

APRIL 06, 2024

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ACTON TAKES ACTION CHAIR, RUTHIE BROCK'S, ONLINE PUBLIC COMMENT POST REGARDIING THE LA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA ITEM: 85-D:

***ACCELERATING RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT, AND PROMOTING COMMUNITY RESILIENCY IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY***

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA ITEM 85-D WILL BE DISCUSSED DURING THE UPCOMING BOS MEETING SCHEDULED FOR TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2024.

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Honorable Board of Supervisors,

I wish to comment on Supplemental item 85-D, Accelerating renewable energy development, and promoting community resiliency in Los Angeles County.

The rural community of Acton is currently battling being in the crosshairs of several developers (3) seeking to build large utility scale battery energy storage systems (BESS) which utilize fire-prone and highly toxic lithium-ion batteries. The residents of Acton have already spoken loud and clear as to how they feel about projects such as these being developed in our area. In September we submitted to County our petitions of protest with 1892 signatures. Our residents have never been so united against anything in the 35 years I have lived in Acton and our sister town of Agua Dulce has stood with us from the beginning against these BESS projects. Our message to County could not be more clear, yet appears to be falling on deaf ears.

While LA County struggles to meet its renewable energy goals, it appears that perhaps "timelines" are surpassing the safety of your residents in order of priority. One example is the hastily approved 400 MW Hecate Humidor BESS which Regional Planning approved with a simple ministerial review, the very same process that would be applied in the review of a fence permit, per DRP Deputy Director David DeGrazia. This shows how little knowledge DRP staff possess about the dangerous Lithium-ion technology utilized by these BESS projects.

In fairness, we cannot expect the DRP nor our Board of Supervisors to be experts in the field of transmission, but what we can expect and DO expect is that our County agencies and representatives will seek guidance from those who do possess this expertise. Item 98-A is being developed by DRP staff who are seeking guidance from the CEC. This is a positive step, yet even as the CEC holds staff workshops (Feb. 23, 2024) for the purpose of educating on BESS safe siting practices, they are not bringing forth experts in transmission to have a fully informed conversation on this very important subject that can then be shared with AHJs. I participated in this workshop and felt it lacked the presence and input from actual experts in the transmission field.

One message did come across from all panel participants (with the exception of one energy industry-focused rep) and that was a message acknowledging the dangers that Lithium-ion batteries present and that the concerns of communities are warranted.

These batteries are known to be fire-prone and the off-gassing during a fire or thermal runaway event is highly toxic and swiftly lethal to those who may be exposed. In 2023, 18 people died in New York from these dangerous gases produced by e-bike and e-scooter lithium-ion battery failure fires. Now think of these risks as applied to a utility scale BESS.

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A ministerial review process does not echo those concerns of the CEC panel experts. It also does not show respect for the dangers associated with lithium-ion battery technology.

In response to AB 205, the CEC has developed the fast track Opt-In Program for energy project approvals. Chair Horvath commented in her motion with the following:

*“Amendments to the REO that increase the supply of clean energy in our County, create local jobs, and improve the resiliency of our most impacted communities would benefit all residents. The alternative will extend our reliance on fossil fuels, negatively impacting our air quality, do nothing to promote the resiliency of vulnerable communities, and **risk losing our local land use, environmental review, and permitting authority to the State.**”*

I wish to point out in reference to Chair Horvath's motion comments that the CEC's Opt-In process includes an environmental review. In fact, their review process is quite appropriately rigorous. County did not see the need for such an environmental review with the approval of the Humidor BESS — even though Chair Horvath's motion seems to earnestly seek to protect this important process. Every energy project that is utility scale or utilizes lithium-based technology should be required to go through the environmental review process!

Does County have any idea how many of these lithium-ion batteries will be utilized in a 400 MegaWatt BESS? The 10 MW Dorman BESS in Chandler AZ was reported to have 3,248 lithium-ion batteries in place according to news reports following a battery failure incident at this facility in 2022. If the Humidor BESS is 400 MW, that's 40 times the capacity of the Dorman BESS. So  $3,248 \times 40 = 129,920$  lithium-ion batteries (or capacity equivalent). I hope this puts the percentage of risk in perspective.

The Hecate “Humidor” is only one of 4 potential BESS slated for development in Acton that will total 2,285 MW of concentrated energy storage. This exceeds the capacity of both the San Onofre and the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Generating Plants. Hecate has plans for two more in addition to the “Humidor”: the “Flea Flicker” and the “Maathai.” Avantus has plans to build the 68 acre, mile+ long, 1150 MW “Angeleno.” The huge energy project developer NextEra has been contacting residents in this very same area and offering to purchase their property. We are under assault due to the door being opened by the County approval of the “Humidor.”

All proposed BESS are to be developed in the same east Acton area in proximity to the Vincent Substation and to residents. The properties in this area are comprised of quiet rural homes, sprawling desert ranches, dog kennels and animal rescues, all of which will be put at great risk in the event of a battery failure event at even one of these facilities. There is no operational reason that a BESS need be sited in close proximity to a substation other than a savings to developers in connection related costs.

Was County aware when they ministerially approved the Humidor that the smoke and superheated

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gases produced by a potential fire would risk the adjacent 500kV transmission lines short-circuiting due to the insulators potential to flashover? Was County aware that these critical transmission lines were part of the southern terminus of the Pacific AC Intertie and if they arc and flashover, it could jeopardize the power grid serving the entire southern California area and potentially other western states?

If a transmission expert had been consulted, this cautionary information would have been revealed. I have consulted with three transmission experts with a combined 100+ years of experience and expertise in the field and all three confirm this risk to be factual based on the location of the Humidor and other nearby proposed BESS. So great was their concern that they contacted Congressman Mike Garcia with this information.

With the understanding that this news came via credible experts, Rep. Garcia took these concerns to a hearing at the House of Representatives Homeland Security subcommittee of Science, Space and Technology. The February 29th hearing was on "Examining the Dangers of EV Fires for First Responders." During the hearing Rep. Garcia was able to pivot the conversation to the siting of battery energy storage facilities that utilize the very same lithium-ion batteries as EVs — only on a massive scale. The expert witness giving testimony was San Bernardino County Fire Chief Dan Munsey. During his comments, Rep. Garcia mentioned the Acton and Agua Dulce communities by name and then posed questions for Chief Munsey. (\*\*Rep. Garcia is introduced at time marker 44:55 [in the house subcommittee video; link follows])

<https://www.youtube.com/live/d8l8AsN5suA?si=pylVcet8Zb2B8qZq>

In closing, my comments are meant to point out that renewable energy goals and timelines should never be prioritized ahead of the safety of communities. Lithium-based technology is currently the preferred choice of BESS developers and these batteries are chosen for their density, performance, lifespan and cost savings. Notice that "safety" was not part of that equation. There are indeed more safe battery technologies currently on the market and more on the horizon. But until the energy industry decides to move on from Lithium-based battery technology, its important that the CEC and LA County fully understand the risks these batteries carry and translate that to responsible and safe siting practices of these projects — away from residents.

Thank you,

Ruthie Brock  
Acton Takes Action Community Task Force  
Acton