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CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION715 P Street
Sacramento, California 95814energy.ca.gov

CEC-70 (Revised 7/22)



En español:

<https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/GetDocument.aspx?tn=259445&DocumentContentId=95536>*IN THE MATTER OF:**Darden Clean Energy Project Opt-in
Application for Certification*

DOCKET NO. 23-OPT-02

NOTICE OF HYBRID ENVIRONMENTAL
SCOPING and INFORMATIONAL MEETING

RE: DARDEN CLEAN ENERGY PROJECT

**Notice of Environmental
Scoping and Informational Meeting
Wednesday, October 16, 2024**

2:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

In-person at:

**Harris Ranch Resort
South Ballroom
24505 West Dorris Avenue
Coalinga, CA 93210
(Wheelchair Accessible)**

Remote Access via Zoom:

See attendance instructions below.

The California Energy Commission (CEC) will host a meeting pursuant to Public Resources Code section 25545.7.2 to present and solicit information on the proposed Darden Clean Energy Project. This will be a hybrid meeting with both a publicly accessible physical location and public access online or by phone through Zoom™. Members of 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

Please see agenda attached at the end of this notice.

Background

Effective June 30, 2022, Assembly Bill (AB) 205, as modified by AB 209, added sections 25545-25545.13 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, if they adhere to specified labor standards, including the use of a skilled and trained workforce, and enter into community benefits agreement(s), as specified. 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 line from these facilities to the first point of interconnection.

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 law 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. Find that the applicant has entered into one or more legally binding and enforceable agreements with, or that benefit, a coalition of one or more community-based organizations.
5. Find that the construction or operation of the facility will have an overall net positive economic benefit to the local government that would have had permitting authority over the site and related facility, as specified.
6. Determine whether to approve or deny the proposed project at a publicly noticed business meeting within 270 days unless certain extensions apply.

IP Darden I, LLC and Affiliates (applicant) filed an opt-in application on November 9, 2023, for the Darden Clean Energy Project, a solar photovoltaic (PV) facility and battery energy storage system (BESS) proposed in unincorporated Fresno County, California. On December 11, 2023, the CEC deemed the application incomplete and docketed a letter detailing the information deficiencies. On September 19, 2024, after receiving additional data, the CEC staff determined that the application was complete. On September 23, 2024, the CEC staff issued a Notice of Preparation of a draft EIR to analyze the potential environmental impacts of the project. These and other documents are available on the CEC docket for this proceeding at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Lists/DocketLog.aspx?docketnumber=23-OPT-02>.

Project Summary

The Darden Clean Energy Project consists of a 1,150 MW solar PV facility, an up to 4,600 MWh BESS, a 34.5-500 kilovolt (kV) grid step-up substation, a 10- to 15-mile 500 kV generation intertie (gen-tie) line, and a 500 kV utility switching station. The project would interconnect to the existing Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) Los Banos-Midway #2 500 kV transmission line.

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 9,000 acres of lands currently owned by Westlands Water District that would be purchased by the applicant. The 500 kV gen-tie line would be sited within an approximate 200-foot-wide easement on private lands. Following construction of the utility switchyard by the applicant, ownership and operations 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).

Refer to the Project Description at the following website link for more project details: <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/GetDocument.aspx?tn=252985&DocumentContentId=88135>. The CEC maintains a website for this project at: <https://www.energy.ca.gov/powerplant/solar-photovoltaic-pv/darden-clean-energy-project>.

Purpose of the Environmental Scoping and Informational Meeting

The Environmental Scoping and Informational Meeting will provide an opportunity for interested members of the public, including surrounding communities, to learn about the proposed project and the CEC's opt-in certification process. The public will be able to obtain information, identify areas of environmental concern to be addressed during the CEC's environmental review of the project, and provide other comments.

During the meeting, the applicant will explain its proposed plans for constructing and operating the project and related facilities. CEC staff will describe CEC and CEC staff's role and responsibilities in reviewing the opt-in application and engaging with government agencies, the public, and California Native American Tribes to inform this review. The CEC's Public Advisor will describe how interested members of the public can participate in the process, including during environmental review and CEC decision-making.

The meeting also assists CEC staff in obtaining additional information to prepare the draft environmental impact report, determine whether the project meets all program requirements, including benefits to the local government and community, and provide a recommendation as to whether the CEC should ultimately approve or deny the application. Thus far CEC staff has identified potentially significant impacts from the project on: air quality; biological resources; cultural/tribal cultural resources; geology, paleontology and minerals; noise and vibration; socioeconomics; transportation; visual resources; and water resources. The Notice of Preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is available at: <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/GetDocument.aspx?tn=259258&DocumentContentId=95345>. The CEC welcomes public comment at the meeting concerning the project.

Attendance Instructions

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

Remote participants may join via Zoom by internet or phone.

