

## Dominic J. Sisneros

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**From:** Abigail Feldman <abigail.f.feldman@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 26, 2024 3:33 PM  
**To:** Dominic J. Sisneros  
**Subject:** IN FAVOR of the AES - Rancho Viejo Solar Project

### Warning:

**EXTERNAL EMAIL:** Do not click any links or open any attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello Mr. Sisneros,

I grew up in Santa Fe, moved away for twenty years and am thrilled to be back in my hometown for the last 8 years. As a practicing landscape architect in town and throughout all of New Mexico, into Texas and Colorado, I get very frustrated with the level of short-sighted NIMBYism in Santa Fe around new development....especially when we are presented with an enormous opportunity to help us make leaps towards clean energy independence with a project such as this solar field. **Please bring this project to our community!** Most of the fears of nearby residents have been addressed by AES, and we have a lot to gain from this project as listed below.

- Job Creation: 200+ jobs expected to be created during peak construction. \$28 million in labor and wages; \$5 million in new wages/material in Santa Fe County; \$18 million in New Mexico manufacturing output
- Tax Revenue: Estimated \$10+ million in tax revenue for Santa Fe County over the life of the project
- Clean Energy Produced: Provides enough clean energy to PNM customers to power 37,000 New Mexican homes annually.
- Environmental Tests Passed: 8 environmental, biological, and aquatic tests completed over the last two years on the site.
- Clean Energy Goals: Directly supports New Mexico's clean energy goal of 50% renewable by 2030, and 100% renewable by 2045.

I would also recommend The County consider working with companies like AES who want to invest in New Mexico to ask that they provide small scale educational projects where locals can come and learn about solar and how it can be done well, taking environmental impacts into consideration from native plant regeneration to stormwater runoff. A small up front investment in educating the public could really go a long way to building good will for projects like this in the future. Below is a link to a wonderful project in Buffalo that does just this.

<https://www.hooddesignstudio.com/solarstrand>

Thank you for your consideration of my thoughts.

Regards,  
Abby Feldman

## Dominic J. Sisneros

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**From:** Andrew Rodney <andrewrodney@mac.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 21, 2024 10:33 AM  
**To:** Jordan A. Yutzky; Dominic J. Sisneros  
**Subject:** I support the Rancho Viejo Solar project

### Warning:

**EXTERNAL EMAIL:** Do not click any links or open any attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

This is a copy of an email sent today to Hank Hughes, Commissioner of District 5.

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Andrew Rodney <andrewrodney@mac.com>  
**Subject:** I support the AES solar project  
**Date:** November 21, 2024 at 9:49:41 AM MST  
**To:** hhughes@santafecountynm.gov

Dear Mr. Hughes,

I wanted to take a moment to express my support for the proposed AES solar facility near my home in Eldorado. My wife and I have lived here for 30 years, and we believe this project is a clean and safe way to generate renewable energy.

However, we are concerned about the misinformation being spread by a local organization that is trying to scare our neighbors. At one point last year, they posted that there would be 1 million batteries on-site, which is simply untrue. They have also claimed that the facility will have no one on-site, which is not accurate either. Additionally, they have stated that the noise level will be similar to a typical street in a major metropolitan city, which is patently false.

As someone who has invested in two solar systems for my net-zero home and last year sent 3.3 MWh of cleanly generated electricity back to the grid, I implore you to consider the significant positive impact that this facility will have on our community and the planet. The AES solar facility will not only provide clean and safe renewable energy but also contribute to reducing carbon emissions, a crucial step in combating climate change.

We are grateful for your service and for taking the time to read this request. We greatly appreciate your consideration of our support for the AES solar facility.

Andrew & Karen Rodney

## Dominic J. Sisneros

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**From:** Chris O <mudrockempire@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 26, 2024 5:57 PM  
**To:** Dominic J. Sisneros  
**Subject:** I Support the AES / Rancho Viejo Solar Project

WARNING:

EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open any attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Mr. Sisneros,

I am writing this November 26th evening in support of the AES /Rancho Viejo Solar Project.

Our state provides 300 days of sunshine per year and I feel it is important to harness this energy. By leaning into this project I feel like it will modernize our local communities and create many opportunities for employment and work experience. The area proposed is far enough way from important historical landmarks which I like also.

Feel free to reach me anytime.

Best Regards,  
Christopher J Ortega  
505.231.6707

Sent from my iPhone

## Dominic J. Sisneros

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**From:** Cliff Walker <hondurascliff@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 25, 2024 2:30 PM  
**To:** Jordan A. Yutzy; Dominic J. Sisneros  
**Subject:** Letter of support for Rancho Viejo Solar

### Warning:

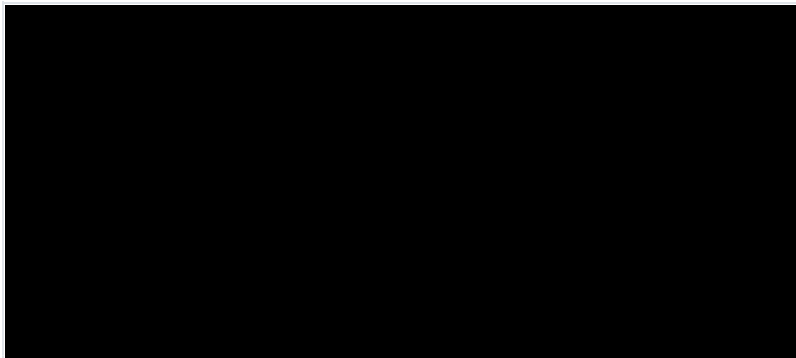
**EXTERNAL EMAIL:** Do not click any links or open any attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Dominic Sisneros and Jordan Yutzy,

As a native born and 30 year resident of Santa Fe County, I support the Rancho Viejo Solar project.

