

## CURRENTS

# County Backs Delayed Start Of BESS Project

### *Questions Linger In Beach Haven*

The Ocean County Board of Commissioners recently adopted a resolution that supports Beach Haven's request that Atlantic City Electric delay the startup/commissioning of the proposed Battery Energy Storage System located within the borough until concerns about the operation are addressed.

Initially, the lithium battery energy storage system was scheduled to go online Aug. 15, but the utility company delayed activation.

"Atlantic City Electric is in the final stages of preparing the Battery Energy Storage System for service, which includes completing standard industry testing and securing all necessary certifications," Brian Ahrens, ACE senior communications specialist, said in August. "At the same time, we continue to engage with borough officials to address any remaining questions and concerns regarding this project. As we move forward, we remain committed to keeping the community informed about our progress. We have worked with industry-leading safety experts for the technical specifications of the battery to ensure they meet the latest industry best practices. We have also worked with local leaders and emergency management agencies, such as the fire department, to assist first responders in understanding the characteristics of the facility."

He said the BESS project "is part of our broader strategic effort to strengthen and modernize the energy grid serving Beach Haven and Long Beach Island. When complete, this facility will improve the reliability and quality of energy service in these communities during times when customer demand for energy is highest."

In its resolution, county officials noted Beach Haven is a coastal community with limited evacuation routes, a substantial seasonal population and critical tourism-based economic activity. They also said the borough "has formally requested that ACE delay the startup/commissioning of the BESS to allow additional time for review, public engagement inter-agency coordination, and the completion of safety, emergency-response, and environmental risk assessments appropriate to the unique coastal context of Long Beach Island."

BESS

The commissioners said nationally recognized standards for installation of the BESS emphasize the project include specific risk analysis, fire protection features, thermal-runaway mitigation, plume modeling and comprehensive emergency response planning, "all of which are of heightened importance in barrier-island settings with constrained ingress/egress."

In addition, the board said local first responders including municipal fire departments, Ocean County Fire Marshal, Ocean County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Management, and regional mutual-aid partners must be fully trained, equipped and exercised for BESS-specific incident response before commissioning, with clearly

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defined roles, communication plans, water and suppressant needs, staging areas and shelter-in-place/evacuation protocols.

"Additional review of siting, flood risk, storm surge, corrosion, noise, visual impacts, hazardous-materials considerations, decommissioning/insurance, and potential alternatives may further reduce risk and build public confidence," the resolution said. "It is in the interest of Ocean County residents that any new energy infrastructure deployed in a dense, coastal, tourist community meet the highest practicable standards of safety, reliability, environmental stewardship and community engagement."

In addition, the board urged the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities and all other applicable regulatory and environmental agencies "to support a short, reasonable delay to enable the above analyses, inter-agency coordination, and public engagement."

Earlier in the year, the borough hired Jensen-Hughes, a Baltimore-based company, for a risk analysis. The engineering and consulting services company provides services, software and consulting in fire protection engineering, forensic engineering and security.

Borough Manager Sherry Mason said she and Borough Solicitor Bruce Padula are reviewing a draft of the company's initial report. Following that, the report is expected to be reviewed and discussed by the borough council.

— Eric Englund