

ERRATA

FOR ITEM

#3

Friday July 9, 2021

PLANNING COMMISSION HEARING

Distributed 7/07/21

SUBJECT: JVR ENERGY PARK MAJOR USE PERMIT; PDS2018-MUP-18-022; PDS2018-ER-18-22-001

This errata is submitted to the Planning Commission to make the following revision to attachment G, which includes public documentation from the Jacumba Community Sponsor Group:

On June 3, 2021, the County received a letter dated May 31, 2021 from the Jacumba Community Sponsor Group detailing comments and revisions to the project that are similar in nature to the May 18, 2021 Jacumba Community Sponsor Group minutes, but also include additional recommendations that were not in the Attachment G. As a result, the letter has been added in the following attachment revisions.

May 31, 2021

County of San Diego Planning and Development Services
5510 Overland Ave, Ste.310
San Diego, CA 92123
ATTN: Nick Koutoufidis

Subject: Jacumba Community Sponsor Group Comments on the revised JVR Energy Park (PDS2018-MUP-18-022)

To whom it may concern:

On May 18, 2021, the Jacumba Community Sponsor Group (JCSG) voted unanimously to deny the revised JVR project as described on the plot plans dated 04/08/21 for a variety of reasons. (See draft meeting minutes of May 18, 2021 which contain general comments/questions and requests for specific clarifications on the project plot maps.)

Jacumba Hot Springs is a diverse community with a population of ~570. Many of our residents are economically disadvantaged families or seniors who live on small fixed incomes or disability benefits. (Currently, there are also four sexually violent predators living under supervision in our community.) Our residents moved to Jacumba for its scenic views, quiet rural landscapes, safe streets, and affordable homes and they have the most to lose if this “interim (35-38 year) industrial-scale solar facility, six times the physical size of our village is approved.

The proposed JVR solar facility will stretch from the Interstate 8 corridor (near Exit 73) south to the international border, and along both sides historic Highway 80. These scenic roadways serve as the gateways through which visitors approach Jacumba. Project fencing and landscaping will not adequately screen the visual blight and mechanical noise generated by hundreds of acres of solar modules, batteries, inverters, transformers, a large collector substation, and an even larger electrical switchyard. **So, how will the County mitigate for lost tourism revenue at the Jacumba businesses that are currently struggling to survive and even prosper?**

This massive green energy project will consume the best available agricultural or residential land within Jacumba’s rural village boundary. It clearly does not conform with the Mountain Empire Sub-Regional Plan’s land-use goals.

--“Encourage the development of land in a manner that reinforces the unique identity of the Mountain Empire Sub-region and its communities.”

--“Avoid the creation of a landscape foreign to that of surrounding sites.”

--“Provide a land use pattern that will accommodate the forecast population increase while retaining the rural charm of the present living environment.”

--“The community supports new development that preserves the natural and historical environment, including water resources, and protects existing neighborhoods, manages growth to reinforce the rural character of the area, which includes agriculture, open space, and trails...”

--“Industrial development is not compatible with the goal of maintaining the rural character of the sub-region...”

Jacumba residents know that a facility of this magnitude would never be sited adjacent to a “richer community” like La Mesa, Encinitas, Chula Vista, or Del Mar. The sponsor group believes that County’s

approval of the 623-acre revised JVR project will set a dangerous land-use precedent—one that will ultimately lead to the further industrialization of our backcountry landscapes.

The glider community of San Diego has stated that solar panel glare and the placement of high-voltage solar facility equipment south of scenic Highway 80, and around three sides of the Jacumba airport runway, may have lethal consequences for inexperienced glider pilots. Elevating solar modules in the flood plain area near the runway will not be viewed by the primary users of the airport (glider pilots) as operationally safe and this may limit their future usage of the airport. This will negatively impact the flow of visitors to Jacumba and financial support to local businesses.

Of course, once solar panels are installed south of Old Highway 80, there will be no further discussion of a future international border crossing as was identified in DEIR comments. This is yet another example of how this utility project will potentially eliminate new commercial activity that would bring jobs to local residents and ensure Jacumba's future vitality.

Climate change is real, and it is already impacting Jacumba in terms of higher local temperatures and lower annual rainfall. **The JVR project fails to address the photovoltaic (PV) heat island effect, a potential 10-degree F rise in ambient temperature which could have a negative impact on elderly residents as well as the vegetation on the east side of town.** The introduction of yet another high voltage ignition source in our fire-prone landscape makes absolutely no sense—The current firefighter staffing of two personnel is woefully insufficient to meet the daily needs of Jacumba residents and travelers on the I-8 corridor, plus an additional daily construction crew of up to 500 workers.

The sponsor group believes the revised JVR project fails to incorporate best management practices (BMPs) which could substantially alleviate some of the negative impacts to our community and the natural environment. The County should require that the developer incorporate the following BMPs into any industrial solar facility, regardless of its final size, that is sited in a rural, high fire danger area, like Jacumba:

---Based on the DEIR's description of the JVR facility, it will use potentially flammable lithium-ion batteries. **The County should require the developer use the environmentally safer ESS iron flow batteries (or similar) as a condition of project approval.** These second-generation ESS iron-flow batteries which present no fire, chemical, or explosive risk, are currently being installed by SDG&E at a smaller solar facility located in Campo.

