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SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING
MARSHALL - APRIL 28, 2015 - 11:00 A.M.
BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Application of Marshall Solar, LLC
For a Site Permit for the Marshall Solar Energy Project
And Associated Facilities in Lyon County, Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. IP-6941/GS-14-1052

Marshal-Lyon County Library
201 C Street
Marshall, Minnesota 56258

April 28, 2015

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1 MS. STEINHAEUER: With that, we didn't
2 have anybody who identified by a card they wanted to
3 speak, but we'll just go by a show of hands.

4 Yes.

5 MS. BABCOCK: My name is MariJo Babcock,
6 M-A-R-I, capital J, little O, B-A-B-C-O-C-K. I live
7 in about, oh, a mile-and-a-half from this project.

8 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I can't hear. I can't
9 hear.

10 MS. BABCOCK: Okay. One thing I noted
11 last night was thinking about this: The
12 constitution of the United States says we have the
13 natural right to life, liberty and property to
14 expect personal security not to be injured.

15 This has not been proven. A study is not
16 proof. We also have the right to communicate with
17 the world.

18 I've been noticing lately our internet
19 has been very bad. We do not have access to digital
20 fiber optics. We have dial-up for phone. The power
21 lines have been powered up over there and our signal
22 comes from that direction. So I've been questioning
23 -- I've got questions into my company to see what is
24 happening there, if it's affecting it.

25 Also, my husband and I are Ham Radio

1 operators. In the event of a natural disaster, Ham
2 Radio is the only communication that would be
3 available. This has been proven over many years.

4 You go to the areas where your power is
5 knocked down and you have no cell phones, no towers,
6 no phones. A generator will power a Ham Radio and
7 we have antennas for that. We are both licensed Ham
8 Radio operators in the state and at the FCC.

9 Also, cell phones. I'm wondering if they
10 will be affected. There's a lot of power going to
11 be coming out of this thing, and I worry about how
12 it's going to affect us. We have a business. I
13 have to go online to report things to the government
14 for payroll and things like this. I have to use
15 this. The government requires it.

16 Also, the constitution says we can be
17 secure in one's house or home. We have our private
18 property. We've acquired it. We have it. It's
19 necessary for us to pursue happiness at even our
20 business and our livelihood.

21 This country we live in is founded on
22 farming. Farming has been the stable and the
23 backbone of the country. We are the breadbasket
24 that the world depends on. What defines prime
25 farmland.

1 Our farm was studied in 2004. We made
2 the cover of a digest magazine. We were the highest
3 producing farmland in the state of Minnesota. That
4 tells me that the surrounding farmland absolutely is
5 some of the highest and best land in this state.
6 This is a lot of land to lose.

7 What happens in the future if you decide
8 to expand. I want to know, are you going to fill in
9 those lines that you've retracted from if that's
10 needed. What will happen.

11 Also, what happens if you lose money on
12 this project. Will the government bail you out.
13 I've heard things as to this happening. I've heard
14 that the reliability of solar is a very low
15 percentage, so I'm not convinced that this is very
16 economical.

17 Also, the pictures show a fence around
18 that. If that fence had been there in the last few
19 weeks, it would be full of corn husks and everybody
20 would know it. Also, will they be cleaned out if
21 they're full of corn husks.

22 This racking and mounting system, is
23 concrete used in the ground to support that. I'm
24 wondering at the end of 25 years, if it's deemed not
25 a feasible project and they abandon it, will they

1 a record of that. I don't know if you want to put
2 it in writing, but we do have a record. So there
3 are a number of questions in there that we will look
4 into.

5 I do want to address the question that
6 you had about expanding the project if the project
7 -- supposing the project is permitted by the
8 Commission. The Commission will -- If the
9 Commission determines to issue a site permit for the
10 project, it will say how large the project will be
11 in the general area it's developed in.

12 If, at some point in the future, NextEra
13 wishes to expand that, they would need to apply for
14 either a new permit or permit amendment, so there
15 would be another process going forward. And that's
16 because the question is speculative, my answer is
17 not complete. But I do want to make people aware
18 that what they have applied for is a 62.25 megawatt
19 project in this area, and that is the decision that
20 the Commission will be making on the project as
21 proposed.

