

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%

2

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

3

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