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Enid News & Eagle

3 Sections 20 Pages \$2.00 Enid, Oklahoma enidnews.com October 22, 2023 **SUNDAY**

NextEra moves forward with solar farm

By Suzie Byrd
Enid News & Eagle

The planning of the Skeleton Creek Energy Center by NextEra Energy Resources came to North-west Oklahoma in 2020.

The first stage was to develop wind farms and dot the scenic view of Northwestern Oklahoma pastures with massive wind turbines. These turbines typically are over 200 feet high with 116-foot blades. They fill the night sky with their flashing red lights, and some have reported hearing them.

Since 2003, NextEra Energy Resources' subsidiaries say it has been helping fuel the state's economic growth and quality of life, and are helping move the country toward energy independence.

To date, the company says it has invested more than \$7.6 billion in Oklahoma, including 18 operational wind energy centers.

Elinore Beitler, a project manager with NextEra Energy, was able to work with the Federal Aviation Administration, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission and Vance Air Force Base officials for the wind farms.

The company said it pulled out a win for its wind project and now is ready to pursue the solar power and battery storage center south and east of Enid.



The planned solar farm south and east of Enid will have a footprint of 2,000 acres. (Photo provided)

However, it appears the next phase of the Skeleton Creek NextEra Energy Center will not happen without protest and some concerns. Perhaps even more controversial is the planned 200 megawatt, 4-hour battery energy storage system.

The system uses lithium batteries

regulated from being transported on planes and boats because of fire and explosive potential.

This past week, the county commissioner's meeting was held in a packed courtroom at the Garfield County Court House, filled mainly with those who were against the project.

The solar project is planned for a rural area southeast of Enid, extending south of Southgate Road and generally between 42nd and 66th.

The property for solar panels would be located within a target area of 5,200 acres, or about 8 square miles, although less than half of the

land within the target area would be leased, purchased or developed, according to plans previously announced by the company.

"I really don't have a problem with solar panels," Dee Ann Ediger said. "But they would be one mile from the south end of Woodring airfield." Ediger and her husband have a plane at Woodring and said 75% of accidents happen within a mile or so of approach or landing.

She also is concerned with the battery storage even though she is not in the designated development area. She lives closer to Fairmont.

"My husband graduated from Pioneer and many of the people who did are concerned with how close these batteries are to a school," she said.

A list of 22 pages of names was presented to board of county commissioners president Reese Wedel. It stated: "We are opposed to building the Garfield County-Skeleton Creek Solar project. Our top reasons for opposition are due to environmental hazards, fire hazards, decreased property values and permanent destruction of fertile crop ground."

"I'm not sure we have any jurisdiction in this matter as county commissioners," Wedel said.

NextEra media spokesperson Naomi Morrison said the company

See NEXTERA, Page A3

Enid Social Justice Committee to seek recall election for Blevins

By Tanner Holubar
Enid News & Eagle

The Enid Social Justice Committee announced it will seek a recall election for Ward 1 City Commissioner Judd Blevins in November. The ESJC said it seeks the recall on grounds that Blevins, who reportedly had ties to white supremacy groups, had not sufficiently addressed the allegations.

An article written in March 2019 for Right Wing Watch, a research project of People for the American Way, accused Blevins of being the Oklahoma state coordinator for Identity Evropa — identified as a white nationalist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center — formed in 2016, renamed to American Identity Movement in 2019 and disbanded in 2020.

In a written statement, ESJC said Blevins was fairly elected and has the right to the commission seat, so it is using the recall option granted in the city charter for recalling any elected official. Kristi Balden, chair of the ESJC, said the recall petition is needed to correct what she said was a grievous error. She said the people living in Ward 1 weren't informed about who Blevins was and that the voters deserve to make a new decision on him.

"I struggle with terms like 'allegedly' because I feel like the ties have been verified and that he's had six months to deny these associations and these ties. The fact that he recruited for Identity Evropa, his presence in Charlottesville, his marching with a torch, him being in attendance for a two-day white supremacy rally. ... again he's had six months to deny this, and he won't."



Members of Enid Social Justice Committee protest the swearing-in of Judd Blevins to Enid City Commission May 1. (Billy Hefton / Enid News & Eagle)

She said Blevins at times has been dismissive and disrespectful on social media posts, and she said the ESJC is moving forward with the recall petition due to Blevins not acknowledging ties to white supremacy groups.

"Yeah we're upset that he won, but that's not politics, we're upset because he's a Nazi. I think he can't make any denials about it because it's so very clear that he was involved in, and that he also won't apologize and express any kind of regret whatsoever," Balden said.

"I don't think someone with his ties should have that kind of influence on our community or should be making

any kind of policy for our community. And attempting to normalize neo-Nazis being in public office, I think that's a terrible precedent to set."

James Neal, vice chair for ESJC, said the group will hold a kickoff event on Nov. 5 to start collecting signatures and once the required amount is received, the group will then submit the recall petition. He said the group began discussing a recall petition back in February after the group was formed, and that the initial hope was that the ESJC wouldn't have to resort to that.

"Our initial desire was for either Judd Blevins to address these questions and denounce any sense of neo-Nazism

See RECALL ELECTION, Page A2

Collect those tickets \$15,000 in cash prizes awaits as Candy Cane Cash begins today

Enid News & Eagle

Candy Cane Cash, the Enid hometown shopping promotion conducted by the Greater Enid Chamber of Commerce and the Enid News & Eagle, begins its 20th year today.

Effective today, people who shop at participating merchants can pick up tickets for a chance to win cash, lots of cash. This year, even more local merchants are participating — 43 merchants with 47 business locations handing out tickets.

"Enid's local merchants have shown tremendous support for Candy Cane Cash again this year," said Leslie Magalios, advertising director of the News & Eagle.

The big incentive: a total of \$15,000 cash will be given away right ahead of Christmas.

When shoppers make a purchase at any of the 47 participating Enid merchant locations, they will be given one-half of a two-part, numbered ticket. One-half stays with the shopper, and the other half is kept by the merchant to go into the winners drawing. On drawing day, Dec. 12, tickets from all of the merchants are placed into a huge hopper at the Chisholm Trail Expo Center. Shoppers are invited to bring their Candy Cane Cash tickets out for the drawing event. At 7 p.m. on that Tuesday night, Dec. 12, tickets will be drawn randomly from the huge hopper representing purchases made. If shoppers have tickets to match the numbered tickets drawn, they win cash.

Drawings will be held that night for \$500, \$500, \$1,000, \$1,000, \$2,000, \$2,500 and \$7,500 — a total of \$15,000 in cash.

The promotion is designed to recognize the importance of shopping first in Enid and reward people for buying at local merchants.

"Each business that participates in Candy Cane Cash contributes to keeping our local tax dollars here in Enid, helping our community thrive," Magalios said.

Buyers are given a ticket for every \$10 spent at a participating business. To add extra chances to win, buyers will be given double tickets on Thursdays.

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Today, sunny. Gusty east wind 9 to 31. Tonight, clear. Southeast wind at 17-26 mph.

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