As a civil engineer, this project should be approved based on the sound science and engineering practices presented by the developer.

It should not be rejected based on the politically motivated opposition organized by Citizens for Responsible Solar, a Washington DC based anti solar power group, who are misleading local residents of the benefits this project will bring to our area. [An activist group is spreading misinformation to stop solar projects in rural America](#)



#### **An activist group is spreading misinformation to stop solar projects in ...**

An NPR/Floodlight investigation found that a longtime Republican insider is stoking solar opposition by spreadin...

The project will bring many benefits to Santa Fe County such as:

- The lowest cost electricity generation ensuring affordable electricity for all residents, particularly residents who cannot afford the capital cost of rooftop solar.
- Emission free form of electricity generation.
- Electricity generation located near its use rather than incurring losses by long distance electricity transmission and straining a distribution grid near its capacity.

- Battery backup ensuring reliable electrical supply and peak load electricity supply.
- A form of electricity generation that does not require water, crucial for our arid area.
- Economic activity, particularly well paying technical jobs for retaining and employing young residents.

I see the main concern from local residents are visual impact and structural fire concerns. As with any construction project, the developer has provided the following mitigations, among others:

- Low profile solar panel and racking system to conserve our landscape.
- Exceeded mandated setbacks from other private property.
- Electrical and battery management systems to isolate any electrical circuits before an electrical fault is created.
- Fire containment and suppression systems to quickly contain and extinguish any forms of heat or fire.
- A large water storage tank to aid fire suppression and aid fire fighters to contain approaching wild land fires or structural fires.

I urge the county to approve this project for the benefit of all Santa Fe County and New Mexico Residents.

Sincerely,

Cliff Walker  
Professional Engineer, Civil Water Resources  
704 Luna Vista  
Santa Fe, NM 87506

## Dominic J. Sisneros

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**From:** Jan Stanley <jan.stanley8877@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 27, 2024 7:20 AM  
**To:** Dominic J. Sisneros  
**Subject:** AES / Rancho Viejo Solar Project.

### Warning:

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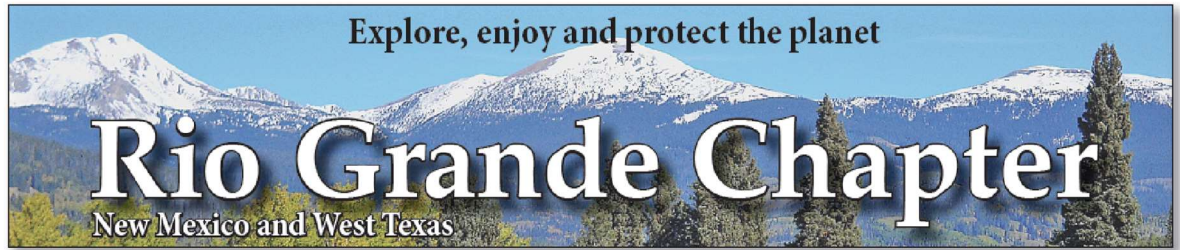
Greetings Mr Cisneros,

I'm writing to voice my support for the Rancho Viejo Solar Project. Probably you have already seen the following bullet points in support of this project, however, I'm including them as I believe they are accurate reasons to support this action to help save our human habitat.

- job Creation: 200+ jobs expected to be created during peak construction. \$28 million in labor and wages; \$5 million in new wages/material in Santa Fe County; \$18 million in New Mexico manufacturing output
- Tax Revenue: Estimated \$10+ million in tax revenue for Santa Fe County over the life of the project
- Clean Energy Produced: Provides enough clean energy to PNM customers to power 37,000 New Mexican homes annually.
- Environmental Tests Passed: 8 environmental, biological, and aquatic tests completed over the last two years on the site.
- Clean Energy Goals: Directly supports New Mexico's clean energy goal of 50% renewable by 2030, and 100% renewable by 2045.

Thanks for considering this proposal,

Jan Stanley  
1 Tano Escondido  
Santa Fe, NM 87506  
(505) 501-2115



1807 2nd St. #45, Santa Fe, NM 87505 [www.riograndesierraclub.org](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org)

To: Santa Fe County Commissioners

From: John Buchser, Chair, Northern Group Sierra Club

Date: September 11, 2023

Re: Solar Farm is Ripe for Santa Fe

Commissioner,

The Sierra Club supports the AES solar/storage project, but we are aware of concerns that some residents have about the potential for fire from the lithium-ion batteries. To that point, we want to bring to your attention to three other solar/storage facilities in Northern New Mexico.