22 Other comments or questions.

23 MS. CAUGHERTY: My name is Joyce
24 Caugherty. The last name is spelled
25 C-A-U-G-H-E-R-T-Y. Sitting through the meetings

1 last night and today, I have got some questions.
2 And I understand the solar panels are to be close
3 together and it was mentioned that they would be
4 mowed. Just looking at the pictures, and you have
5 500 acres, it looks like it's going to be a
6 challenge. What kind of equipment is going to be
7 used to cover 25 acres. And if it's a moist year,
8 it's going to take time to cover those 25 acres.

9 And then about weed control, that's
10 another issue. How are you going to handle that.
11 You talk about native grasses, but in this part of
12 the country, wild obnoxious weeds seem to thrive
13 very well.

14 And then looking at the proposed site,
15 there is some panels right along Highway 19. They
16 are going to be an eyesore. How far back -- Well,
17 even from the roads, how far back are those panels
18 going to sit from the road.

19 And then just history in the United
20 States. There's been some big companies that have
21 owned banks, energy companies, you know, and it's
22 not unusual to have them sold. How committed is
23 NextEra committed to this project for 25 years. Is
24 there going to be a company that comes in and offers
25 them big bucks and they'll sell it, and will the

1 next company have the same concerns as NextEra or
2 feelings as NextEra and how is that going to be
3 handled. And big corporations, do they really care
4 down the road somewhere that they just abandon it?
5 I know last night it was mentioned that there be
6 compensation for when the lease is over, but just
7 how personal is this for the company.

8 And then a lot of the farms around that
9 area have been in the family, last night it was
10 mentioned, for many years. And how is this going to
11 affect land values in the surrounding area with this
12 big plant there. People are not going to want to
13 move there because it's going to be an eyesore. We
14 heard some of that last night.

15 And this farmland for these families are
16 their livelihood. They're going to look at this
17 every day. And just how is this affecting the local
18 people.

19 MS. STEINHAUER: Thank you. I don't know
20 that I can answer all of those questions. We have a
21 record for that. So the last question you had was
22 the property values, and that is something that we
23 will take a look at. I did look at that for an
24 earlier solar project, and we'll try to see if
25 there's something that is more up to date on the

1 large solar projects and the effect on property
2 values. I would say that that's a concern that is
3 always brought up, and I understand that, with any
4 large energy facility.

5 And the answer that I -- We will try to
6 update that information, but I'm not sure if we'll
7 really be able to find -- I suspect we won't be able
8 to find some sort of calculation that will tell you
9 how it will affect a particular property. Property
10 values are determined by the market based on a
11 variety of site-specific criteria. I hear that
12 comment and we would like to know, the Commission
13 would like to know the best information that's out
14 there.

15 Yes.

16 MR. MULLER: Chuck Muller, M-U-L-L-E-R.
17 On the environmental impact, I'm an avid sportsman.
18 I like to hunt and everything else. And I know they
19 checked into endangered species and everything, but
20 with this structure there's parts of it that are a
21 mile wide by a half mile and, you know, both
22 directions, north, south, east and west. I go home
23 at night and I have deer laying in my grove, you
24 know. I have pheasants that come eat out of my bird
25 feeders in my backyard. When you put a structure up

1 like this, that has to change where these creatures
2 are going and stuff. Is there any studies that's
3 going to be done just with our local wildlife right
4 here besides just the endangered species?

5 MS. STEINHAUER: I guess an answer to
6 that would be yes, that is something that we'll try
7 to look at with the design. We'll ask for an
8 assessment of how wildlife uses that area generally.

9 I know in other locations where projects
10 have been proposed, the permitting entity requires a
11 wildlife study to identify sort of how the wildlife
12 uses the area and to preserve known wildlife
13 corridors. If the whole area is fenced, I think it
14 does seem reasonable that that may change the usage
15 of the area.

16 And then when the facilities go in with a
17 new type of ground cover, it's reasonable to assume
18 the usage would change or maybe that area may be
19 more attractive to different species. So that is
20 something we'll try to look at and get a better
21 answer for you.

