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## In Support of CUP - case #24-5200 Rancho Viejo Solar

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From Scott Eilerts <seilerts@gmail.com>

Date Wed 6/11/2025 5:51 PM

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

### Warning:

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Dear Santa Fe County Commissioners,

To the extent that County Commissioners may review and reconsider the Planning Commission's approval of a Conditional Use Permit for the Rancho Viejo Solar Project, I offer the following Letter of Support.

I live in Eldorado in a house that I purchased in 2008. I hold a PhD in high energy physics from the University of New Mexico and have spent 25 years working in quantitative analysis and risk management. Having reviewed all of the materials prepared by AES, I write **in favor** of the Rancho Viejo Solar Project. I have no financial interest in AES, Rancho Viejo Partnership, or any other party who stands to gain financially from this Project.

Most opponents of this Project cite the dangers of battery energy storage systems (BESS). In the simplest terms, there is a potential fire risk in the event of a failure in one of the 40 foot battery storage containers at some point during the Project's 35 year lifespan. Perhaps the most important outcome of the Conditional Use Permit approval by the Planning Commission is the substantial risk mitigation derived from the numerous conditions that AES must first satisfy, including the 90 requirements specified by Santa Fe County Fire Prevention. Further, the recent battery storage container fire in Escondido, CA shows that the fire was contained to the site, and air quality monitoring as close as 100 feet to the event remained well within EPA limits. While opponents state that this Project should be built "in the middle of nowhere" due to the fire and air quality risk, the fact is that the Project's BESS installation is well over a mile from any habitation. Between advances in technology and close cooperation with County Fire, County Commissioners should have full confidence that AES will have minimized the risk of fire or panic by satisfying all conditions in the Planning Commission's Order. Overall, this Project clearly meets the intent and requirements for a commercial solar energy production and storage facility as described in the County's Sustainable Land Development Code.

As an expert in risk management, I know very well that risk-based decisions are almost never a simple yes or no. Decision-making government bodies must follow applicable laws and balance the societal benefits against the potential societal costs. The evidence shows that the Planning Commission based its approval upon matters of law after hearing extensively from all interested parties. This Project carries significant societal benefits and serves to reinforce Santa Fe County's environmentally

conscious reputation. Opponents of this Project bring no new evidence to suggest that the Planning Commission made the wrong decision. If anything, continued advances in BESS fire prevention and suppression technologies leave their hyperbolic arguments sounding even more hollow.

Sincerely,

Scott Eilerts, PhD  
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