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Darden Clean Energy Project 23-OPT-02

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

October 24, 2024

Ann Crisp
California Energy Commission
715 P. Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Project: Notice of Preparation for a Draft Environmental Impact Report to the Darden Clean Energy Project (23-OPT-02)

District CEQA Reference No: 20241126

Dear Ms. Crisp:

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (District) has reviewed the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) from the California Energy Commission (CEC) for the Darden Clean Energy project. Per the CEC, the project consists of a 1,150-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) facility, up to a 4,600 megawatt-hour (MWh) battery energy storage system (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 (Project). The Project would interconnect to the existing Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) Los Banos-Midway #2 500 kV transmission line. The Project spans approximately 9,100 acres in unincorporated Fresno County, south of the Cantua Creek community, between South Sonoma Avenue to the west and South Butte Avenue to the east.

1) Project Related Emissions

At the federal level under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), the District is designated as extreme nonattainment for the 8-hour ozone standards and serious nonattainment for the particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in size (PM_{2.5}) standards. At the state level under California Ambient Air Quality Standards (CAAQS), the District is designated as nonattainment for the 8-hour ozone, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5} standards.

The District's initial review of the Project concludes that emissions resulting from construction and/or operation of the Project may exceed any of the following significance thresholds as identified in the District's Guidance for Assessing and Mitigating Air Quality Impacts: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/media/g4nl3p0g/gamaqi.pdf>.

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The District recommends that a more detailed preliminary review of the Project be conducted for the Project's construction and operational emissions.

1a) Construction Emissions

The District recommends, to reduce impacts from construction-related diesel exhaust emissions, the Project should utilize the cleanest available off-road construction equipment.

1b) Operational Emissions

Operational (ongoing) air emissions from mobile sources and stationary sources should be analyzed separately. For reference, the District's significance thresholds are identified in the District's Guidance for Assessing and Mitigating Air Quality Impacts:

<https://ww2.valleyair.org/media/g4nl3p0g/gamaqi.pdf>.

Recommended Mitigation Measure: At a minimum, project related impacts on air quality should be reduced to levels below the District's significance thresholds through incorporation of design elements such as the use of cleaner Heavy Heavy-Duty (HHD) trucks and vehicles, measures that reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMTs), and measures that increase energy efficiency. More information on transportation mitigation measures can be found at: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/media/ob0pweru/clean-air-measures.pdf>

1c) Recommended Model for Quantifying Air Emissions

Project-related criteria pollutant emissions from construction and operational sources should be identified and quantified. Emissions analysis should be performed using the California Emission Estimator Model (CalEEMod), which uses the most recent CARB-approved version of relevant emissions models and emission factors. CalEEMod is available to the public and can be downloaded from the CalEEMod website at: www.caleemod.com.

2) Health Risk Screening/Assessment

The CEC should evaluate the risk associated with the Project for sensitive receptors (residences, businesses, hospitals, day-care facilities, health care facilities, etc.) in the area and mitigate any potentially significant risk to help limit exposure of sensitive receptors to emissions.

To determine potential health impacts on surrounding receptors (residences, businesses, hospitals, day-care facilities, health care facilities, etc.) a Prioritization and/or a Health Risk Assessment (HRA) should be performed for the Project. These health risk determinations should quantify and characterize potential Toxic Air

Contaminants (TACs) identified by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment/California Air Resources Board (OEHHA/CARB) that pose a present or potential hazard to human health.

Health risk analyses should include all potential air emissions from the project, which include emissions from construction of the project, including multi-year construction, as well as ongoing operational activities of the project. Note, two common sources of TACs can be attributed to diesel exhaust emitted from heavy-duty off-road earth moving equipment during construction, and from ongoing operation of heavy-duty on-road trucks.

Prioritization (Screening Health Risk Assessment):

A "Prioritization" is the recommended method for a conservative screening-level health risk assessment. The Prioritization should be performed using the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association's (CAPCOA) methodology. Please contact the District for assistance with performing a Prioritization analysis.

The District recommends that a more refined analysis, in the form of an HRA, be performed for any project resulting in a Prioritization score of 10 or greater. This is because the prioritization results are a conservative health risk representation, while the detailed HRA provides a more accurate health risk evaluation.

Health Risk Assessment:

Prior to performing an HRA, it is strongly recommended that land use agencies/project proponents develop and submit for District review a health risk modeling protocol that outlines the sources and methodologies that will be used to perform the HRA.

A development project would be considered to have a potentially significant health risk if the HRA demonstrates that the health impacts would exceed the District's established risk thresholds, which can be found here:
<https://ww2.valleyair.org/permitting/ceqa/>.

A project with a significant health risk would trigger all feasible mitigation measures. The District strongly recommends that development projects that result in a significant health risk not be approved by the land use agency.

The District is available to review HRA protocols and analyses. For HRA submittals please provide the following information electronically to the District for review:

- HRA (AERMOD) modeling files
- HARP2 files
- Summary of emissions source locations, emissions rates, and emission factor calculations and methodologies.

