

DOCKETED	
Docket Number:	23-OPT-02
Project Title:	Darden Clean Energy Project
TN #:	262194
Document Title:	Notice of Darden Clean Energy Project Staff Assessment Public Meeting
Description:	March 26, 2025 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Filer:	Lisa Worrall
Organization:	California Energy Commission
Submitter Role:	Commission Staff
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CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

715 P Street
Sacramento, California 95814

energy.ca.gov

CEC-70 (Revised 7/22)



IN THE MATTER OF:

*Darden Clean Energy Project Opt-In
Application for Certification*

DOCKET NO. 23-OPT-02

NOTICE OF STAFF ASSESSMENT PUBLIC
MEETING

RE: Darden Clean Energy Project

**Notice of Darden Clean Energy Project
Staff Assessment Public Meeting**

March 26, 2025

5:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

In-Person and Remote

Includes In-Person Spanish Interpretation

See Attendance Instructions

In-person at:

Harris Ranch Resort
South Ballroom
24505 West Dorris Avenue
Coalinga, California 93210

(Wheelchair Accessible)

Remote Access via Zoom™

The California Energy Commission (CEC) will host a public meeting on the Staff Assessment for the Darden Clean Energy Project, pursuant to Public Resources Code section 25545.7.6. The purpose of the meeting is for CEC staff to present the Staff Assessment, which includes a Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR), and receive comments on the assessment from interested government agencies, California Native American Tribes, the public, and the project applicant.

The Staff Assessment contains the CEC staff's independent, objective evaluation of the proposed project. The Staff Assessment was filed to the docket on February 18, 2025 (TN 261842) and can

be found on the project's docket California Energy Commission : Docket Log at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Lists/DocketLog.aspx?docketnumber=23-OPT-02>

The information obtained from the public meeting discussions and comments will be a part of the record of the proceeding and will be considered in the preparation of the Updated Staff Assessment, which will include a Final EIR.

The public can participate in the meeting consistent with the attendance instructions below. The CEC aims to begin promptly at the start time posted and the end time is an estimate based on the proposed agenda. The meeting may end sooner or later than the posted end time.

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Introductions
3. Introductory remarks from California Native American Tribes, government agencies, and elected officials.
4. Staff presentation on the status of the Darden Opt-in proceeding and purpose of the Staff Assessment Public Meeting
5. CEC staff presentation and discussion of environmental issues presented in the Staff Assessment. The discussion, moderated by CEC staff, will focus on notable topic areas and any requested modifications to the Staff Assessment including mitigation measures. This item will include time for public comments.
6. Adjourn

Breaks will be announced at the beginning of the meeting.

Background

Effective June 30, 2022, Assembly Bill (AB) 205 added sections 25545 to 25545.13 to the Public Resources Code, which expanded the CEC's existing power plant licensing authority by creating the Opt-In Certification Program. This program allows specified clean energy projects to seek consolidated permitting at the CEC until June 30, 2029. These projects include solar photovoltaic electricity generating power plants 50 megawatts (MW) or more, energy storage systems 200 megawatt-hours (MWh) or more, and the electric transmission lines from these facilities to the first point of interconnection (for a complete list of qualifying projects, see Public Resources Code section 25545).

Under this statutory authority, the CEC permit is in lieu of any permit that would normally be required by the local land use authority and most, but not all, state permits. More information about this Opt-in Certification Program can be found at <https://www.energy.ca.gov/programs-and-topics/topics/power-plants/opt-certification-program>.

The Opt-In Certification Program also requires the CEC to be the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and after an application is deemed complete to do the following:

1. Prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).
2. Hold public meetings as close as practicable to the proposed project site.
3. Consult with California Native American Tribes that are culturally and traditionally associated with the geographic area of the proposed site.
4. Certify compliance with requirements for community benefits agreement, project labor agreements, and economic benefits.
5. Determine whether to approve or deny the proposed project at a publicly noticed business meeting within 270 days unless certain extensions apply.

On November 9, 2023, IP Darden I, LLC and Affiliates (applicant) filed an opt-in application for a proposed solar facility, battery energy storage system, and hydrogen facility in western Fresno County, near Cantua Creek. Consistent with Public Resources Code section 25545.4, CEC staff reviewed the application materials within 30 days and on December 11, 2023, the CEC's Executive Director notified the applicant that the application was incomplete, identifying numerous specific instances where information required under California Code of Regulations, title 20, section 1877 was missing. Over the following ten months, the applicant submitted the missing information. On September 19, 2024, staff determined that the supplemental information required to complete the application was acceptable and issued a Determination of Completeness signed by CEC's Executive Director. On September 23, 2024, staff submitted to the State Clearinghouse, mailed to local agencies, and posted a Notice of Preparation of a Draft EIR to the project's docket. As required by California Code of Regulations section 1880, the CEC hosted an Environmental Scoping and Informational Meeting on October 16, 2024, in Coalinga, California. In October 2024, the applicant removed the hydrogen facility from the proposed project and in December 2024, the option 2 location of the substation, battery, and operations & maintenance facility was removed from the proposed project and therefore those portions of the initial application were not considered or reviewed by CEC.

Project Summary

The applicant proposes to construct and operate the Darden Clean Energy Project on approximately 9,500 acres in western Fresno County. The project consists of a 1,150-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) facility, an up to 4,600 megawatt-hour battery energy storage system (BESS), a 34.5-500 kilovolt (kV) grid step-up substation, a 15-mile 500 kV generation intertie (gen-tie) line, and a 500 kV utility switchyard. The project would interconnect to the existing Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) Los Banos-Midway #2 500 kV transmission line. The project would be located in an agricultural area of unincorporated Fresno County south of the community of Cantua Creek.