22 MR. MULLER: Okay. Thank you. I can't
23 really believe that because you have no wildlife in
24 town. And I have wood ducks about every other year
25 that nest in my grove that fly to a drainage ditch

1 that this thing butts right up to. Ducks are not
2 going to fly over the top of glaring glass. Thank
3 you.

4 MS. STEINHAUER: Thank you.

5 Any other comments or questions?

6 Yes.

7 MR. WEIDAUER: My name is Ron Weidauer.
8 I'm hoping that my voice holds up here for just a
9 bit. I guess this morning I heard NextEra tell us
10 how good this is going to be in the area, what they
11 were going to do. It was like it was a telemarketer
12 calling me. I need to hang up. But, no, this is
13 real. You need to stand up to the people that are
14 living out there. That's their livelihood,
15 wildlife, farming, whatever it might be.

16 I want to thank Steve Ritter, our county
17 commissioner, for being here. I am sorry that I do
18 not see our county agent or our mayor here to offer
19 their suggestions on this project.

20 And when they outline the outline
21 perimeter of the project that's being done, you will
22 notice that they have brought the solar panels back
23 to where they think they can satisfy the people that
24 live there. Now, if you -- And maybe I should have
25 them pull up the outline area of this project that

1 they -- land that they own. I don't know which one
2 of you would pull up a copy of that. I'd like to
3 just point out something.

4 MS. STEINHAUER: Is this the map that you
5 are referring to?

6 MR. WEIDAUER: Yes, that's the map. Now
7 you see the outside line for the perimeter of the
8 property that they own. They backed it away from my
9 kids' property. I own the land on the north and on
10 the west side of this, 28 and 29.

11 Now, once they put these solar panels in,
12 the next thing they will do is they will come and
13 they will expand their field to cover every inch of
14 that land because the machine will be in order for
15 them to do it.

16 Now, you look down towards the highway,
17 there's a large area there. They will fill this in.
18 And then if the project should be a success, they
19 will come after more land. I can't believe that our
20 country, the United States of America, where we need
21 food so bad, where one out of every six people are
22 starving, they go to bed at night hungry all over
23 the world -- We are the breadbasket of the world.

24 Now, to take land out which probably
25 produces more than ours -- I have the neighbors when

1 I farm telling me, well, what did your corn do
2 today. Well, it's 19 percent moisture and I get it
3 down to 175, 200. Well, ours is making 200 and the
4 moisture level is 17. So I guess I use that for
5 instance to prove how good a land that they're
6 taking out of production here.

7 Another point I think would solve a lot
8 of problems here, NextEra needs to stand up and tell
9 these people that live so close to there, now, if
10 you're concerned about stray electricity or whatever
11 it might be, you need to probably, for your own
12 health, to take and move away. Don't tell them that
13 it does not bother them because stray electricity
14 does happen.

15 You've seen electrical storms. I've seen
16 fences fly in the air, where it hits the fence. Or
17 I've had cattle be killed by lightening. Now, when
18 I talk about lightening and what's going on here,
19 you have a large electrical field there.

20 I'd like to also comment on their
21 substation. My wife had an opportunity where we
22 drove to take a look at one in Gila Bend, Arizona,
23 and also the one in Primm Valley, California, at the
24 edge of the Nevada border. Now, the one on the edge
25 of the Nevada border are blinding pilots coming in.

1 a little bit on this prime land. I absolutely can't
2 believe that our president, our secretary of
3 agriculture, when they're telling us -- or the
4 president of the United States, in the state of the
5 union address, said we must protect our very
6 productive land. And our secretary of agriculture
7 is basically saying the same thing, as he has talked
8 to many different groups.

9 So we need to take and to look at other
10 places that would better fit this project. We are
11 not against the green energy. We are for it
12 100 percent, but it does not belong out on prime
13 farmland. It belongs someplace where this land that
14 they're taking away will not be used for -- cannot
15 be used for farming purposes. There's a great
16 concern for the families out there, for whatever
17 it's worth. They will have to stand up and talk to
18 the issue themselves.

19 Basically, the number one issue I see is
20 the people's health. And then the prime farmland,
21 I've heard everything. My understanding is that
22 they're breaking the law by the amount of acres that
23 they're taking out for this project. That needs to
24 be looked into and clarified.

