



Office of the City Council

“Working with our community to create positive impact through service with heart.”

October 28, 2025

Chair Felipe Hernandez and Members of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Sent via Email to: BoardOfSupervisors@santacruzcountyca.gov

Subject: Watsonville Community Concerns Regarding Battery Energy Storage System Facility on Minto Road

Dear Chair Felipe Hernandez and Members of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors:

We are writing to share the community’s significant and unresolved concerns regarding the proposed Minto Road energy storage project near our city. While we understand that the approval of this project does not fall within our jurisdiction, the potential impact on our residents and our environment is of great concern to us. We respectfully request that you engage with the community and take steps to address the issues raised by concerned citizens.

The lack of communication and proactive coordination to date has hindered our ability to support concerned citizens, who, following the January 2025 fire at the Moss Landing Facility, continue to expect answers from all of us. We respectfully request that the Board prioritize listening to and addressing the serious concerns that exist today. The Watsonville City Council is particularly concerned with several issues that have been raised by both residents of Watsonville and other communities near the proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility.

Protecting the safety and well-being of our residents is our foremost concern. Utility-scale battery energy storage can play a key role in supporting a clean and resilient energy grid. However, as mentioned, the January 2025 fire at the Moss Landing facility illustrates the potential risks associated with large-scale lithium-ion battery storage, including fire hazards, chemical releases, and environmental impacts. These risks must be carefully evaluated and addressed before land use and zoning approvals are granted, as such projects can affect our communities for decades to come. We are aware that the County has already taken steps to allow this project to be based on Minto Road.

The City also welcomes the opportunity to provide input on projects within or adjacent to the Watsonville Sphere of Influence, to ensure that traffic, utility, and environmental



impacts are adequately assessed and mitigated, and that any requests for sewer or water service are managed appropriately. Early and meaningful engagement is crucial to ensuring that projects align with community priorities, foster public trust, and address potential concerns before they impact our children, families, and seniors.

These are some of our primary concerns from Watsonville residents:

1. Fire and Safety Risks

- **Thermal runaway:** Lithium-ion batteries may carry the risk of thermal runaway, in which a single overheated cell can trigger a chain reaction, resulting in fires or explosions that release flammable and potentially toxic gases.
- **Toxic gases and contamination:** These gases can pose hazards to residents, first responders, and nearby soils or our valuable ag fields and water sources, potentially leading to long-term environmental and health effects.
- **Firefighting challenges:** Fires involving BESS are difficult to control and often require containment-only approaches, creating significant risks for both responders and surrounding communities.
- **Evacuation and access:** In areas with elevated fire risk, improperly sited BESS facilities could obstruct evacuation routes or create hazardous conditions during emergencies. An access assessment of the Minto Road is required.

2. Environmental and Neighborhood Concerns

- **Proximity to communities and sensitive areas:** Projects located near homes, schools, or wildlife habitats present heightened risks in the event of an incident.
- **Air quality and EMFs:** Construction, operation, and potential incidents can affect local air quality, while concerns about electromagnetic field exposure have also been cited.
- **Agricultural and ecological impacts:** Watsonville’s agricultural-heavy landscape requires that any project avoid negative effects on farmland, irrigation systems, and local ecosystems.

3. Community Engagement and Local Control

- **Bypass of local review:** Fast-track state approval processes that bypass local government review have generated frustration and concern among residents. We are concerned about the County’s lack of process to ensure local input is sought.
- **Calls for improved standards:** Communities advocate for robust safety measures, including fire suppression, emergency preparedness, and the exploration of safer battery technologies beyond lithium-ion.

We recommend that the County consider a careful review of this project and incorporate an evidence-based approach to energy storage regulations. We are advocating for actions that help us maintain public trust and ensure long-term safety and resilience of our area. In conclusion, we urge the Board to continue prioritizing resident safety, environmental protection, neighborhood well-being, and community engagement as it



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considers potential project approvals.

We appreciate your consideration of these concerns.

Respectfully,

Watsonville City Council

cc:

Pajaro Valley Unified School District Board of Trustees

Senator John Laird

Assemblymember Robert Rivas

Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)