The first is a facility up in Hyde Memorial State Park installed by Positive Energy Solar. This facility is comprised of a 200 panel, 80 kilowatt PV system with 22 lithium-ion batteries for storage. Positive Energy Solar is confident that the building that houses the batteries can contain any fire that might occur within the building due to multiple built-in safeguards, as well as protect the batteries from any external fire, especially given the onsite building setbacks. This is important because this facility is in a heavily wooded area. Granted this project is considerably smaller than the proposed AES project, but this technology is scalable. In addition, given its size, AES would probably choose a slightly different technology that would incorporate even more safeguards and redundancies in preventing the start or spread of any fire. (Reference: John Brown, Positive Energy Solar, 505 424-1112, [johnbrown@PositiveEnergySolar.com](mailto:johnbrown@PositiveEnergySolar.com))

The other 2 are solar/storage facilities that are part of the Kit Carson Electric Coop system. One in Taos entails 12.5 MW of lithium-ion battery storage that has been in operation for one year. The other in Angel Fire entails 3.5 MW of lithium-ion battery storage and it has been in operation for 3-4 months. No fires have occurred at either facility. The safety features incorporated into these battery storage facilities are robust. First, 3 independent entities are monitoring these batteries in real time, 24/7. Second, the storage facilities have sophisticated control systems built in with automatic features that could shut down the battery(ies) under set parameters, with manual overrides as well. Third, the batteries are compartmentalized in steel containers (think shipping containers) to isolate and contain any fire that might start. These containers also have generous setbacks from vegetation and property boundaries. Furthermore, Kit Carson has coordinated with and conducted training with all fire departments in these areas. Finally, Kit Carson has a total of 15 MW more of battery storage on the



drawing board for 3 other sites. Kit Carson would not be moving forward with additional battery storage if they did not feel comfortable and confident in the safety of these facilities. (Reference: Luis Reyes, Kit Carson Electric Coop, 575 741-0213, [lreyes@kitcarson.com](mailto:lreyes@kitcarson.com))

I submitted the above comments to Jose Larranaga of the Land Use Department for addition to the case file.

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I sent the following to the Land Use Department in early June, and my emails from comcast to the Commissioners bounced. I reported this problem to Emma Felt, and she was having the IT department look into it. In the meantime, I will use my less-frequently monitored gmail account to send this correspondence.

Jose Larranaga indicated that the below comments would be added to the case file.

The New Mexican printed this on a Sunday shortly after I submitted.

### **Solar Farm is Ripe for Santa Fe**

Rancho Viejo has proposed an 800-acre facility on private land bordered by Eldorado and Rancho San Marcos. It is 1.5 miles from any homes, and includes 96 megawatts of solar panels and 48 MW of battery storage. Rancho Viejo has partnered with AES Corporation to pursue permitting from Santa Fe County.

This development is close to existing PNM power lines, and hopefully PNM won't drag their feet on the needed interconnect. Solar collectors on this scale are a good option for Santa Fe, where the wind is not as persistent as on the eastern plains of New Mexico. The connection to nearby high voltage power lines would minimize transmission losses.

Santa Fe County, which has limited staff with the appropriate expertise to evaluate a large solar/storage project, has hired Terracon Consultants of Albuquerque to provide input to the County Planning Commission.

One of the most common problems with lithium-ion battery storage is overheating. This was a common problem in laptops not many years ago, and it continues to be a problem with large energy storage systems. Continued advances in battery design are reducing the risk, but an explosion and fire from one battery can damage other batteries, and result in fire that requires special retardants. As was discovered at Cannon Air Force Base recently, fire control chemicals can severely damage groundwater. AES selection of fire retardants needs to include automated protection systems that avoid problematic chemical retardants. Experience by Kit Carson Electric in addressing any potential fires at two solar sites in Taos County should also be tapped.

The grasslands and pinon-juniper forest at this elevation are frequently very dry, and thus any automated systems and fire isolation strategies may not always be sufficient on a windy day. The county needs to be assured that it has the capacity and resources to quickly control escaped fires. AES could have appropriate on-site control chemicals for use by County firefighters. No on-site water is

planned, so the County needs to assess a worst-case need for water to prevent fire spread outside the facility.

We support this proposal's inclusion of storage at the solar facility, as we need night-time renewable energy in addition to daytime solar. Should it be approved, it will join even larger solar projects proposed for sites in Bernalillo County and San Juan County. All together they point to a future where renewable energy can be counted on for a majority of our electricity needs in New Mexico.

Thanks,

John Buchser

Chair, Northern Group, Rio Grande Chapter, Sierra Club

[jbuchser@comcast.net](mailto:jbuchser@comcast.net) or

[jbuchser505@gmail.com](mailto:jbuchser505@gmail.com)

505 231 6645 cell

Jose Larranaga,

Yesterday, I was reading an article on the NPR website about a national organization, called Citizens for Responsible Solar, that is spearheading efforts by local faux-grassroots organizations to stop solar projects[\*]. And then, almost as if on cue, today I read a letter to the editor in the New Mexican about stopping the Rancho Viejo Solar Project for reasons that are not entirely clear (only that it is in an "inappropriate location", even though that location appears to be on private land). Readers of this letter are invited to submit our "thoughts" to you on this topic. My thoughts are: we need all the non-fossil energy we can get, and I think you should support this project. Talk of further "regulatory review" and "strategic planning" sounds like delaying tactics to me, bullet points provided by a national organization that is working to impede all manner of rural solar development.