- **To join via Zoom.** Click on <https://energy.zoom.us/j/81000455949?pwd=yXIbklztTKmJiVy2KaD8jTP11IEXNg.9WPirlyArH6PhGQ> or login in at <https://zoom.us/> and enter the Webinar ID **810 0045 5949** and passcode **918894** and follow all prompts.
- **To join by telephone.** Call toll-free at (888) 475-4499 or toll at (669) 219-2599. When prompted, enter the Webinar ID **810 0045 5949** and passcode **918894**.

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 certified transcript of the meeting will be docketed and posted as soon as possible after the meeting concludes.

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.

Spanish Language Interpretation. Spanish language interpretation will be available during the meeting. For any questions about this service, please contact the CEC Public Advisor (see contact information below).

Public Comment

A public comment period will be provided during the meeting. Depending on the number of members of the public seeking to make a comment, the total time allotted for public comment and the time allotted for each comment may be adjusted during the meeting.

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.

If participating via Zoom's online platform, use the "raise hand" feature to indicate you would like to make a comment. The CEC will open your line to speak. Please restate and spell your name for the record, indicate if you have an affiliation, and begin your comments.

If participating by 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.

Additionally, the Public Advisor may upon the request of interested members of the public who are not able to attend, neutrally read their comments into the record during the public comment period. If you are interested in this service, please email concise comments the day before the meeting to the Public Advisor at publicadvisor@energy.ca.gov. Comments submitted the day of the meeting or that cannot be read within a two-minute timeframe will be filed in the Docket referenced below.

Written comments by responsible and trustee agencies in response to the Notice of Preparation of the Draft EIR may be submitted to the Docket Unit by 5:00 p.m. on October 24, 2024. Public comments on this project can be submitted at any time during the proceeding.

The CEC maintains publicly accessible online dockets for its proceedings where public comments, notices, agendas, and other documents are filed and maintained. The docket for the Darden Clean Energy Project, 23-OPT-02, is available at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Lists/DocketLog.aspx?docketnumber=23-OPT-02>.

The CEC encourages use of its quick and easy e-commenting site where anyone can “Add Comment” to a docket. Comments may be entered into a “Comment Text” box or attached as a document. Any attachments must be downloadable, searchable, maximum size of 10 MB, and in compliance with California Code of Regulations, Title 20, section 1208.1. Visit the e-commenting page for the docket associated with this event at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Login.aspx?perms=1&returnurl=http%3a%2f%2fefiling.energy.ca.gov%2fdefault.aspx>.

Comment by Email or Regular Mail: To request your comment be docketed by CEC staff, email your comment to docket@energy.ca.gov and include docket number 23-OPT-02 and “Environmental Scoping and Informational Meeting” in the subject line, or send a paper copy of your comment to California Energy Commission, Docket Unit MS-4, Docket No. 23-OPT-02, 715 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814.

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 CEC Project Manager, Ann Crisp at STEPsiting@energy.ca.gov. Please include “Darden Clean Energy Project” in the subject line. Alternatively, Ann Crisp can be reached at (916) 352-0543.

Availability of Documents: All documents filed in this proceeding, including a full and formal transcript of the Environmental Scoping and Informational Meeting rendered by a professional

court reporter, will be posted in the docket for the proceeding. Please visit the following pages for more information:

- The CEC's web page on the proposed project at <https://www.energy.ca.gov/powerplant/solar-photovoltaic-pv/darden-clean-energy-project>.
- The "Docket Log (23-OPT-02)" link on the Darden Clean Energy Project's web page at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Lists/DocketLog.aspx?docketnumber=23-OPT-02>. Documents and presentations for this meeting will be available at the above link.
- When new information is posted, an email will be sent to those subscribed to the Darden Clean Energy Project subscription topic. Enter your email under "Subscribe Darden Clean Energy Project" on the Darden Clean Energy Project webpage <https://www.energy.ca.gov/powerplant/solar-photovoltaic-pv/darden-clean-energy-project> to subscribe. To receive notices on this and other email subscription topics, visit Subscriptions, at <https://www.energy.ca.gov/subscriptions>.

Dated: October 4, 2024, at Sacramento, California.

Elizabeth Huber
Director—Siting, Transmission & Environmental Protection Division

Subscriptions:
Darden Clean Energy Project

AGENDA

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

Environmental Scoping and Informational Meeting

Darden Clean Energy Project (23-OPT-02)

The meeting begins at 2:00 p.m. and will conclude at 6:30 p.m.

All start and end times are estimates

1. Welcome
2. Presentation by CEC staff on the opt-in certification process
3. Presentation by the CEC Office of the Public Advisor, Energy Equity, and Tribal Affairs on public and tribal participation opportunities
4. Initial Comment Period to accommodate participants who will not be able to stay the duration of the event for the closing comment period
5. Presentation by the applicant on the project as currently proposed, including information on project features which address mandatory requirements of the opt-in certification process (e.g., labor agreements/prevaling wage, economic benefits, community benefits)
6. CEC staff presentation on analysis and issues identified
- (Break)
7. Comments from California Native American Tribes, responsible and trustee agencies, elected officials, other government agencies
- (Break)
8. Comments from interested members of the public, neighboring communities, and other individuals and entities
9. Adjourn