away.’” Coe said Crankovitch and Bowen are “sharp guys” and will act in the interest of Kittitas County.

Huston’s concerns

Huston said he sympathized with being the first company to seek a permit for a wind farm in Kittitas County but it was a fact of the matter that EnXco officials must deal with. He said he would clarify some of his intents from the Dec. 7 meeting.

Where the agreement made references to other agreements or future plans, he wanted to see the agreements or else remove the references. For instance, if there’s a reference to agreements with fire districts, then he wanted to see the agreements. “If I am going to be asked to attach it to this document, then I need to see it,” Huston said. He said he doesn’t want to be caught with an approved wind farm agreement that has outstanding disputes.

The document also proposes 1,000-foot buffers between wind towers and residences in the area. When exceptions were needed, EnXco had planned on making voluntary agreement with neighbors. Huston said he was troubled by the notion of seeking a waiver to a county agreement outside of the county process.

Golladay said he felt the 1,000-foot buffer, a figure proposed by EnXco, is the variance. Neighbors should be able to agree to less as long it is more than the standard setbacks for rural land. Golladay said agreements with other agencies, such as fire districts, are between the company and those entities. “If we approve this and they fail to get an agreement with the fire district, then they are in violation of this agreement,” he said.

Huston said the setbacks, through the agreement, become the county requirement and thus need the county process for changes. And he noted that by requiring to see other agreements the county is dealing with the wind farm the same way it dealt with a master-planned resort near Roslyn and a proposed natural gas pipeline for the Upper County.

Comments from Geoff Saunders, <geoff@geoffsaunders.com> who sent the above article:

Kittitas County in central WA has been targeted for three huge wind farms: Two planned by Zilkha Renewable energy and one by EnXco. All are within a few miles of the city of Ellensburg, population 15,000, the largest town in central WA. If all the wind farms are permitted they will total about 350 turbines. The proposed areas are lightly populated, mainly residential (virtually zero farming), and very beautiful. I am with a group of residents and landowners which has been fighting the proposed projects since 2001. We have succeeded in slowing them down but victory is far from assured.

The above article relates to EnXco’s project. EnXco applied for its permit – and a zoning change – with the county. Zilkha however, sensing that the county would probably impose strict limitations on its wind farms, applied to a state government body, EFSEC, which is chartered to site very large and controversial energy projects, mainly nuclear and gas-fired plants. However the wind industry lobbied EFSEC to modify its charter to include wind farms so that developers could bypass local governments that would not look favorably on poorly-sited projects.

EFSEC has not ruled on Zilkha’s projects, and as the above article says, Kittitas County has not ruled on EnXco’s project.

Links of interest:

The Daily Record <http://www.kvnews.com/>

EFSEC <http://www.efsec.wa.gov/>
(see Kittitas Valley Wind farm project and Wildhorse Wind Farm project)

Zilkha <http://www.zilkha.com/>
(both projects described here)

Kittitas County Planning Department <http://www.co.kittitas.wa.us/cds/default.asp>
(see EnXco's Desert Claim Wind Power Project)