

**DOCKETED**

<b>Docket Number:</b>	26-OPT-02
<b>Project Title:</b>	Seahawk Battery Energy Storage System
<b>TN #:</b>	271070
<b>Document Title:</b>	City of Watsonville City Council Comments - Regarding Proposed Seahawk Battery Energy Storage System
<b>Description:</b>	N/A
<b>Filer:</b>	System
<b>Organization:</b>	City of Watsonville City Council
<b>Submitter Role:</b>	Public Agency
<b>Submission Date:</b>	6/26/2026 5:11:06 PM
<b>Docketed Date:</b>	6/29/2026

*Comment Received From: City of Watsonville City Council  
Submitted On: 6/26/2026  
Docket Number: 26-OPT-02*

**City of Watsonville Comments Regarding Proposed Seahawk  
Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) – Docket No. 26-OPT-02**

*Additional submitted attachment is included below.*



## Office of the City Council

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

June 23, 2026

California Energy Commission (CEC)  
715 P Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Subject: City of Watsonville Comments Regarding Proposed Seahawk Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) – Docket No. 26-OPT-02**

Dear Commissioners:

The City Council of Watsonville respectfully submits the following comments regarding the proposed Seahawk Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) project and the applicant's election to utilize the California Energy Commission's Opt-In Certification Program pursuant to Assembly Bill 205.

Although the proposed facility is located within unincorporated Santa Cruz County, immediately adjacent to the City of Watsonville, the project will directly affect Watsonville residents, public safety personnel, and municipal resources. Due to geographic proximity, established automatic aid and mutual aid agreements, and emergency response travel times, the City of Watsonville Fire Department is expected to serve as the primary first-response agency in the event of a fire, thermal runaway event, hazardous materials release, or other emergency associated with the facility.

Accordingly, the City of Watsonville requests that the California Energy Commission formally recognize the City as an impacted jurisdiction for purposes of evaluating project impacts, determining net positive economic benefits, developing community benefits commitments, and establishing reimbursement and mitigation requirements associated with project review, construction, operation, emergency response, and eventual decommissioning.

The City further requests that the Commission ensure the project satisfies the requirements of Public Resources Code sections 25545.9 and 25545.10 in a manner that fully accounts for impacts borne by Watsonville residents and municipal services. Any determination that the project provides a net positive economic benefit should include consideration of the direct and indirect costs imposed upon the City, including emergency preparedness, personnel training, equipment acquisition, inspection responsibilities, and long-term public safety obligations.

Likewise, because the City of Watsonville and its residents will experience project-related

impacts and provide critical public services supporting the facility, the City requests participation in the negotiation and development of any Community Benefits Agreement associated with the project. Community benefits should be structured to provide meaningful and measurable benefits to Watsonville residents and should not be limited solely to the jurisdiction in which the project is physically located.

The City further notes that Senate Bill 283 reflects the Legislature's intent that local fire authorities be actively engaged in the planning, design, risk assessment, emergency preparedness, and operational oversight of battery energy storage facilities. The Watsonville Fire Department must therefore be included in all consultations regarding emergency response planning, hazard assessments, emergency action procedures, and ongoing operational safety requirements.

To protect public safety and ensure that project-related costs are not shifted to local taxpayers, the City requests that the Commission require, at a minimum, the following mitigation measures and financial commitments:

- **Equipment and Apparatus Upgrades.** Direct funding for specialized battery energy storage emergency response equipment, including thermal imaging systems, gas monitoring equipment, hazardous materials monitoring devices, communications equipment, and high-capacity water delivery and exposure protection systems.
- **Initial and Ongoing Firefighter Training.** Funding for technician-level and recurring training regarding lithium-ion battery hazards, thermal runaway events, hazardous off-gassing, incident command considerations, and facility-specific emergency response procedures for all applicable personnel throughout the operational life of the project.
- **Plan Review, Inspection, and Compliance Monitoring.** Reimbursement for all staff, consultant, inspection, and administrative costs associated with project review, emergency planning, operational oversight, safety inspections, drills, and regulatory compliance activities.
- **Real-Time Emergency Information Access.** Direct access for emergency responders to facility telemetry, alarm notifications, Battery Management System information, emergency shutdown procedures, site maps, and other information necessary to support rapid and informed emergency response.
- **Binding Cost-Recovery Mechanism.** A legally enforceable agreement requiring full reimbursement of all costs incurred by the City in responding to any incident associated with the facility, including personnel costs, overtime, apparatus deployment, mutual aid expenses, equipment replacement, environmental monitoring, and post-incident recovery activities.
- **Long-Term Public Safety Funding.** Establishment of an ongoing funding mechanism to support recurring training, preparedness exercises, equipment replacement, and emergency readiness throughout the life of the project.
- **Decommissioning and Financial Assurance.** Adequate financial security to ensure that future

decommissioning, site restoration, hazardous material management, and any related public safety costs are borne by the project owner and not by local taxpayers.

In addition to public safety-related commitments, the City requests that any Community Benefits Agreement include meaningful benefits for Watsonville residents. Potential benefits may include workforce development programs, local hiring commitments, educational partnerships, park and recreation improvements, infrastructure investments, environmental enhancement projects, community grant programs, emergency preparedness initiatives, and other investments that provide direct and lasting value to the surrounding community.

The City of Watsonville supports California's clean energy objectives and recognizes the important role that energy storage can play in achieving statewide reliability and climate goals. However, those objectives must be balanced with the responsibility to protect public safety and ensure that local communities and first responders are not required to absorb disproportionate risks or costs associated with state-certified infrastructure projects.


For these reasons, the City respectfully requests that the California Energy Commission formally include Watsonville in all relevant project consultations, Community Benefits Agreement discussions, reimbursement determinations, emergency response planning efforts, and evaluations of net positive economic benefits associated with the Seahawk BESS project.

The City further requests that no final certification of the Seahawk Battery Energy Storage System be issued until all Community Benefits Agreement provisions, public safety mitigation measures, reimbursement mechanisms, emergency response commitments, and financial assurances have been fully negotiated, memorialized in legally enforceable agreements, and made available for public review. Given the City's role as a primary emergency response agency and the direct impacts on Watsonville residents, these commitments are essential to demonstrating compliance with the requirements of Assembly Bill 205 and ensuring that the project provides a genuine net positive benefit to affected communities.

The City respectfully requests that the Commission apply standards that are substantially equivalent to or more protective than the requirements contained in the County's draft battery energy storage ordinance when evaluating and conditioning approval of the project.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Signed by:  
  
5B51A63E6606457  
Watsonville City Council

CC: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors  
Nicole Coburn, Santa Cruz County Executive Officer

