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DOCKET

11-AFC-2

DATE MAR 20 2012

RECD. MAR 20 2012

March 20, 2012

Melissa Mourkas, ASLA, Planner II, Visual & Cultural Resources
California Energy Commission, Siting, Transmission, and Environmental Protection Division
1516 Ninth Street, MS 40
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

Re: Hidden Hills Solar Energy Generating System, Application for Certification (11-AFC-2), Aesthetics and Visual Impacts

Ms. Mourkas,

I have reviewed the available plans for the Hidden Hills Solar Energy Generating System (HHSEGS) project proposed in Charleston View relative to the County's laws, ordinances, and regulations for aesthetics and visual resources. The recommendations outlined below are based on the current information provided by the applicant. I understand that some of the applicant's simulations will be revised to provide a more accurate depiction of the project site and address potential glint and glare issues. The revised simulations may warrant modifications of the County's recommendations so as to adequately address the glint and glare impacts resulting from the project. With those caveats in mind, below are my recommendations for screening and aesthetic mitigation for the project, based on what the County would consider for a project of this magnitude at the location proposed.

Setbacks – the existing Open Space zoning for the site and nearby areas requires a 50-foot setback. Based on my understanding that facilities along the periphery of the power plant site will primarily be limited to mirrors, a 50-foot setback would be appropriate to buffer the project from nearby properties and Old Spanish Trail. Along Old Spanish Trail, the setback should be measured from the future edge of right-of-way, taking into account any additional right-of-way that may be necessary to accommodate the project. Additional setbacks may be appropriate if more intensive uses are proposed along the site periphery, such as in the common area. On the other hand, if the zoning is changed, alternative setbacks may be appropriate. For example, the setbacks in the General Industrial and Extractive (M-1) Zone District are 25 feet for the front yard, 15 feet for the rear yard, and 10 feet for the side yard; these setbacks may be adequate if no sensitive uses are nearby and edge treatments can buffer the site from Old Spanish Trail.

Landscaping – drought tolerant plants should be included within the setback to buffer the power plant from nearby properties and mitigate the change in visual resources as seen from Old Spanish Trail. Parking lots should include landscaped planters with drought-tolerant shade trees. Native plants and stones should be incorporated to the extent possible.

Fencing/wall/berm – I recommend that fencing and walls around the site be designed for security foremost, but include aesthetically pleasing elements if possible. If a decorative wall along Old Spanish Trail meets security requirements, I recommend that one be installed to screen views of the site and glare from the mirrors from vehicles travelling along the road. If the project will result in dangerous glint and glare on passing motorists, a barrier (such as a visually impermeable fence, wall, or berm) eliminating that impact should be required.

Interpretation/entry: visitors to the site and passers-by should be provided an appropriate visual experience while travelling by and/or entering the site. To this end, I recommend that an interpretive area be provided along Old Spanish Trail to educate the travelling public about the power plant and local history, while providing a safe area to stop and admire the development. Attractively designed entryways should also be provided, taking into account traffic safety and access requirements.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact me at (760) 878-0268 or jhart@inyocounty.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joshua Hart", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joshua Hart, AICP
Planning Director

cc: Board of Supervisors
CAO
County Counsel
Sheriff
Public Works
BrightSource Energy