For assistance, please contact the District's Technical Services Department by:

- E-Mailing inquiries to: hramodeler@valleyair.org
- Calling (559) 230-5900

Recommended Measure: Development projects resulting in TAC emissions should be located an adequate distance from residential areas and other sensitive receptors to prevent the creation of a significant health risk in accordance to CARB's Air Quality and Land Use Handbook: A Community Health Perspective located at <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/resource-center/strategy-development/land-use-resources>.

3) Ambient Air Quality Analysis

An Ambient Air Quality Analysis (AAQA) uses air dispersion modeling to determine if emissions increases from a project will cause or contribute to a violation of State or National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The District recommends an AAQA be performed for the Project if emissions exceed 100 pounds per day of any pollutant.

An AAQA uses air dispersion modeling to determine if emission increase from a project will cause or contribute to a violation of State or National Ambient Air Quality Standards. An acceptable analysis would include emissions from both project-specific permitted and non-permitted equipment and activities. The District recommends consultation with District staff to determine the appropriate model and input data to use in the analysis.

Specific information for assessing significance, including screening tools and modeling guidance, is available online at the District's website: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/permitting/ceqa/>.

4) Voluntary Emission Reduction Agreement

Per the NOP the applicant has proposed various mitigation measures to reduce the severity of air quality impacts, including a Voluntary Emission Reduction Agreement (VERA). Since, criteria pollutant emissions may result in emissions exceeding the District's significance thresholds, potentially resulting in a significant impact on air quality. The District recommends the DEIR include a discussion on the feasibility of implementing a VERA for this Project.

A VERA is a mitigation measure by which the project proponent provides pound-for-pound mitigation of emissions increases through a process that develops, funds, and implements emission reduction projects, with the District serving a role of administrator of the emissions reduction projects and verifier of the successful mitigation effort. To implement a VERA, the project proponent and the District enter into a contractual agreement in which the project proponent agrees to mitigate

project specific emissions by providing funds for the District's incentives programs. The funds are disbursed by the District in the form of grants for projects that achieve emission reductions. Thus, project-related impacts on air quality can be mitigated. Types of emission reduction projects that have been funded in the past include electrification of stationary internal combustion engines (such as agricultural irrigation pumps), replacing old heavy-duty trucks with new, cleaner, more efficient heavy-duty trucks, and replacement of agricultural equipment with the latest generation technologies.

In implementing a VERA, the District verifies the actual emission reductions that have been achieved as a result of completed grant contracts, monitors the emission reduction projects, and ensures the enforceability of achieved reductions. After the project is mitigated, the District certifies to the Lead Agency that the mitigation is completed, providing the Lead Agency with an enforceable mitigation measure demonstrating that project-related emissions have been mitigated. To assist the Lead Agency and project proponent in ensuring that the environmental document is compliant with CEQA, the District recommends the environmental document includes an assessment of the feasibility of implementing a VERA.

5) Truck Routing

Truck routing involves the assessment of which roads Heavy Heavy-Duty (HHD) trucks take to and from their destination, and the emissions impact that the HHD trucks may have on residential communities and sensitive receptors.

Since the Project may result in HHD trucks trips from hauling construction material and equipment to and from the facility, the District recommends the CEC evaluate HHD truck routing patterns for the Project, with the aim of limiting exposure of residential communities and sensitive receptors to emissions. This evaluation would consider the current truck routes, the quantity and type of each truck (e.g., Medium Heavy-Duty, HHD, etc.), the destination and origin of each trip, traffic volume correlation with the time of day or the day of the week, overall Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), and associated exhaust emissions. The truck routing evaluation would also identify alternative truck routes and their impacts on VMT and air quality.

6) Reduce Idling of Heavy-Duty Trucks

The goal of this strategy is to limit the potential for localized PM_{2.5} and toxic air contaminant impacts associated with the idling of Heavy-Duty trucks. The diesel exhaust from idling has the potential to impose significant adverse health and environmental impacts.

Since the Project may result in HHD truck trips, the District recommends the DEIR include measures to ensure compliance of the state anti-idling regulation (13 CCR §

2485 and 13 CCR § 2480) and discuss the importance of limiting the amount of idling, especially near sensitive receptors.

7) District Rules and Regulations

The District issues permits for many types of air pollution sources, and regulates some activities that do not require permits. A project subject to District rules and regulations would reduce its impacts on air quality through compliance with the District's regulatory framework. In general, a regulation is a collection of individual rules, each of which deals with a specific topic. As an example, Regulation II (Permits) includes District Rule 2010 (Permits Required), Rule 2201 (New and Modified Stationary Source Review), Rule 2520 (Federally Mandated Operating Permits), and several other rules pertaining to District permitting requirements and processes.

The list of rules below is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Current District rules can be found online at: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/rules-and-planning/current-district-rules-and-regulations>. To identify other District rules or regulations that apply to future projects, or to obtain information about District permit requirements, the project proponents are strongly encouraged to contact the District's Small Business Assistance (SBA) Office at (559) 230-5888.

