

December 22, 2017

Roselyn Marcus  
EFSEC Chair  
Energy Facilities Site Evaluation Council  
P.O. Box 47250  
Olympia, WA. 98504-47250

RE: TUUSSO Energy-Columbia Solar Project – EFSEC Docket No. EF-170823

Dear Chair Marcus:

I appreciate this opportunity to submit comments to the Council about the TUUSSO Energy application under review with EFSEC.

TUUSSO Energy's Columbia Solar project does not qualify for the expedited process as described in WAC 463-43-030. An application may be expedited when the council finds:

- (1) The environmental impact of the proposed energy facility will be mitigated to a nonsignificant level under the State Environmental Policy Act; and
- (2) The project is found to be consistent and in compliance with city, county, or regional land use plans.

As requested in Mr. Posner's notification of December 13, 2017, "**Comments submitted should clearly address the Tuusso Energy–Columbia Solar Project's consistency and compliance with Kittitas County land use plans and zoning ordinances.**" I will direct my comments toward the project's lack of consistency with Kittitas County land use plans and zoning ordinances, although the WAC 463-43-030 (2) mentioned above is broader in scope since it includes "regional land use plans".

Kittitas County has complied with the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA) in establishing a consistent Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinances within its authority and mandate.

To address point 2 of the WAC 463-43-030: These project sites do not comply with the Kittitas County Conditional Use Review criteria 17.60A.015:

- "7. For conditional uses outside of Urban Growth Areas, the proposed use:
- A. Is consistent with the intent, goals, policies, and objectives of the Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan, including the policies of Chapter 8, Rural and Resource Lands;
  - B. Preserves "rural character" as defined in the Growth Management Act (RCW [36.70A.030\(15\)](#));
  - C. Requires only rural government services; and
  - D. Does not compromise the long term viability of designated resource lands."

This application misses the mark on all four criteria.

Criterion A: *Is consistent with the intent, goals, policies, and objectives of the Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan, including the policies of Chapter 8, Rural and Resource Lands; (Kittitas County Code 17.60A.015); and*

Criterion B. Preserves "rural character" as defined in the Growth Management Act (RCW [36.70A.030](#)(15));

The project is not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and specifically the County's definition of rural character expressed in accordance with the GMA.

Kittitas County addressed the nature and importance of Rural Character and echoes the GMA in the most recent Comprehensive Plan:

*The State of Washington Growth Management Act requires that the County "include measures that apply to rural development and **protect the rural character of the area as established by the County.**" **These measures must be used to control rural development, assure visual compatibility of rural development with surrounding areas, reduce sprawl and protect against conflict with the use of agricultural, forest and mineral resource lands** (RCW 36.70A.070). *Emphasis added.**

A significant section of chapter 8 of the County's Comprehensive plan is devoted to rural character which "is defined in Kittitas County as predominant visual landscape of open spaces, mountains, forests, and farms and the activities which preserve such features."

Ranging in size from 30 – 50 acres, the installed panels on each of the 5 sites cover the expanse of 30 - 50 football fields of raised glass per site which is in stark contrast to prime irrigated farmland surrounding each site. The proposed sites are not compatible with the scenic beauty of nationally-renown Yakima River which is within ¼ mile of two of the sites nor with a historic two-room schoolhouse which is within 200 yards of the Urtica site. The contrast visually is significant and is not consistent with the County's goal of "visual compatibility" set forth in its Comprehensive Plan nor its objective to preserve "rural character" as defined in the GMA.

Criterion C: Requires only rural government services;

The project fails in this county requirement since by applying directly to EFSEC, if approved, Columbia Solar would come under state jurisdiction and require ongoing state administration for the extent of the project operation just as two other energy facilities sited in Kittitas County (i.e. Kittitas Valley Wind Power and Wild Horse) operate with ongoing EFSEC administration.

Criterion D: Does not compromise the long term viability of designated resource lands.

TUUSSO Energy intends to use prime farmland for 30 years and contends the sites can be readily converted back to agricultural use. However, biologists from University of California/ Riverside would likely disagree. In their December 2017 article "*Land-Sparing Opportunities for Solar Energy Development in Agricultural Landscapes: A Case Study of the Great Central Valley, CA, United States*" Drs. Hoffacker, Allen and Hernandez state, "Reversion of a site used for solar energy generation back to agriculture is typically unlikely, complicated by long-term application of herbicides, stabilizers, gravel, chemical suppressants, and soil compaction from power plant construction and maintenance activities. Further, land lease agreements and payback periods often exceed 15 years." (Retrieved 12/22/17: <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.7b05110>) The article outlines

the importance of preserving prime irrigated farmland for food production and the use of low value “contaminated sites” for utility scale solar. Contaminated sites include: “brownfields, federal or nonfederal superfunds, and lands identified by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), the Abandoned Mine Lands Program, and the Landfill Methane Outreach Program.” They predict that contaminated sites “may serve as increasingly desirable recipient environments for solar energy infrastructure within the CV (Central Valley) of California and **agricultural landscapes elsewhere.**” (Emphasis added.)

An example of reclaiming a “contaminated site” is within Washington State’s borders. In June 2017 Benton County enthusiastically approved a 20 MW utility scale solar for siting on reclaimed Hanford land: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/news/local/article155696154.html>. Benton County’s decision reflects the findings of the UC/Riverside research with the wise siting of utility scale solar on low value, contaminated land as opposed to high value prime farmland. One of the hallmarks of solar energy production is that it does not require water for power generation, thus a move away from siting solar on irrigated prime farmland would place Washington in the forefront of progressive solar planning.

I hope you will agree that the application is not in compliance with Kittitas County’s Comprehensive Plan or Kittitas County’s conditional use permit criteria. I would urge the Council to deny the applicant’s request for expedited application on the lack of compliance with Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan and zoning code 17.60A.015.

Best regards,

Kathi Pritchard

Kathi Pritchard has held communications and tourism marketing positions with local, county, state and provincial governments in Oregon and British Columbia. Since 2006 she has lived with her husband and family in the abundantly, beautiful Kittitas Valley.