Best regards,

James Theiler

5B Angelitos Rd

Santa Fe, NM

[\*] "An activist group is spreading misinformation to stop solar projects in rural America" (<https://www.npr.org/2023/02/18/1154867064/solar-power-misinformation-activists-rural-america>)

I am an Eldorado at Santa Fe resident and I support the AES solar project. This is the type of infrastructure we need if we are to have any chance of weaning ourselves from fossil fuels. Yes to the project--even in my backyard!

Sincerely,

Ronald Schell

--

Ronald Schell

10 Prima Vista Road

Santa Fe, NM 87508

(608) 233-1973

[www.sfsustainablebusiness.com](http://www.sfsustainablebusiness.com) 505.501.0222 418 Cerrillos Rd., Santa Fe, NM 87501

April 10, 2023

Dear Board of County Commissioners,

I am writing to advocate for the proposed Rancho Viejo solar project in our community. This project has the potential to provide clean, renewable energy to power not just our community but all of New Mexico while creating numerous high-paying jobs in our area.

Utility-scale solar and storage projects combine solar panels with battery storage systems to capture and store clean energy for use when the sun is not shining. These projects have become increasingly necessary throughout the country in recent years because they provide reliable, 24/7 clean power **without** using fossil fuels.

The project's construction would require skilled workers such as electricians, engineers, technicians and installers who are in high demand and earn well above-average wages. Once the project's construction is completed, ongoing maintenance and monitoring jobs will be created to ensure the system runs smoothly, offering competitive salaries.

Additionally, allowing the Rancho Viejo project would help our community move toward a more sustainable future, which is essential in today's world. Reducing our reliance on fossil fuels reduces our carbon emissions and contributes to a healthier planet for future generations. Please consider approving the proposed Rancho Viejo solar project in our community. This project has will boost job creation, our economy, provide new tax revenue and, most importantly, deliver the clean energy to build a more sustainable energy future. We don't have time to do anything but everything we can do.

Sincerely,

Glenn Schiffbauer

Executive Director

505.501.0222

[glenschiffbauer@gmail.com](mailto:glenschiffbauer@gmail.com)

Dear Mr. Larranga:

I am an Eldorado at Santa Fe resident and I support the AES solar project. This is the type of infrastructure we need if we are to have any chance of weaning ourselves from fossil fuels. Yes to the project--even in my backyard!

Sincerely,

Ronald Schell

--

Ronald Schell

10 Prima Vista Road

Santa Fe, NM 87508

(608) 233-1973

Jose Larrañaga  
Building and Development Supervisor  
Santa Fe County

Dear Mr. Larrañaga:

This letter is in support of approval for the **AES Rancho Viejo Solar Project Conditional Use Permit (CUP)**

application. I have come to this decision after careful consideration. I am a 29-year resident of the SR 14 community and a decades-long professional in the clean and renewable energy fields. My consultancy, Cliburn and Associates, is focused on energy innovations and best practices for consumer-owned utilities nationwide. This includes my experience leading a DOE-funded project called Solar-Plus for Electric Cooperatives in 2020-21 and work for the National Community Solar Partnership. I also have contributed to solar development in New Mexico, including as a consultant for the first Buckman Direct Diversion solar plant and as an advocate for state climate and energy policy.

I also am a member of the San Marcos Association Board, but I do not represent the SMA in this letter since the majority of that board has opposed Rancho Viejo CUP approval. I respect my neighbors' efforts to preserve the landscape and their fears about this project, stoked by today's social climate of distrust. It is difficult to see the rising environmental costs and inequities of living in a fossil-fueled economy. Yet those costs are already far more devastating to people and wildlife than the most likely risks of this 96-MW solar plus storage project. This project can succeed if Santa Fe County applies common sense oversight and uses this experience to spur the clarification of its codes and outreach, assuring that not only this project, but also any subsequent ones conform to best practices in planning and operations.

**The AES proposal outlines an appropriate and thoughtful use for this land.** I have read the AES CUP

application and environmental assessment. I attended both AES public meetings, as well as a presentation by and discussions with the project's opponents. AES has been very responsive to public concerns, especially regarding the proximity to residents and concerns for wildlife. Their construction plans are minimal-impact (e.g., no concrete piers), and they have expressed willingness to implement native plant re-seeding. Current research indicates that the partial shade beneath solar panels is likely to help restore plant life and maintain soils, which were damaged here from years of ranching. It is important to remember that the AES project is currently set for a 30-year life, with a commitment to dismantling, recycling and restoration. Solar projects of the past 25 to 30 years have been similarly dismantled, although in some cases, stakeholders support their continued operation under new agreements. And since storage batteries do not last as long as solar PV, it is likely that the batteries will be replaced in due course, as technical and safety improvements continue. In all, this is a short time commitment, considering the importance of investing *now* to reach resilience and carbon reduction goals. We cannot advance clean energy applications without putting them in the field. I urge the County to review utility-scale storage experience at Kit Carson Electric Co-op in Taos, which is now 100%

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renewable in daytime hours, and to review projects at SRP, a public power utility near Phoenix. SRP had a battery failure in 2022, but its adherence to best-practice protocols brought that incident to a close without injury or spread. SRP announced last week that with confidence, it has launched construction for a new 250-MW (1,000 MWh) battery facility, a cornerstone in its clean energy plan.

