



NEWS RELEASE

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Subject: Port courts solar module manufacturer, supports Stehekin road rebuild

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Commissioners for the Port of Chelan County, meeting in regular session Jan. 3, heard from economic Development Director Ron Johnston-Rodriguez that a manufacturer of photovoltaic solar modules was seriously considering leasing 15,000 square feet of Port-owned property in Olds Station. He said the company would be positioning itself to supply a market that is projected to grow dramatically to take advantage of the state's new solar incentive program. Johnston-Rodriguez pointed out that the new incentive program also provides a higher payback for solar module manufacturing through premiums from utility companies. Currently no solar modules are being manufactured in Washington.

He said the unnamed solar module manufacturer's long-term vision in establishing a headquarters in Wenatchee would be to double its operation within five years, which is likely to entice additional investors. The company would provide some local jobs in operating a robotic assembly line, Johnston-Rodriguez said.

"This proposal is generating enthusiasm from the people involved with the Port's Advanced Vehicle Initiative," he said. "We anticipate it would lead to joint development here by other solar engineering firms." Commissioners met in executive session following their regular meeting, to discuss real estate matters relevant to the proposal.

In other business, commissioners voted to send state Senator Linda Evans Parlette a letter of support for a proposal to reconstruct and relocate Upper Stehekin's major road, at the western end of Lake Chelan. The road, which connects High Bridge to Cottonwood Camp in the Stephen Mather Wilderness, was badly damaged by flooding last year. Relocation of its route requires an act of Congress, under the 1988 Washington Parks Wilderness Act.

"Having this road closed has a big impact on the Stehekin economy, as it makes it more difficult for visitors to access the wilderness," Commissioner Mike Mackey said. He noted that the proposed relocation would consume no more acreage than that designated by Congress when the wilderness was established. Mackey credited Sen. Parlette for her work on the relocation proposal.

Commissioners also heard from Pangborn Memorial Airport Manager Pat Moore that some airport technicians have been cross-training in snow removal techniques so as not to overtax the regular snowplow operators. Moore said icy conditions led to two temporary closures of the airport in December, noting that in normal years the airport only closes for icy conditions two or three times in an entire season. She told commissioners that 32 flights out of 121 were canceled in December, an improvement over 47 out of 121 in December 2005. Of the 40 flights delayed last month, 38 were due to weather conditions and air traffic in Seattle, she said.

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