



O R E G O N

MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Work Session Summary Minutes

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

April 15, 2025. 1:30 PM

Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Salem
5th Floor, Suite 5232, Commissioners Board Room

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Kevin Cameron, Colm Willis, and Danielle Bethell.

Board's Office: Chad Ball, Chris Eppley, Heather Inyama, Toni Whitler, Trevor Lane, and Matt Lawyer.

Legal Counsel: Steve Elzinga.

Public Works: Brandon Reich, Gillian Peden, and Austin Barnes.

Commissioner Danielle Bethell called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m.

Summary

Potential impact of BESS on farmland. Need to protect valuable farmland, citing past issues with solar farms. The systems, typically 5-10 acres, store energy for EV charging and semi-trucks. The board considered creating criteria to determine if land is unsuitable for farming before allowing BESS. The consensus leans towards a temporary ban while developing criteria, ensuring robust community input and legal defensibility.

Overview/Risks

- BESS's are emerging infrastructure projects.
- Typical characteristics are as follows:
 - 5-10 acres in size.
 - Designed to store and redistribute energy for electric vehicle charging.
 - Primarily located near electrical substations.
- Significant risks identified:
 - Potential permanent contamination of agricultural land.
 - Fire and explosion hazards.
 - Toxic metal release.
 - Potential long-term environmental damage.
 - Disruption of agricultural productivity.
 - Potential community displacement during emergency situations.
- Concerns regarding converting high-value farmland to industrial energy infrastructure.

Mitigation Discussion:

- Comprehensive risk assessment needed.
- Potential mitigation strategies:
 - Strict soil classification requirements.

- Mandatory environmental impact studies.
- Detailed emergency response plans.
- Comprehensive insurance and compensation mechanisms.
- Independent safety certification processes.
- Considerations for neighboring property owners:
 - Potential legal recourse for damages.
 - Compensation for agricultural losses.
 - Long-term environmental monitoring.

Land Use Options

- Current regulatory landscape:
 - Limited existing provisions for battery storage systems.
 - Currently permitted under utility facility classifications.
- Potential regulatory approaches:
 - Complete prohibition in agricultural zones.
 - Conditional use permits with stringent criteria.
 - Soil quality and agricultural productivity assessments.
 - Strict location restrictions.
 - Comprehensive environmental and safety review process.
- Potential criteria for consideration:
 - Soil quality classification.
 - Proximity to existing infrastructure.
 - Minimal impact on surrounding agricultural operations.
 - Comprehensive safety and environmental management plans.

Next Steps

- Immediate actions:
 - Draft comprehensive prohibition ordinance.
 - Develop detailed conditional use permit framework.
- Collaborative process:
 - Engage planning commission.
 - Consult community stakeholders.
 - Research industry best practices.
 - Develop robust safety and environmental standards.
- Long-term strategy:
 - Create flexible yet protective regulatory framework.
 - Develop clear guidelines for potential future applications.
 - Establish comprehensive review process.
- Prepare detailed report for the board to review.
- Maintain flexibility for future technological and regulatory developments.

Adjourned – time: 2:11 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White