

**Pronghorn Solar Park Project
Virtual Community Open House
Transcription (Unofficial) of Live Question and Answer Session
May 12, 2021**

It sounds like this project is already approved for construction. Is the project final and approved to move forward?

This is an important question and one that we heard from several members in the community as we knocked on doors. Just to be clear, the project is not yet approved for construction and it is not yet approved by Pueblo County for land use. We'll be proceeding with that process soon. Public input is important in that process, and we're gathering that here, establishing a relationship with the community and looking for your feedback to incorporate into our 1041 application.

If the project is approved, how do we know Leeward is going to follow through with commitments made during the permitting process?

Leeward's project commitments will be documented in the 1041 permit application that will be submitted to Pueblo County, and the County will review the application package as part of making a permit decision. The County will decide if additional commitments or conditions are required. If the County approves the Pronghorn permit request, the permit will contain the conditions that were agreed upon and that Leeward must comply and abide with. Permitted developments really need to adhere to those conditions, so they are not in violation of the permit terms. Leeward wants to be a good neighbor and have positive relationships with its communities. Leeward has two projects in Colorado that are operating right now; those projects do not have violations and were constructed and are being operated and maintained in compliance with those permits. This shows Leeward is a good neighbor in the communities that they operate in.

What safety considerations have been evaluated for this Project?

Safety is a number one priority at Leeward and several safety considerations have been incorporated into the project design. For example, the project team engaged with the Pueblo Rural Fire Protection District to understand their safety recommendations for the site. The District noted that they do not have unusual fire concerns for the development or for solar developments in general, and offered some site design recommendations. Leeward took their recommendations and all their feedback in consideration of the design. This includes use of things like ring roads for ease of movement within the site and to provide adequate turnaround space, wider roads to adequately accommodate emergency vehicles, and then Leeward was sure to propose site access from Lime Road, which is where the Pueblo Rural Fire Protection District recommended.

In addition to these things, the project also includes a fence line setback of at least 50 feet and solar array setbacks of at least 70 feet from residential property lines. If the project is approved, Leeward also developed a vegetation management plan and that really would dictate how the vegetation on site will be maintained. This all adds to the overall safety of the site and would include things like periodic mowing to provide a well-maintained site, both internally and around the buffer around the site. Leeward also has an extensive safety training program for its employees and contractors. And the team will install reliable and proven technology on site.

Why are you building this project here and what are the benefits to our neighborhood?

We picked this site for a variety of reasons: one main reason is that Pueblo County and Southern Colorado in general have high energy potential -- there is a significant number of sunny days. Pueblo County has around 260 sunny days per year, which means there is a high potential for solar energy generation. The site itself is relatively flat, dry, and contiguous. It is an area that is already used for existing generation with Comanche Solar, Big Horn Solar (to come), and Comanche Generating Station, and it is also close to utility infrastructure from Xcel, Tri-State, and Black Hills Energy.

Secondly, the benefits to the community and why we picked this area: this project would bring economic benefits of 400+ construction jobs throughout the construction period, and indirect jobs related to supply chain as well. The project will be producing tax benefits. Therefore, a project of this size is estimated to generate somewhere around \$760,000 in property taxes in just the first year of its operation, with a large portion of that going to the fire department (\$170,000) and to local school districts (\$300,000 to Districts 60 and 70 together). In addition to that, we are proposing to respond to the demand for more renewable energy in a growing population base. We are also securing a relatively low-impact use of this project site for 30+ years.

Why would you go to the expense of building a project like this without a commitment to buy the energy from an electric utility company?

We are really preparing a project to be ready to be built and having the energy sold to the utility companies. Securing the power purchase agreement or the contract to sell the energy is part of the development process and will be done before building the project.

How much water will be used for this Project?

We understand the community's concern given the arid climate and the water uses in the region. We want to be clear that solar projects are a very low use of water when compared to other sources of energy generation. Solar projects do not use water to generate electricity, and we would only be washing the panels once or maybe twice a year. The remainder of the year we would be relying on natural weather events to clean the panels and keep them in good working order.

Are you grading the site and how much does that impact drainage during rainstorms, etc.?

The preliminary designs for the site have resulted in minimal grading so there should really be minimal impact to stormwater runoff. In addition to that, we are going to allow the site to naturally revegetate and include a landscape buffer along the northern border that will further help mitigate any stormwater runoff.

With all the land surrounding this project and the current power plant, why construct this solar project so close to residential structures?

We are looking at this property for various reasons: it is a flat, contiguous property that is good for solar development in general, but it is also close to utility infrastructure that allows for an efficient connection to the grid (to either Xcel, Tri-State, or Black Hills Energy). We do understand that it is close to the homes along our northern border and we have taken special care to include a landscape buffer across the entire northern and northeastern border where the Project borders homes. We are welcoming feedback regarding our landscape buffer now that you've seen our plans and visual renderings. We would love to hear from the community with feedback in regard to what it would look like.

