

**DOCKETED**

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## **Battery Electric Storage System (BESS) in San Juan Capistrano**

December 31, 2024

By Ed Maurer

We first reported on this project in August 2024 pointing out that local public safety concerns need to be considered as well as the growing urgency of actions to limit the damage caused by climate change. Compass Energy proposed this storage facility to the San Juan City Council, which then refused to allow its Planning Department to undertake the planning process needed to apply. Because Compass Energy was not allowed to process this project at the city level, it decided to opt in to California Energy Commission (AB 205) program for renewable energy.

Since then, the CEC's docket on this issue has logged many letters from residents – many from Laguna Niguel – opposing this project. Compass Energy, the company building this BESS, has submitted additional documents requested by the CEC, and we expect the commission to decide by the end of February 2025 whether to greenlight this project or not. Should there be a go-ahead, public hearings will be held by the CEC allowing proponents and opponents the opportunity to voice their opinions.

The opponents' major concern about an overheated battery leading to a "thermal runaway" is real, but it doesn't recognize that fire management of modern BESS systems has evolved to where any fire can be contained within each battery unit. Moreover, the CEC, CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) as well as insurance underwriters require the operator of any BESS to meet high fire safety standards.

The Sierra Club is of the opinion that "ending fossil fuel use and transitioning to renewable energy across the entire energy system is essential to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Sierra Club's strategy to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy requires that we build a resilient, decarbonized renewable energy system which ensures that communities' needs for energy are being met at all times."<sup>[1]</sup> Properly constructed Battery Electric Storage Systems located in built-up areas and close to existing transmission lines meet the Sierra Club's requirements: the BESS proposed for San Juan Capistrano will be located in or near built-up areas, i.e., close to where electric energy is needed, and it is adjacent to a transmission line that can carry this energy to businesses and homes.

The need for Battery Electric Storage Systems is urgent as they provide electricity after the sun goes down, specially from 5 to 9 PM. California's solar power plants, from rooftops to utility-size installations in the Central Valley and the Mojave Desert, currently produce more energy during daylight hours than is needed, and often it goes to waste. See Melody Petersen's article in the LA Times of November 24. This surplus could be reduced by routing it to BESS where it can be stored, potentially obviating the need for fossil fuel burning "peaker plants."



This move away from such dirty power plants to modern Battery Electric Storage Systems is happening across the country. Duke Energy, a major utility, will soon tear down its Allen Steam Station which used to generate 1,155 megawatts of coal-fired electricity, and install a 50 megawatt/200 megawatt-hour battery, with completion expected by the end of 2025.<sup>[2]</sup> These batteries will be located next to the Catawba River, across which is the Charlotte, NC International Airport.

The Sierra Club will participate in public meetings about the Battery Electric Storage System proposed for San Juan Capistrano to provide non-partisan, fact-based information.

Article available at: <https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/sierra-sage/blog/2024/12/battery-electric-storage-system-bess-san-juan-capistrano>

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<sup>[1]</sup> Policy for Siting of Renewable Energy, Transmission, Storage, and related Infrastructure.

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://cleantechnica.com/2024/12/04/duke-energy-will-replace-a-coal-generating-station-with-battery-storage/>