25 The property values that are out there

1 right now will not stand once this solar farm is put
2 there.

3 I think the solar farm project needs to
4 be laid for at least a year or two until a lot of
5 these questions are asked -- or answered. We're not
6 getting them yet. Thank you.

7 MS. STEINHAUER: Thank you.

8 Comments?

9 MS. GEURTS: Janelle Geurts, G-E-U-R-T-S.
10 And I just am listening as far as alternative sites.
11 Am I able to give a suggestion on alternatives? I
12 mean, I just recently took a drive over to Ivanhoe,
13 Minnesota, 20 miles west of here. In my drive over,
14 which is toward Brookings, which is where the sun is
15 coming out of, I'd just like to make a suggestion.
16 NextEra, you guys just sitting here, grab a pot
17 luck, drive over there. There are acres upon acres
18 of land that would be available. And it's either
19 all pasture land or land that's just not being
20 utilized, and these people over there would jump at
21 the opportunity to have someone buy their land.

22 And they are -- At Lincoln County is one
23 of the poorest counties in our state, and I think
24 they would appreciate the tax dollars coming in as
25 well.

1 We have a lot of opportunities here in
2 Lyon County. We're going to be having a sports
3 facility being built. We're growing by leaps and
4 bounds. Let's look at helping out another county in
5 our state that really could use it and look at using
6 that area.

7 MS. STEINHAUER: Thank you. So just so I
8 understand, you're suggesting something in Lincoln
9 County, land that is pasture land or not actively --

10 MS. GEURTS: Right, it's not. I mean, we
11 drove over there. And my daughter even commented,
12 who's 16 years old, she said, Mom, there's nothing
13 out here; there's no homes. And these people own
14 the land and they used to pasture it, I'm sure, for
15 cattle. It's wide open. And it would be, I'm sure,
16 a Godsend to go that direction, it really would be.

17 MS. STEINHAUER: Thank you.

18 Additional comments, questions?

19 I do want to respect people's time, but
20 we're here. So if there's questions that we can try
21 to answer. I realize that we can't answer all the
22 questions now. It's fairly early in the process.
23 All we really have right now is the application, so
24 we'll be looking at that information and developing
25 some more detailed information. But I wanted to

1 make sure that people felt like they had an
2 opportunity to ask questions, have their comments in
3 the record if you wanted to speak today.

4 But written comments will be received
5 through May 15th. After today's meeting -- After
6 today's meeting they need to be in writing.

7 So opportunity for oral comments going
8 once?

9 Yes.

10 MR. MULLER: Muller again, Chuck. One
11 quick question. All these questions and comments
12 and everything else that's been said last night and
13 tonight, are you guys putting them on your website
14 so we have all the answers? And the studies that
15 are getting done, that we have access to them so we
16 can see what the results are for all?

17 MS. STEINHAUER: I'm understanding that
18 as two questions. So the question about the
19 comments last night and then the written comments
20 will be on our website. They will also be E-filed.
21 I will submit the written comments at the end of the
22 comment period so that they're all together. The
23 oral comments, we'll work with the court reporter
24 and see if we can get those up earlier. So all of
25 that information goes into the scoping document.

1 Then the environmental assessment is
2 prepared that will reference any studies either done
3 specifically for this project or that have been done
4 for other projects or with other issue areas, so
5 those will be referenced. Most of them will
6 probably be online and you'll be able to link to
7 those. But I'm not putting that information up as
8 the EA is developing, but it will be available as
9 the EA is complete, probably in fall.

10 MR. MULLER: All right. Thank you.

11 MS. STEINHAUER: Thank you.

12 Oral comments going once, going twice,
13 third and final opportunity for oral comments as
14 part of the record?

15 I'm not seeing any hands. We will close
16 this portion of the public comment meeting. I want
17 to thank you very much for coming. And, again, I
18 look forward -- We'll be available to try to answer
19 questions after the meeting. But going forward for
20 your comments to be part of the record, they need to
21 be in writing and you need to have those to me by
22 May 15th. So thank you very much for your time and
23 your interest. I appreciate it. Thank you.

24 (Whereupon, the public scoping and
25 informational meeting was concluded at

1 12:17 p.m.)

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