At times there are heavy downpours in this area, and it drains into Bessemer Ditch. What will the water/materials runoff from the site look like as it goes into Bessemer Ditch?

A preliminary study of the drainage was done and there will be very limited impact on the drainage patterns. There is also minimal grading that will be done. There are really no types of contamination on a solar project -- everything is sealed within the solar module so any rain that comes down is not going to pick up any contamination, so you will not have that in the runoff.

Will herbicides be used and if so, would it control invasive plants?

A Vegetation Management Plan has been developed for the site and it contains multiple layers of control. The first layer is not introducing any new noxious weeds to the site. Leeward will be employing construction best management practices (BMPs) so that new weeds do not get introduced to the site. For weeds that do establish on site/around the perimeter of the site, periodic monitoring and mowing are part of the Vegetation Management Plan. If those measures are not successful, then the weeds will be eradicated. The approach to eradication really depends on the specific weed that appears on site, and then the best management practices for addressing it. It is hard to comment on that right now just because we do not know what could pop up out there, but there are multiple layers in that plan so that different levels of prevention and eradication are available to the team.

Will this project reduce the families interested in locating to Lakeside Manor and how might this impact the property values?

We have done several studies and we studied several solar projects across the country to determine if there is any impact of property values. When we did that, we looked at properties that were close to the solar panels and properties that were away from the solar panels as a test

area. Those studies concluded that properties' proximity to large-scale solar projects do not have a measurable negative impact on property values. Part of the reason for that is that solar panels do not possess the negative qualities that would theoretically impact property values like hazardous materials, odor, noise, and excess traffic do.

The question is how many homeowners border the project?

It is about 70-ish homes, but we can follow up with an exact number.

Various questions regarding project's proximity to the residential neighborhoods have been received. The question is around the concern about the visual impacts. Can we go back and talk about visual impacts and the visual simulations that we have done and what's being considered in terms of placement of solar panels adjacent to homes?

We designed the project here as it is contiguous, dry, flat land that is developable and good for a solar project, and it is also close to utility infrastructure that makes for an efficient electrical connection to the grid. We did take special care along the northern border to include a 50-foot setback from the residential property lines to the fence. We also included a game-friendly fence with wooden posts and fencing that blends into the foreground. We also included a landscape buffer along the northern border. We do want to hear feedback from the community on that visual buffer.

This project is mentioned as a low-impact land use, can you explain more regarding what that means?

When we say a low-impact land use, the way that these projects are designed and built is that they are set upon a racking system that is primarily steel I-beams driven into the ground. We do not have a significant amount of concrete poured on the property. The ground itself can revegetate over the years, and our panels are not converting the land permanently. Also, you don't have a significant amount of traffic on the property on a daily basis. The project would produce no odors or noises beyond the project boundary. There would also be minimal traffic and any disturbances. Therefore, use of the land is very low impact to the neighboring community but also to the land itself.

Will the landscape buffer require water?

I understand the question and the concern as Pueblo is generally a dry, arid area of our state and that alone presents species growth challenges. As part of Leeward's Vegetation Management Plan, they are committed to vegetation establishment and reestablishment where appropriate. The species that have been proposed in the Vegetation Management Plan were based on regional ecosystem profiles, and the species that are being proposed have greater odds for successful establishment than non-native or non-adaptive species. The species that we are recommending are also known to succeed in drier environments like Pueblo. That said, like any new plantings on any new landscape, some irrigation is going to be required to get those species and plantings established and rooted in the ground. Once they are established, the species are expected to grow through natural rain events or with minimal watering requirements. We know

that folks have lived in this area for significant periods of time with lots of experience locally. So, if you have comments or suggestions, we would love to hear them.

Will this project raise temperatures in the area?

We do not anticipate that the PV modules for this project are going to create the heat island effect that folks have talked about, or cause any significant heat impacts outside of the project boundary. The panels themselves are generally encased in glass, are thin, lightweight and they dissipate heat into the environment quickly. In addition to that, we will include vegetation regrowth underneath the panels and we have the landscape buffer to north of the project that will help further block or dissipate heat from any solar panels.

There has been discussion of an article that was in *Nature*. Could you speak to the details of that article or additional studies that the team has looked at?

We have absolutely heard of this study and we investigated it, and it actually turns out that the author, Barron-Gafford, later clarified that outside of the PV arrays, thermal energy is able to radiate back towards the environment as it does in natural settings. He was the one who also clarified that any heat effect would quickly dissipate and that landscaping around the solar project and underneath the panels would mitigate any heat effects.

Do you disagree with that study?

It is not that we are disagreeing with the study, it is that the author himself is clarifying the study that any heat effect would be mitigated by vegetation on site, and dissipate as it normally would into the atmosphere and vegetative buffers like we have proposed.

Will there be any impacts to wildlife? What would the impact to wildlife -- deer, antelope, quail, foxes, and roadrunners -- be, and would rattlesnakes move into the subdivision from the groundwork?