7a) District Rules 2010 and 2201 - Air Quality Permitting for Stationary Sources

Stationary Source emissions include any building, structure, facility, or installation which emits or may emit any affected pollutant directly or as a fugitive emission. District Rule 2010 (Permits Required) requires operators of emission sources to obtain an Authority to Construct (ATC) and Permit to Operate (PTO) from the District. District Rule 2201 (New and Modified Stationary Source Review) requires that new and modified stationary sources of emissions mitigate their emissions using Best Available Control Technology (BACT).

Since the Project will include twelve (12) emergency backup diesel generators, this Project will be subject to District Rule 2010 (Permits Required) and Rule 2201 (New and Modified Stationary Source Review) and will require District permits. Prior to construction, the Project proponent should submit to the District an application for an ATC. Currently for this Project, the District received an ATC application. For further information or assistance, the project proponent may contact the District's SBA Office at (559) 230-5888.

7b) District Rule 9510 - Indirect Source Review (ISR)

The Project is subject to District Rule 9510 because it will receive a project-level discretionary approval from a public agency and will equal or exceed 9,000 square feet of space.

The purpose of District Rule 9510 is to reduce the growth in both NO_x and PM emissions associated with development and transportation projects from mobile and area sources; specifically, the emissions associated with the construction and subsequent operation of development projects. The ISR Rule requires developers to mitigate their NO_x and PM emissions by incorporating clean air design elements into their projects. Should the proposed development project clean air design elements be insufficient to meet the required emission reductions, developers must pay a fee that ultimately funds incentive projects to achieve off-site emissions reductions.

Per Section 5.0 of the ISR Rule, an Air Impact Assessment (AIA) application is required to be submitted no later than applying for project-level approval from a public agency. As of the date of this letter, the District has not received an AIA application for this Project. Please immediately submit an AIA application to the District to comply with District Rule 9510 so that proper mitigation and clean air design under ISR can be incorporated into the Project's design. One AIA application should be submitted for the entire Project.

Information about how to comply with District Rule 9510 can be found online at: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/permitting/indirect-source-review-rule-overview>

The AIA application form can be found online at: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/permitting/indirect-source-review-rule-overview/forms-and-applications/>

District staff is available to provide assistance and can be reached by phone at (559) 230-5900 or by email at ISR@valleyair.org.

7c) District Rule 4002 (National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants)

In the event an existing building will be renovated, partially demolished or removed, the Project may be subject to District Rule 4002. This rule requires a thorough inspection for asbestos to be conducted before any regulated facility is demolished or renovated. Information on how to comply with District Rule 4002 can be found online at: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/compliance/demolition-renovation/>

7d) District Rule 4601 (Architectural Coatings)

The Project may be subject to District Rule 4601 since it may utilize architectural coatings. Architectural coatings are paints, varnishes, sealers, or stains that are applied to structures, portable buildings, pavements or curbs. The purpose of this rule is to limit VOC emissions from architectural coatings. In addition, this rule specifies architectural coatings storage, cleanup and labeling requirements. Additional information on how to comply with District Rule 4601 requirements can be found online at:
<https://ww2.valleyair.org/media/tkgjeusd/rule-4601.pdf>

7e) District Regulation VIII (Fugitive PM10 Prohibitions)

The project proponent may be required to submit a Construction Notification Form or submit and receive approval of a Dust Control Plan prior to commencing any earthmoving activities as described in Regulation VIII, specifically Rule 8021 – *Construction, Demolition, Excavation, Extraction, and Other Earthmoving Activities*.

Should the project result in at least 1-acre in size, the project proponent shall provide written notification to the District at least 48 hours prior to the project proponents intent to commence any earthmoving activities pursuant to District Rule 8021 (Construction, Demolition, Excavation, Extraction, and Other Earthmoving Activities). Also, should the project result in the disturbance of 5-acres or more, or will include moving, depositing, or relocating more than 2,500 cubic yards per day of bulk materials, the project proponent shall submit to the District a Dust Control Plan pursuant to District Rule 8021 (Construction, Demolition, Excavation, Extraction, and Other Earthmoving Activities). For additional information regarding the written notification or Dust Control Plan requirements, please contact District Compliance staff at (559) 230-5950.

The application for both the Construction Notification and Dust Control Plan can be found online at: <https://ww2.valleyair.org/media/fm3jrbsq/dcp-form.docx>

Information about District Regulation VIII can be found online at:
<https://ww2.valleyair.org/dustcontrol>

7f) Other District Rules and Regulations

The Project may also be subject to the following District rules: Rule 4102 (Nuisance) and Rule 4641 (Cutback, Slow Cure, and Emulsified Asphalt, Paving and Maintenance Operations).

8) **District Comment Letter**

The District recommends that a copy of the District's comments be provided to the Project proponent.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact Michael Corder by e-mail at Michael.Corder@valleyair.org or by phone at (559) 230-5818.

Sincerely,

Tom Jordan
Director of Policy and Government Affairs



For: Mark Montelongo
Program Manager