AES has an impressive commitment to local workforce development and to training for the County Fire Department to prepare for this new, but not entirely novel hazard. Opponents of this project are quick to criticize our county fire department, without directly engaging with officials about their training and field capabilities. Further, I understand that an economic impact analysis is still being done, but AES has already estimated payments of \$7 million in local taxes over the project life.

Many residents in the SR 14 community hope the proposed project site would never be developed. But

growth keeps coming, and if that parcel is not developed gently for renewable energy, it is likely to be developed for other purposes, such as construction yards, agricultural facilities and greenhouses, warehouses or more roads, wells, and lights for new gated “ranchette” communities like Rancho San Marcos and Las Campanas. Aesthetic complaints against the solar project need to be assessed in the context of private land rights and inevitable change. Even if this project is visible, it is very likely to look like large solar projects you might find in Colorado and throughout the West—that is, like a dark, quiet reservoir in the distance. I hope, for that matter, that the County will conditionally limit expansion of this project, so that (along with an AES community solar project, if that is in the works) it might occupy less than 800 acres on a property that totals some 8,000 acres, where antelope still roam.

### **This proposed project addresses the urgent need for climate action and for energy equity in Santa Fe**

**County.** The opponents to this project often say, “I support solar energy, but...” or they point to the solar panels on their own roofs. But a strategy relying *only* on distributed rooftop solar cannot begin to reach all of our community’s families that live in rentals, mobile homes, etc. According to the U.S. EIA, only 1% of New Mexico’s electricity was generated by residential or commercial-scale PV (<1 MW) in 2020. I support Santa Fe getting its share of the 125-MW statewide community solar program and I support the city’s current low-income Solarize pilot effort, but these options are still insufficient. I spend most of my professional time promoting portfolios of local energy solutions; yet I recognize an immediate need for large-scale solar projects, like the AES project, as well. When people say, “I have solar, so this AES project does nothing for me,” it stings with privilege and with a false impression of how net metering and a regional grid system works. The AES project will bring nearly 100 MW of solar onto the grid, ultimately affecting everyone who is interconnected and offering storage to help assure reliability among variable renewable energy sources, *including* proliferating distributed solar systems. It is also difficult to explain the cost of doing nothing. It feels like “preservation.” Yet the National Resources Defense Council estimates that cardio-vascular and respiratory ailments directly related to our continued use of fossil fuels costs Americans some \$820 billion every year in healthcare bills. Add to this the incalculable cost of missing global targets to slow climate change. A cynic might ask what these national impacts have to do with this solar project “out past the Interstate,” but the success or failure of most climate and energy equity efforts will come down to small, local policies and courage.

In addressing the opponents to this project, I implore Santa Fe County leadership to provide more public education and dialog. As I sit with my fellow board members on the SMA, I see their struggle to understand what’s on the table here. That is difficult in a time of distrust, when people gather information from the Internet and hesitate to reach out to the many professionals in our own state (e.g., within the County, at UNM, Sandia Labs, RETA, state government, SFCC, etc.) who have deep, relevant expertise. I fear that the problem of solar NIMBY will increase if our leaders don’t get ahead of it now. I

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refer to a recent article that speaks to this, entitled [Yes in My Backyard](#), by Bill McKibben and published in *Mother Jones*.

**Address confusing language in the county code, but don’t let it cause a long delay.** The County code

should be clarified in its CUP application response or supplemented by ordinance or by another means to address large-scale renewable energy and storage projects that were barely envisioned in 2016—or even in 2019, when the most recent planners’ notes were added to the SLDC matrix. The past two decades have seen revolutionary cost reductions of about 80% for utility-scale solar, and a similar revolution in battery technology and cost. Consequently, the range of feasible projects and the terminology to describe them have expanded. Some stakeholders, including the SMA, have tried to analyze the current code as if it were written with perfect foresight. I argue that the County needs planning terms and guidelines that are general enough to adapt for rapid advances in solar and storage.



I hope the County will take actions towards the timely development of this proposed project (with reasonable conditions), while providing consistent guidance for similar, future projects in Santa Fe County. One approach is to simply establish that solar or solar plus storage on a utility scale, but below the 300-MW threshold for PRC review, fits the definition for CUP-provisioned renewable energy. Such projects do not have impacts that are comparable to any reasonable definition of “electricity generating plants.” A fossil-fueled generation plant requires regular deliveries of fuel by train, truck or pipeline, management of waste materials, mechanical infrastructure, emissions monitoring, lighting and more. It is a different animal altogether from PV and even solar-plus-storage. As one possible option, I noticed that there is a new Community Solar Development Ordinance, which seemed to come about quickly and provides consistent guidance for projects up to 5-MW. Perhaps a similar remedy could be crafted for transmission-interconnected, but <300-MW developments.