Leeward's team was in the neighborhood a few weeks ago and heard the community's comments about wildlife. Leeward has been coordinating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Natural Heritage Program, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife regarding the project. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has indicated it has no concerns with the project resulting in impacts to species that are protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The Colorado Natural Heritage Program recommended coordination with CPW and that is exactly what Leeward is doing now. In response to 2019 project feedback that CPW provided, Leeward is proposing wildlife and game fencing to limit impacts to big game. The fence and vegetation setbacks that are incorporated in the site design really promote safe and continued wildlife movement around the site. If the Project is approved, pre-construction surveys will be conducted in consideration of all of Colorado Parks and Wildlife recommended buffers and seasonal restrictions for certain species, and that would include big game. Some big game use the area quite frequently--a lot of the neighbors commented about how much they enjoy seeing pronghorn in the area. The project site itself is not in a documented migration corridor from CNHP or CPW. And again, the areas around the site will remain open for species to move around.

In terms of snakes, it is hard to say where they will go but when there is ground disturbance activities, it does stir up snakes in the area. Where they go, we are not sure. We can't speak to that, but there is a lot of surrounding open space that does not include dogs and pets in fenced backyards, and that may be where the snakes are more likely to migrate. But again, these are all things that we will be discussing with Colorado Parks and Wildlife. CPW did just reach out within the past week and said that they are reviewing all of the updated project information and that they really appreciate the team's proactive outreach and efforts to coordinate with them. The coordination will be ongoing, and Leeward will factor all of CPW's recommendations into the application that ultimately gets submitted to Pueblo County.

Can neighbors plug an extension cord into the power supply to power backyard lighting?

Unfortunately, you cannot plug into the project. Utility-scale solar projects in Colorado generally sell directly to the utilities, but it would be a great idea if it were possible!

Regarding lighting, will it be visible from neighboring properties?

The plant lighting will have minimal lighting. For security purposes, lighting will be at the main gate, the operations and maintenance building, on the project's substation, and at the inverter stations. Some of that lighting will be motion activated. It is all going to be downward facing so it should not present a problem. Pueblo County is really focused on limiting light pollution; therefore, all the lighting on site will really be focused on its intended light source, and generally any light that illuminates the sky would not be built on site.

Why not build further away from the residential areas or closer to the current Big Horn Project?

The benefit of this site is the proximity to the electrical infrastructure from multiple utilities. There is substation access for Tri-State, Xcel, and Black Hills Energy. There is also a Black Hills Energy transmission line on the property, so that is a big driver of that component as well as the ability to deliver our energy to the utility companies.

Is this project government subsidized?

The project does qualify, like all solar products do, for the Federal Investment Tax Credit. Beyond that, we do not have any incentives secured for the project and are not currently relying on incentives.

Regarding the Nature Study, what are some of the considerations that have been made in terms of the site design for heat minimization?

The head author of the study, Barron-Gafford, did later clarify that the heat island effects that they talked about are mitigated with on-site vegetation, landscape buffering, and that any heat island effect quickly dissipated into the atmosphere as it normally would. Again, these panels are thin, lightweight pieces of equipment that would dissipate their heat quickly. If you want to look at how hot the modules actually get, you're only looking at the worst case of 130 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit, similar to the hot water in your home. These modules do not concentrate the sun's energy like other solar technologies; therefore, they run a lot cooler, and the heat does dissipate

very rapidly. Another example is for people that have solar models on their roofs -- those modules run a little bit hotter than here in the open field where we have breezes, as we have that cooling effect. This should give you some idea of what the temperature is at, which is very minimal.

Will there be a trail or walking path for the surrounding community to enjoy?

Solar energy projects must have a security fencing around them, it is a Federal energy requirement, so unfortunately, we cannot have a walking trail or path through the project property.

What studies have been done or what information has been collected around property value and property taxes? Is there anyone on the team checking on behalf of Lakeside Manor to see if the project will impact property taxes?

Properties are taxed based on use and the Colorado Department of Taxation has a tax policy for solar projects. So, the facility would be taxed, but it should not impact the taxes of the neighboring properties. Regarding property values, we did study several solar projects across the country, looking at the property values of homes adjacent to the project, and in a controlled area away from the project, and determined that proximity to large-scale solar projects do not cause a measurable impact on property values.

Regarding property value, were any of the projects studied in Colorado?

At least one of the projects involved in the study was in Colorado.

Has the District Commissioner been involved in the official process?

With the 1041 application being an official process, there are limitations on how much we can share and discuss with the Commissioners, so we have involved the Pueblo County Planning and Zoning Department. I would expect that the Commissioners are aware of this as well but there is a limitation on how much we can communicate with them about the project because it is part of an official proceeding.

Also, to share a little bit more about the 1041 permit process...Commissioners will have a say in whether or not the proposed development is approved, and the Pueblo County Planning and Development Department will really be responsible for apprising the Commissioners on the information that was submitted as part of the project application and presenting that information to them for review, along with their recommendations for approval or non-approval. This is a formal County process that the development and application will follow. The Commissioners will be involved in the process and in the formal proceedings.