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Comment Received From: Lalainia Moules

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BESS at 90 Minto Road

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to strongly oppose New Leaf Energy of Massachusetts's™ proposed lithium battery energy storage system (BESS) at 90 Minto Road in Watsonville. I also urge the County to reconsider whether large-scale lithium battery storage facilities are appropriate anywhere near residential communities, schools, environmentally sensitive areas, and other vulnerable receptors in Santa Cruz County.

I live within one mile of the proposed site. This is not a remote industrial location. It is situated within an established residential and agricultural community and in close proximity to families, schools, childcare facilities, older adults, people with disabilities, and important natural habitat and waterways.

My concern is straightforward: a large-scale lithium battery facility carrying the potential for fire, thermal runaway, toxic emissions, and emergency response challenges should not be placed this close to homes, children, vulnerable residents, and sensitive environmental resources.

There are alternative battery technologies that should be fully evaluated before Santa Cruz County accepts the risks associated with lithium battery storage in a location such as Minto Road. Alternative battery technologies are already being deployed commercially, including in the United States. The County should not assume that lithium technology is the only viable option when evaluating energy storage projects and their impacts on surrounding communities.

The demographics surrounding 90 Minto Road make the proposed location particularly concerning. According to the community data available to us, within approximately two miles of the proposed site there are:

28,450 Latino residents

2,948 monolingual Spanish-speaking residents

3,010 people living with disabilities

4,221 residents receiving SNAP/food assistance

6,985 children ages 0–14

4,680 residents age 65 and older

12 schools, including PVUSD and private elementary, junior high, and high schools

In addition, 11 childcare centers and two eldercare facilities are located within approximately one mile of the proposed site.

These are not simply statistics. They represent thousands of families, children, seniors, and vulnerable residents whose safety and quality of life must be considered before approving an industrial-scale battery facility.

There are also serious environmental questions that deserve greater scrutiny. The proposed site is near natural habitat, waterways, agricultural land, and residential properties. The County should require a thorough evaluation of what could occur in the event of a battery fire or other emergency, including potential impacts from smoke, airborne contaminants, contaminated firefighting runoff, and impacts to nearby soil, surface water, groundwater, wildlife, and habitat.

The question before the County should not simply be whether a BESS facility can technically be permitted at 90 Minto Road. The question should be whether this technology, at this scale, belongs in this particular location given the people, schools, vulnerable populations, natural resources, and habitat surrounding it.

I support responsible renewable energy and energy storage. However, supporting clean energy does not require our community to accept unnecessary risk or inappropriate industrial siting. Renewable energy projects should be developed responsibly, with appropriate technology, appropriate setbacks, meaningful community participation, and locations that protect both residents and the environment.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to oppose the proposed lithium BESS at 90 Minto Road and require a substantially more protective evaluation of battery chemistry, alternative locations, emergency response capabilities, environmental impacts, and appropriate setbacks before allowing a project of this nature near a residential community.

Thank you for considering the concerns of the families and residents who will live with the consequences of this decision.

Sincerely,

Lalainia Moules
Watsonville Resident