--According to the DEIR, the JVR solar project will waste 11-acre feet of water from local aquifers each time solar panels are cleaned, on a quarterly basis. In other arid regions of the world (like India), solar facilities employ a dry, motorized brushing system which saves up 90 percent of the water usage. County planners appear to think that groundwater monitoring of private wells is sufficient to track any potential impact of water usage on the local water table. All utility-scale solar facilities like the proposed JVR project, must respect the finite nature of shared local aquifers in groundwater dependent communities. **The County should require that the JVR project use a more environmentally-sustainable water saving system for solar module cleaning.**

--The JVR developer must be required to use the most efficient solar modules available even if they cost more to buy and install. **Also, if the JVR solar module warranty does not meet the lifespan of the project (35-38 years), the final EIR should address any potential impacts to the community (noise, traffic) if current solar modules become obsolete and/or their warranty necessitates whole-scale module swap out.**

--Given the rapid advancements in solar technology, the sponsor group questions whether a 543-acre solar facility footprint is really necessary to produce 90MW of energy. For example, the BayWa representative told our group that the larger community buffer alternative could be implemented and the project would still be able to accomplish its stated goal of producing up to 90MW of power. If so, then why

didn't the developer incorporate the 300-foot setback (the community buffer alternative) into their revised project plans thereby showing their willingness to make a meaningful compromise in an effort to mitigate the project's impact on the community? **The sponsor group requests as a minimum, that 300-foot setbacks next to all private residences be a part of any approved JVR solar project plan.** How is it that the 108-acre Jacumba Solar project built by BayWa in 2017 which uses fixed (non-tracking), south-facing solar modules is able to produce 28MW of power? Based on production values from that less sophisticated solar technology, the new JVR solar facility using bifacial modules should be able to produce up to 90MW of power on a significantly smaller footprint, somewhere in the range of 250 to 300 acres. (Bifacial solar modules while more expensive than monofacial modules, offer as much as a 30 percent improvement in efficiency.) At this point in the CEQA review process, our sponsor group should have been provided with solar facility specifics and we should have had some real answers to our questions about module efficiency, distance between solar arrays, and type of battery that will to be used. After all, on May 24, 2021, BayWa knew enough about JVR project specifics to enter into a 90MW 20-year power purchase agreement with the San Diego Community Power (SDCP) group.

At our May 18, 2021 sponsor group meeting, we learned that BayWa had initiated benefit agreements with two non-profit entities (Jacumba Community Services and the Imperial Valley Desert Museum) who do not speak for the community of Jacumba with regards to land use decisions and their identified impacts to our town. Although we requested that BayWa provide us with a copy of the proposed benefits packages, to date, we have not received that requested information. **In the interests of transparency, the sponsor group asks for the County's help in getting that information from BayWa representatives as soon as possible.**

The community also requests that BayWa investigate the feasibility of providing a backup power source to Jacumba when the town's normal power source is unavailable due to Santa Ana winds. The JVR facility will continue to store and provide power to the electrical grid even during Santa Ana events. **A backup power transmission loop to Jacumba could be a meaningful benefit to residents.** (A similar electrical loop will provide backup power to selected businesses and public schools from SDG&E's 1MW solar project in Campo.)

A large number of the trees and shrubs on the preliminary JVR landscaping list found on Sheet 500 of the revised plot maps are inappropriate for Jacumba's micro-climate, as many them are not drought tolerant and they are slow-growing. The preliminary landscaping plan should be amended as follows:

--TREES: Using the two-letter codes listed on the JVR preliminary plant legend, remove the following trees: DS, PC, QC, and QE. Consider adding the following trees: *Pinus cembroides* (Mexican Pinyon), *Prosopis glandulosa* (Honey Mesquite), *Chilopsis linearis* (Desert Willow), and *Juniperus California* (California Juniper).

--SHRUBS: Remove the following shrubs: AB and GS. Consider adding the following shrubs: *Sambucus Mexicana* (Mexican Elderberry), *Simmondsia chinensis* (Jojoba), and *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* (Mexican Bird of Paradise).

During our last sponsor group meeting on May 18th, PDS staff and the BayWa representative were unprepared to respond to our questions and concerns about this complex project. As a matter of procedure and as an issue of honesty and forthrightness, the project developer should make a greater effort to provide personnel with a thorough understanding of project parameters at community meetings. The steady stream of non-answers, or partial answers such as --"that issue will be addressed globally in the final EIR" or "we haven't decided on the solar equipment we will be using" which we received prior to our vote on this project does a real disservice to the CEQA review effort. It does not serve the county decision-makers well and nor does it foster Jacumba's confidence in what appears to be a flawed and skewed planning process, one that benefits urban communities at the expense of their rural neighbors.

The community of Jacumba is not averse to green energy projects in our area--we previously supported BayWa's 2017 Jacumba solar project. As we have stated before, we are willing to compromise on a smaller project footprint of 250 to 300 acres, one moved well north of scenic Highway 80, and away from residences and the Jacumba airport. Our group is currently developing a shared vision for some of the JVR MUP acreage that would not be used for solar panels. Our plan includes a more expansive and thoughtful wildlife corridor adjacent to state park lands, a future airport safety and expansion area, and a central valley area which would support a mixture of agricultural, residential (affordable housing), and recreational uses.

In an era of environmental and economic justice, our low income, ethnically diverse community should not bear the brunt of industrial-scale green energy projects like the JVR Energy Park, which sends all of their generated power to urban centers at the expense of our rural quality of life. If we are truly to reverse the impacts of climate change, County leaders should be actively incentivizing rooftop solar installations for businesses and residences. They should also seek ways to site smaller utility projects and/or battery storage units nearer to the locations where the power will actually be used...Those simple tenets should be the pillars of the County's plan for future green energy generation.

Submitted by:

Cherry Diefenbach, JCSG Chair

CC:

KUSI, East County Magazine, KPBS, KOGO, SDUT, and Districts 1-5 BOS