Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

To: Energy Facility Siting Council

From: Wally Adams

Date: February 11, 2022

Subject: Agenda Item E (Information Item):
Public Comments Web Portal for the February 25, 2022, EFSC Meeting

Attachments: Attachment 1: Screen Shots from the Portal

BUSINESS PROBLEM

Public comment periods are required by statute and administrative rules to occur at several points in the Site Certificate process as well as the Rulemaking process. Comments are currently captured in several channels: emails are most common, but also by written letter, fax and verbally. There is no online system for submitting comments, and comments received are not readily available to view.

Comments must be processed after they are received, meaning that they are catalogued in a single .pdf file with an index. Any attachments received must be included with the comments. In some cases – generally when a large number of comments are received – a summary of the issues must be generated.

With several different channels for incoming comments, there is no set method for cataloging the comments and combining them into one file. An index of comments must be generated manually.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the project was to create an online comment portal to capture and display comments submitted by the public. We also wanted to use existing software platforms for which the State already has licenses and in-house IT resources to develop the system, thereby keeping our costs low. Additional objectives included:

- Provide people who submit comments with an email acknowledgement;
- Ability to generate an index of comments received;
- Ability to generate a list of comments in pdf format; and
- A docket to provide public access to the comments received for a particular project.

Finally, we wanted to design the portal to help guide people through the site certificate process by adding information about Council procedures where appropriate and enabling them to easily add references to a specific exhibit in the application for site certificate (ASC) and/or a specific Council standard. The intention is to make it easier for people to participate in Council proceedings without crossing the line of providing legal advice.

RESULTS

Comment Portal
ODOE's IT group was able to develop an application to capture online comments, and to display all comments received for a project through an online portal. The application uses Microsoft Dynamics as its platform, for which the agency already has a license. ODOE IT has taken a similar approach to solicit comments for the Biennial Energy Report and several other projects.

When a person arrives at the portal, they see a screen which allows them to choose a project to comment on. The portal has been specifically configured to accept comments from projects at the following stages:

- Notice of Intent
- Draft Proposed Order (DPO)
- DPO – Type A Amendment
- DPO – Type B Amendment
- Formal Rulemaking
- Informal Rulemaking

Screen shots from the portal are contained in Attachment 1. The screen shots were taken for a test project at the DPO stage.

After selecting a project, the next two screens introduce the system and include a description of the various ways that a person may provide comments, links to resources regarding the Council's process, and information that is relevant to the current project and phase. These introductory pages also include the start and end dates for the comment period. These can be set by Siting Division personnel for each project phase, and comments are only accepted through the portal during an active comment period.

The user next arrives at a screen requesting their contact information. This screen is standard across ODOE's comment portals, so it will look familiar to a person who has commented on other initiatives. Only first name, last name, and email address are required fields; the rest are optional.

After entering their contact information, the user arrives at the comment submission screen. The system is designed to accept multiple comments at once provided that they all relate to the same project. After clicking the "Create" button, a subform pops up where the comments are entered. In addition to simply typing their comment, the user has the option to add references.

For DPO comments those optional references are the ASC Exhibit and the applicable Council standard(s). Both can be easily selected from drop-down menus.

After completing the comment sub-form and submitting one or more comments, the user simply needs to hit the "Submit" button on the comment submission screen to complete the process. An acknowledgement screen appears to confirm submission, and the person will also receive a conformation email at the address they previously entered.

Docket
The second part of this system is perhaps the most useful, as it provides something that was previously not available: easy access to view the comments that have been submitted regarding a project. After navigating to the Siting Docket page, the user will see a screen which describes the docket system and includes filters for Project, Project Phase, Source, and Date Range. After making their selections, the user will see a list of the comments received and hyperlinks to the comments. Clicking the hyperlink takes the person to the comment. If the comment includes any attachments, there will be a link(s) to open the attachments associated with the comment.

Future Updates
This comment portal was created with the intent to make commenting easier for those interested in our applications, amendments and rulemakings and we have done some testing outside of the Siting Division and outside of ODOE. As a result of that testing we have made some adjustments. However, we recognize there are likely improvements that we have not thought of yet and welcome any improvement ideas from Council or anyone else. To that end, in the auto generated confirmation email once a comment is submitted we include the following statement:

> *Thank you for submitting a comment using ODOE's online comment portal. If you had any issues submitting your comment or have any suggestions on how to improve the system, please contact …………………*

CONCLUSION

The comment portal is already available and in use. The docket is in final test and should be live by the end of February.

One note regarding the docket: comments that are entered through the online portal automatically populate the docket, and no further action is needed to make them visible. Comments received by other means must be entered into the system by ODOE staff. While this takes time, the benefits in terms of providing public access to the comments make it worthwhile. There is also another return for the effort as the system provides the ability to later download a single file with all of the comments and an associated index.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Screen Shots from the Portal