The solar PV facility would be made up of approximately 3,100,000 solar panels, inverter-transformer stations, and an electrical collection system, and would be located on approximately

9,100 acres of lands currently owned by Westlands Water District that would be purchased by IP Darden. The 500 kV gen-tie line would be sited within an approximate 200-foot-wide easement on private lands. Following the construction of the utility switchyard by IP Darden, ownership and operations of the switchyard would transfer to PG&E. The BESS would be capable of storing up to 1,150 MW of electricity for four hours (up-to 4,600 MWh).

The CEC maintains a website for this project at: <https://www.energy.ca.gov/powerplant/solar-photovoltaic-pv/darden-clean-energy-project>.

Attendance Instructions

In-person participants may join the meeting at Harris Ranch Resort, South Ballroom, 24505 West Dorris Avenue, Coalinga, California 93210. Masks and social distancing are encouraged, but not required.

If participants bring a device to join the meeting via Zoom at the physical location, the system audio must be muted, or the audio should not be joined. This is to avoid disruptive feedback during the meeting. Audio will be provided through an onsite sound system.

Remote participants may join via Zoom by internet or phone.

- **To join via Zoom.** Click on <https://energy.zoom.us/j/89362666803?pwd=PTtUDD4kWISsJJaS6MaokvaXBfQnOg.1> or login in at <https://zoom.us/join> and enter Webinar ID 893 6266 6803 and passcode 776372 and follow all prompts.
- **To join by telephone.** Call toll-free at 1-213-338-8477. When prompted, enter the Webinar ID 893 6266 6803 and passcode 776372.

Zoom Closed Captioning Service. At the bottom of the screen, click the Live Transcript CC icon and choose "Show Subtitle" or "View Full Transcript" from the pop-up menu. To stop closed captioning, close the "Live Transcript" or select "Hide Subtitle" from the pop-up menu. If joining by phone, closed captioning is automatic and cannot be turned off. While closed captioning is available in real-time, it can include errors. A more accurate transcript of the meeting will be docketed and posted as soon as possible after the meeting concludes.

Zoom Spanish Interpreting Services. Open the Zoom meeting. In the "Navigation" panel, click "Settings," then click the "Meeting" tab. Under "In Meeting (Advanced)," click "Language Interpretation" toggle to enable/ disable. If a verification dialog displays, click "Enable" or "Disable" to verify the change. If the option is grayed out, it has been locked, and you will need to contact your Zoom admin. Click "Mute Original Audio" to reduce background noise.

Zoom Difficulty. Contact Zoom at (888) 799-9666 ext. 2, or the CEC Public Advisor at publicadvisor@energy.ca.gov, or by phone at (916) 957-7910.

Public Comments

Oral comments. Oral comments will be accepted at the meeting. Comments may be limited to three minutes or less per speaker and one person per organization. To comment via Zoom, use the “raise hand” feature so the administrator can announce your name and unmute you. Please restate and spell your name for the record, indicate if you have an affiliation, and begin your comments. To comment via telephone, press *9 to “raise your hand” and *6 to mute/unmute. The CEC will announce the last three digits of the phone number listed and open your line. Make sure to unmute your phone before speaking, then restate and spell your name for the record, indicate if you have an affiliation, state your position on the proposed project, if any, and begin your comments.

Written comments. The CEC encourages the use of its electronic commenting system. Visit the e-commenting page for this docket California Energy Commission: e-comment: Submit Comment at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Ecomment/Ecomment.aspx?docketnumber=23-OPT-02>. Enter your contact information and a subject title that describes your comment. Comments may be included in the “Comment Text” box or attached as a downloadable, searchable document in Microsoft® Word or Adobe® Acrobat®. The maximum file size allowed is 10 MB.

Written and oral comments, attachments, and associated contact information (including address, phone number, and email address) will become part of the public record of this proceeding with access available via any internet search engine. Written comments may also be submitted by email. Include docket number 23-OPT-02 and Darden Clean Energy Project in the subject line and email to docket@energy.ca.gov.

A paper copy may be mailed to:
California Energy Commission
Docket Unit, MS-4
Docket No. 23-OPT-02
715 P Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Written comments may be submitted to the Docket Unit through 5:00 p.m. on **April 21, 2025**.

Public Advisor. The CEC’s Public Advisor assists the public with participation in CEC proceedings. To request assistance, interpreting services, or reasonable modifications and accommodations, call (916) 957-7910 or email publicadvisor@energy.ca.gov as soon as possible but at least five days in advance of the meeting. The CEC will work diligently to meet all requests based on availability.

Media Inquiries. Email mediaoffice@energy.ca.gov or call (916) 654-4989.

Technical Subject and General Inquiries. Email Lisa Worrall at STEPsiting@energy.ca.gov or call (916) 661-8367.

Availability of Documents. Documents and presentations for this meeting will be available at California Energy Commission: Docket Log at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Lists/DocketLog.aspx?docketnumber=23-OPT-02>.

When new information is posted, an email will be sent to those subscribed to the Darden Clean Energy Project. To receive these notices or notices on other email subscription topics, visit Subscriptions at <https://www.energy.ca.gov/subscriptions>.

Dated: March 14, 2025, at Sacramento, California.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Huber', followed by a horizontal line.

Elizabeth Huber
Director, Siting, Transmission, and Environmental Protection Division

Subscriptions:
[Darden Clean Energy Project]