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Filer:	Elisabeth de Jong
Organization:	California Energy Commission
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Preliminary Proposed Workforce Development Findings and Recommendations for Discussion and Consideration by the Lithium Valley Commission

During the February 24, 2022, workshop on workforce development and in prior workshops and community meetings, the Lithium Valley Commission was provided panel discussions that presented or reflected specific findings, proposed actions, and potential recommendations for the Commission to consider. Additionally, through information provided in the public docket for the Lithium Valley Commission proceeding and through conversations and presentations conducted during prior meetings, speakers and commissioners provided additional information and early draft recommendations on this topic. This topic provides an opportunity for general high-level recommendations as well as more specific, detailed recommendations. In addition, this topic offers the Commission the ability to include short-term and longer term needs and recommendations.

Following are proposed findings and recommendations for commissioner consideration, refinement, and discussion.

Findings:

Reports, studies, and project developer materials have provided general job estimates and descriptions of anticipated workforce needs associated with the addition of lithium extraction at existing geothermal power plants as well as the development of new geothermal facilities with integrated lithium extraction.

The Lithium Valley Commission has consistently received input that additional and more detailed information is needed regarding the types of jobs that will be needed to develop and operate new projects, the skills and training required for these jobs, the anticipated timeframe and demand for specific job types, and the expected longevity of each job type.

We have also learned that the development of a local workforce requires greater, sustained communication among a wide range of stakeholders and ensuring the involvement of local community organizations, labor groups, academic institutions, and public agencies.

We find that it is imperative that projects prioritize development and hiring of a local workforce and provide resources to support the planning and development of necessary training and educational opportunities and commit to requirements for strong workforce and labor standards, including project labor agreements, to create high quality jobs and support state-certified apprenticeship opportunities.

We find that a wide range of employment opportunities are expected to be created by project construction and operation and there will be related downstream and ancillary employment opportunities. These opportunities can benefit Imperial and Coachella Valley communities and the region and state more broadly. However, to realize these local and statewide benefits, initiatives are needed at all academic and vocational levels to effectively support workforce development.

Further, the Lithium Valley Commission finds that access to education and training requires more than creating a supply of classes and training programs but also means enabling participation in these opportunities ensuring equity in access. Supporting the educational advancement of the local community will require childcare services, public transportation, infrastructure improvement that supports safety, investments in technology and a wide range of approaches to the delivery of training and courses, and related services and programs.

Recommendations:

- Implement Road Construction Careers Partnerships, which provides support of services, pre-apprenticeship of training, and demand through partnerships with local employment entities to reach a wider range of potential employees through methods such as: providing childcare services, public transportation, classes, and certifications.
- Organize and develop Community Based Agreements (CBA) and Project Labor Agreements (PLA) in collaboration with industry, labor, community, environmental, and employer groups for the region (including fence line and frontline communities) to create educational pathways, internships, apprenticeships for local residents, and related benefits for the local community. Processes for local input should include:
 - Support formation of a Community Advisory Council using Rise and Ready and High Road frameworks to provide input and guidance on Community Based Agreements.
 - Provide opportunities to connect to broader constituencies in the region to provide input on provisions for wage floors, local procurement, local contracting, labor training and education, childcare, transportation, green building standards, and related benefits for the local community.
- Support industry employer training partnerships that use High Road core principles for training and education, such as supporting and enhancing apprenticeships and other labor-management partnerships, and funding comprehensive training opportunities that prepare workers for good careers.

- Create a requirement for all government assistance that new investment in lithium-related activities require high job quality standards and job access agreements for blue collar (construction and operation and maintenance (O&M)) jobs.
- Support creation of curriculum, courses, and certification programs, utilizing and enhancing local school and college programs for areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to assist in creating career pathways for youth and adults through partnerships with industry.
- Encourage collaboration among industry, academia, and local governments to ensure that skill gaps are identified to be able to build appropriate training programs to support future careers.
- Support for a full service local four-year degree campus to help advance workforce development and prepare for High Road construction jobs.
- Make training available locally for other High Road construction jobs that will come to the area as ancillary opportunities with the growth of the lithium extraction industry in the region.
- Use both High Road and Rise and Ready frameworks to address equity in the region.
- Develop a collaborative and integrative workforce training approach that makes funds available to pay community participants for their training and access to quality laboratories and equipment from industry for the trainings.
- Collaborate with Imperial County, municipalities, local builders, and state governments to develop sustainable and affordable housing initiatives.
- Create meaningful participation of community and labor constituents, where participation is much more than just informing or consulting, but one that builds trust within the community.
- Link workforce development and economic development to create investment in innovation, infrastructure, and collective resources.
- Consider the creation of a sovereign wealth fund that provides local benefits recognizing the long-term economic opportunity of lithium extraction from geothermal brine in Imperial Valley.
- Convene a supporting community-focused group/body to remain involved and offer public platforms for community engagement beyond the AB 1657 October 2022 legislative report due date.