



Acton residents upset BESS concerns being ignored

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A rendering of the proposed facility, which would be located east of Highway 14, south of the Vincent Hill Station restaurant. Courtesy.

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Acton residents expressed concern this week after learning county officials had, as Acton Town Council President Jeremiah Owen put it succinctly Friday, “rescinded their rescission,” meaning they reversed their move to receive public input over a battery-storage project being proposed in the rural community.



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The project is now expected to be approved through a ministerial site-plan review, according to a letter from county officials, not through the conditional-use permit process that would require a public hearing.

Acton resident Ruthie Brock, representing a community group called Acton Takes Action, sent a letter Thursday to express residents' concerns over the Hecate Humidor Battery Energy Storage System, or BESS. Her group includes hundreds of local residents opposed to the plan.



"What is the rush to do this?" Owen said, "Especially when we know that the community is overwhelmingly not in favor of this. We can't see a community benefit and nexus there, and there's a high fire risk."

County officials from 5th District Supervisor Kathryn Barger's office, who represents the Santa Clarita and Antelope valleys, shared an Aug. 1 letter from the L.A. County Department of Regional Planning, which explained the latest decision had to do with the project's classification.

They also said that the project helps fill an increased need for utility-scale energy battery storage systems to improve grid stability throughout the state.

The county decided the nonpublic site-plan review route was appropriate because the project's applicants argued the facility was meant to be a distribution facility; whereas the Town Council was arguing the 400-megawatt station should be considered a transmission facility, which could have prompted the review.

"Hecate Grid is developing the Humidor BESS Project on approximately 15 acres," according to the company's website. "The site is conveniently located less than 3,500 feet from an existing Southern California Edison (SCE) substation, allowing for cost-effective interconnection and operation."

In a phone interview on Friday, Owen mentioned a number of concerns he has about the project, saying there's no real local service benefit, the facility's purpose is being mischaracterized to expedite the approval process and there should be a public discussion of the community's concerns.

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The county's decision to consider the facility's permit requests using its ministerial review process negates the public getting a chance to air its concerns and hear its questions answered, Owen said.



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A spokesman for Hecate was not immediately available Friday to answer questions. Owen said the council has yet to hear from anyone from the project regarding community outreach, and more opportunity for dialogue has been the council’s primary request.

Acton residents first drew the county’s attention with their concerns for the project in June. Owen said the council’s June 5 meeting drew about 200 residents, and the council usually gets a crowd of about 10-15.

Brock shared files Friday that indicated the community effort managed to gather more than 1,700 signatures for a protest petition from people throughout both valleys.

“We do not believe that a ministerial review is adequate for approving a BESS that would be storing and transmitting millions of watts of energy and utilizing lithium-ion batteries to accomplish this,” Brock wrote. “In addition, this project is proposed in a designated Very High Fire Hazard Area in extreme proximity to ranch homes, Metro rail tracks and the busy State Route 14. It also sits over the Acton Water Basin, on the border of the designated SEA, and beside the San Andreas Fault.”

Owen also was frustrated that the council was notified of its decision while residents were still waiting for a report Barger requested with a [June 6 motion](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hNREoRKxFyP88enh886wLTz6RVVwIErO/view) (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hNREoRKxFyP88enh886wLTz6RVVwIErO/view) that was authored in response over residents’ concerns about the proliferation of the projects.

The motion called for: a description of all current projects in the area; a description of anticipated or known BESS pending applications; an analysis of key equity indicators and considerations in areas where projects are already permitted; and “recommendations to bolster the county’s review authority, including opportunities to streamline in conjunction with state energy goals with an aim to avoid overconcentration of BESS projects.”

The reports Barger requested in June were not yet available as of this story’s publication.

A county official from L.A. County Planning was not immediately available Friday to provide an update with information on when the project may receive word on the status of its site-plan review.



Perry Smith