I am grateful for the news that you have consulted with experts for the environmental assessment and will do so for the EPC review. I hope the County will expect—and enforce its expectation for—best practices for this project. It is time to shift our perspective from renewable energy in the future to renewable energy today.

Sincerely,

Jill K. Cliburn

[jkcliburn@cliburnenergy.com](mailto:jkcliburn@cliburnenergy.com)

Mr. Larranaga and Ms Green,

I am writing regarding the proposed AES large scale solar project. I attended one of the remote presentations by a member of one of the other communities bordering the project. I found the presentation to both misleading and alarmist to say the least. I have done some research on AES and some of their past projects and would like to state that I am fully behind this sort of capitalization of the natural resources that NM has to offer. I and my wife live in Eldorado and also border the proposed project and as such embrace the "yes, it's ok to have this in my backyard" theory. I suspect you don't get much positive mail regarding these sorts of things, but a positive view is just as important as a negative view.

Thank you for the work you do, kind regards,

Karl Wolff

27 Cuesta Rd

Eldorado at Santa Fe, NM 87508

315.569.4509c

February 19, 2023.

Dear Jose Larra and AES Solar Planners,

I am writing this letter as an interested private citizen, but my comments are referenced by my experience as a member of the Santa Fe County Trails and Open Space Committee, as the Wildlife Chair for Indivisible SOS, Santa Fe, and as a New Mexico educator.

I am writing this letter of support and concern regarding AES Solar application in the San Marcos area of Santa Fe County. Let me state up front that I am an advocate for the transition to renewable sources of energy. Solar energy makes great sense for New Mexico.

My concern is for the massive scale of the solar array relative to all the small communities where this will be located. I live in a neighboring community. So do multiple species of wildlife, as the San Marcos area is located in a wildlife corridors zone that connects several mountain ranges. There are also significant Santa Fe county Open Spaces in this area that may be impacted by this massive structure. I suggest that great care be paid to the scale and configuration of these panels so that they are not disruptive to wildlife or an eyesore (or earsore) – or any other downgrade in the quality of life for all the residents. Perhaps if the panels were configured in smaller segments, in a visually pleasing pattern, perhaps in a Zia symbol, or some other friendly shapes it would less objectionable visually, and would not obstruct the activity of wildlife, including disruption watersheds. Please take into consideration these suggestions in order to make a more user-friendly transition to solar energy. Thanks for your time and attention! Jan Cohen, M.Ed email: [hh1joylane@yahoo.com](mailto:hh1joylane@yahoo.com)

Dear Mr. Larranaga and Ms. Green,

I am a resident of the Eldorado at Santa Fe area, and I wish to express my support for the AES solar farm/power plant project. I have been distressed to see the misinformation and scare tactics put out by what are made to appear to be “grass roots” groups that are arguing for “responsible solar”; in actuality, these groups are, as far as I can tell, covertly sponsored by large fossil fuel companies. Assuming Santa Fe County has done and will continue to do its due diligence in reviewing the AES proposal for safety, wild life corridor matters, and property values concerns, then I remain in robust support of the project.

Sincerely,

Colin T. Ramsey  
103 Jornada Loop  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

**From:** Susan Gordon <[susangordon@earthlink.net](mailto:susangordon@earthlink.net)>

**Sent:** Monday, December 2, 2024 11:06 AM

**To:** Alexandra Ladd <[aladd@santafecountynm.gov](mailto:aladd@santafecountynm.gov)>

**Subject:** Strong Support for the AES Solar Project

**Warning:**

**EXTERNAL EMAIL:** Do not click any links or open any attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello Commissioner Ladd,

I write to express my strong SUPPORT for the proposed Rancho Viejo Solar Project. I attended a recent meeting in person at the Community College and listened to a webcast of a second meeting by the fire department. I believe that this is a very good project for Santa Fe. AES has listened to the community concerns with regards to the roads at the site, the spacing and height of the panels, and is providing on site staffing.

A few vocal opponents have made it difficult for some of us to even speak during meetings due to their aggressive and hostile behavior toward AES.

I live in the Rancho Viejo neighborhood and have no concerns about the safety of this solar installation. I have solar on my roof.

Please do what you can to support this project for Santa Fe and New Mexico.

Thank you,

**Susan Gordon**

Susan Gordon

[susangordon@earthlink.net](mailto:susangordon@earthlink.net)

**From:** Stephen Inoue <[golferdudestephen@gmail.com](mailto:golferdudestephen@gmail.com)>

**Sent:** Monday, December 2, 2024 1:05 PM

**To:** Alexandra Ladd <[aladd@santafecountynm.gov](mailto:aladd@santafecountynm.gov)>

**Subject:** Solar project safety

**Warning:**

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Please require a much more comprehensive fire suppression strategy than the currently proposed 5,000 and 30,000 gallon tanks. Extinguishing 1-100 kwh EV car battery averages over 20,000 gallons. One storage pod with 100 or more batteries inside could result in a catastrophic fire for the whole Santa Fe area.

