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Community Benefit cannot be New Leaf preventing its' own accidents

I greatly appreciate the recent movement by our Watsonville City Council towards an Ordinance concerning BESS in our area. Their engagement with the CEC on behalf of the entire community, including unincorporated Watsonville, is critical.

While I wish that the City of Watsonville's Ordinance would outright ban lithium chemistry for BESS, the City of Watsonville mentioned tonight (6/23/26) at their public meeting that they may be asking the CEC to request funds from New Leaf Energy to train responders for the proposed BESS location (which is not in the City limits, but in unincorporated rural Watsonville), proposing that New Leaf should be able to add this as part of their "community benefit".

"Community Benefit" is an indicator of what the BESS would ADD to residents' lives. It is usually an ADDITION, that has social, environmental or economic benefit directly to residents-- NOT paying for mitigation of a problem that the developer causes to the community.

Also, as Councilmember Jimmy Dutra noted, the City of Watsonville has and should have limited fiscal / resource liability for what happens in unincorporated Watsonville. Of course, in an emergency we all help each other - but in terms of asking New Leaf for money for defense against a toxic plume fire, it is the County - especially our District 4 Supervisor - who should be positioning to request funds for training the frontliners in unincorporated Watsonville.

That would mean funds for the County Sheriff, and the recently disbanded PVFT under Santa Cruz Fire.

Any funds for training emergency personnel need to go to unincorporated Watsonville, which New Leaf needs to prove can be responsive in case of a crisis ---not to the City of Watsonville--- and these funds should never be called or allowed to be taken credit for as "community benefit".

New Leaf would be rewarded with checking off one more requirement to pass their project, while simply getting away with preparing to pay for causing a disaster in our area. The defining requirement for Community benefit - social, environmental, or economic value to unincorporated Watsonville - are not met in this way.

Respectfully yours and very grateful for your consideration to protect all residents and the environment at College Lake from harm,

Phoenix Artemisia / Linda Aron