I am a big fan of solar power and clean energy, but want to make sure that if this project moves forward, it is done in a safe manner without jeopardizing the lives and natural beauty of the Santa Fe area.

Stephen Inoue

**From:** KIMBERLY and IAN BANNERMAN <[bannerman2913@msn.com](mailto:bannerman2913@msn.com)>

**Sent:** Monday, December 2, 2024 1:32 PM

**To:** Alexandra Ladd <[aladd@santafecountynm.gov](mailto:aladd@santafecountynm.gov)>

**Subject:** AES Solar Project - SUPPORT!

Hi, Ms. Ladd.

I am writing in full support of the AES Solar Project. I am an Eldorado resident and am appalled by the stance of many people in my neighborhood. While there are certain risks to this development, I feel they are outweighed by the beneficial nature of creating additional renewable energy sources. Additionally, there are high voltage powerlines through our neighborhood that are as much a threat as this facility. The NIMBY attitude of many Eldorado residents is short sighted and elitist.

While I work full time and can't be at the meeting, I hope my support will be noted.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Kim Bannerman  
6 Lobo Lane, 87508

**From:** Dale Stahlecker <dwseagle@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, December 3, 2024 3:54 PM

**To:** Alexandra Ladd <aladd@santafecountynm.gov>

**Subject:** AES battery scam

**Warning:**

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I am in full support of clean, renewable energy. But that is not the real purpose of this project. It is to buy PNM electricity at night when it is cheap, and to sell it back to PNM in the daytime when it is expensive.

AES's track record on battery safety is abysmal. And they want to put a large battery storage facility in an area surrounded by flash fuels that lead to many Santa Fe County neighborhoods. Please do not allow the battery storage as proposed on this land.

Dale Stahlecker  
30 Fonda Road  
Santa Fe, NM  
87508



## Support letter

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**From:** Melissa Houser <missa.houser@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Thursday, December 5, 2024 2:23 PM

**To:** Dominic J. Sisneros <djsisneros@santafecountynm.gov>; Alexandra Ladd <aladd@santafecountynm.gov>; Jordan A. Yutzy <jyutzy@santafecountynm.gov>

**Subject:** In Favor of solar installation

### Warning:

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Hi

I would like to let the County know that I support the solar installation on Ranch Viejo land. We need to move forward with renewable power generation in NM to replace fossil fuel power generation.

Thank you

Melissa Houser

186 Glorieta Mesa Rd, Glorieta, NM 87535

**FW: AES Rancho Viejo solar/storage project -- testimony in support**

**From:** John Buchser <jbuchser@comcast.net>

**Sent:** Friday, December 6, 2024 10:12 AM

**To:** Dominic J. Sisneros <djsisneros@santafecountynm.gov>

**Cc:** Jordan A. Yutzy <jyutzy@santafecountynm.gov>

**Subject:** AES Rancho Viejo solar/storage project -- testimony in support

**Warning:**

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Testimony in Support

AES Ranch Viejo Solar / Storage Application for Conditional Use Permit  
Sustainable Land Development Code Hearing  
12/4/24

My name is John Buchser, I am providing truthful testimony before this hearing. I represent the Sierra Club in my role as the Chair of the Northern Group of the Rio Grande Chapter.

We support this project. We believe technology has progressed to the point with Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) where the fire risk can be properly managed. Proximity to the customer base reduces costs. The need for renewables is urgent.

A Siemens 2024 engineering video demonstrates (<https://register.gotowebinar.com/recording/6579852952213592669>) a single-cell battery failure where:

- (1) Early outgassing of a failed cell can be detected before the cell explodes, allowing
- (2) Nitrogen gas to be released into the container.

This cell then causes damage when it explodes to the adjacent cells. However, the cascade to other cells does not occur.

The Surprise, Arizona McMicken Fire that occurred on 4/19/19 injured several firefighters.

One of the recommendations of a report prepared for Arizona Public Service Company states: "standards have avoided prescribing solutions that restrict or slow cell-to-cell and module-to-module thermal runaway propagation".

This fire analysis is an example of the regulatory standards on these systems lagging behind state of the art. The County should consider placing a condition on the project that requires a system to restrict a single-cell failure to the two adjacent cells.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

**From:** Lucy Gent Foma <lucygent@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 3, 2024 2:31 PM  
**To:** Dominic J. Sisneros <djsisneros@santafecountynm.gov>  
**Subject:** Letter of SUPPORT for Rancho Viejo Solar

**Warning:**

**EXTERNAL EMAIL:** Do not click any links or open any attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Mr. Sisneros and Mr. Yutzy,

I am writing as a private citizen who lives in Santa Fe to support the AES Rancho Viejo Solar Project proposal.

The proposed solar project is in the Rural Fringe zoning district, which would allow the property developer to build at a density of 1 DU/20 acres. Though this wide swath of land could be developed into 34 private homes to connect the Eldorado community to the San Marcos District, I think it more closely aligns with the highest purpose and stated intent of the SLDC to be developed as a Commercial Solar Energy Production Facility.

“The SLDC Shall:

1.4.2.14 Restrict development within lands containing environmental, ecological, archaeological, historical or cultural sensitivity and preserve agriculture and ranch lands and utilize: clustering; use of purchase and transfer of development rights; federal and state income tax credits and deductions for donation of development and conservation easements; **development of solar and wind resources and other incentives to maximize economic return and to preserve such resources to the maximum extent feasible;**”

The proposed development would essentially preserve the resources on the 800 acres of land on which they are built because other than semi-annual maintenance, the site is vacant of humans. The site is also remote enough that there would only be minimal visual impact, if any, to a few residents of the County. In exchange, the project would power over 23,000 New Mexico homes annually.

Having followed the public meeting held by AES and the meetings held by neighbors in opposition, I see that AES has made accommodations and incorporated feedback that they heard from the public. They have also ensured that best practices will be used during installation and operation of the facility.

For example, AES is working closely with Santa Fe officials during the Rancho Viejo Solar project’s development and with the Santa Fe County Fire Department to implement safety best practices and training. Training of Fire Department staff aligns with the national Energy.gov recommendations. The Federal Energy Management Program through Energy.gov provides a technical specifications guideline for agencies wishing to procure lithium-ion battery storage systems (BESS) that states:

## “1.7 Local Fire Marshall Involvement

The Contractor shall involve the fire marshal or organization responsible for fire protection to provide design advice and design approval. The Contractor shall review the design of the system with the fire marshal and also observe design guidelines regarding firefighter access in the International Association of Fire Fighters and the NEC 2017.

The Contractor shall invite local firefighters to a training where firefighters will be shown how the BESS works and how to shut it down, form a fire suppression plan, and shall work with the fire marshal to determine where to post the permanent instructions and required markings. The Contractor shall coordinate with local fire marshals on BESS setback requirements, first responder training, and posted instructions for shutoffs.”

<https://www.energy.gov/eere/femp/articles/lithium-ion-battery-storage-technical-specifications>

There has been some pushback on the project by neighbors who are concerned about the potential for a lithium-ion battery fire. BESS is a crucial component to commercial scale solar for uninterrupted power supply (<https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy19osti/74426.pdf>). Power is only generated during the day with a solar array so storing it is necessary for night-time usage. Lithium-ion Batteries are one of the most popular types of BESS, because they have a high energy density and are relatively lightweight. There is a fire risk from large batteries, but these risks are mitigated through moderating temperatures around the batteries and by building enclosures around the BESS.

From p. 30 of US Dept of Energy's April 2024 Energy Storage Safety Strategic Plan ([https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/EED\\_2827\\_FIG\\_SafetyStrategy%20240505v2.pdf](https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/EED_2827_FIG_SafetyStrategy%20240505v2.pdf)):

### "5.3.2 Enclosure Design

While some ESSs are still installed in buildings, codes and standards have evolved to the point where compliance is more onerous due to the proximity to people. Similarly, earlier containerized designs were mostly walk-in units, which are now treated like buildings from the perspective of fire codes. These issues have pushed designers towards cabinets that are serviced from the outside and only the technician's arms cross the threshold of the enclosure. Such enclosures also allow for much higher energy density and reduced facility area.

In past years, many integrators standardized their designs on 40-foot and 53-foot ISO containers, and some still offer these units. The weight of these systems is such that they cannot be transported fully assembled, so it is necessary to install modules in the field. Furthermore, the requirements for product listing have led some integrators to adopt smaller cabinet-type units to modularize ESS project designs. These units, typically 10'-20', can be shipped fully assembled, and, in the event of a fire, losses are reduced, and cabinets can be easily replaced. The cabinets are heavily insulated to allow them to be

installed with very little spacing, while still preventing propagation of fire between units."

Santa Fe's electricity for the past 50 years has come from mining and burning coal at the San Juan Generating Station and around the 4-corners region. This coal-powered electricity has significantly contributed to climate change through emitting carbon dioxide and also poisoned generations of people on a daily basis by depositing coal ash. The coal combustion residue (coal ash) has been irresponsibly disposed of in Navajo Nation, causing cancer, respiratory impacts and birth defects to Navajo people for 50 years. There were 59 million tons of coal ash produced and deposited during the life of the San Juan Mine. Santa Fe residents continue to demand electricity, it is time that we stop burning coal at the cost of suffering by rural communities.

I heard in a neighborhood opposition meeting that the power generated by this solar facility would not benefit the local residents and would instead be sold at a profit to out-of-state users. The AES project will tie-into the PNM grid, which serves Santa Fe and Albuquerque, along with 52% of the rest of New Mexico electric customers. Electrons in a grid go to the closest place they are needed. That most likely means that the power generated by this facility will go to the houses immediately next to it.

New Mexico passed the Energy Transition Act in 2019 which sets targets for New Mexico's three largest electric utilities to produce 40% renewable electricity by 2025, 50% renewable energy by 2030. Coal plants have already been retired, which means that our electric grid needs to be building renewable energy quickly to meet the 2025 deadline. Santa Fe County, with one of the largest population centers in the state, must take responsibility for generating a fraction of the electricity that it uses. Now is the time to support the projects that the SLDC has said it supports for years.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lucy Gent Foma

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“If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it.”

— Mary Oliver