RENEWABLE NORTHWEST

Who's Involved and What's Your Role?

A guide to who should be at the table when a BESS project is reviewed

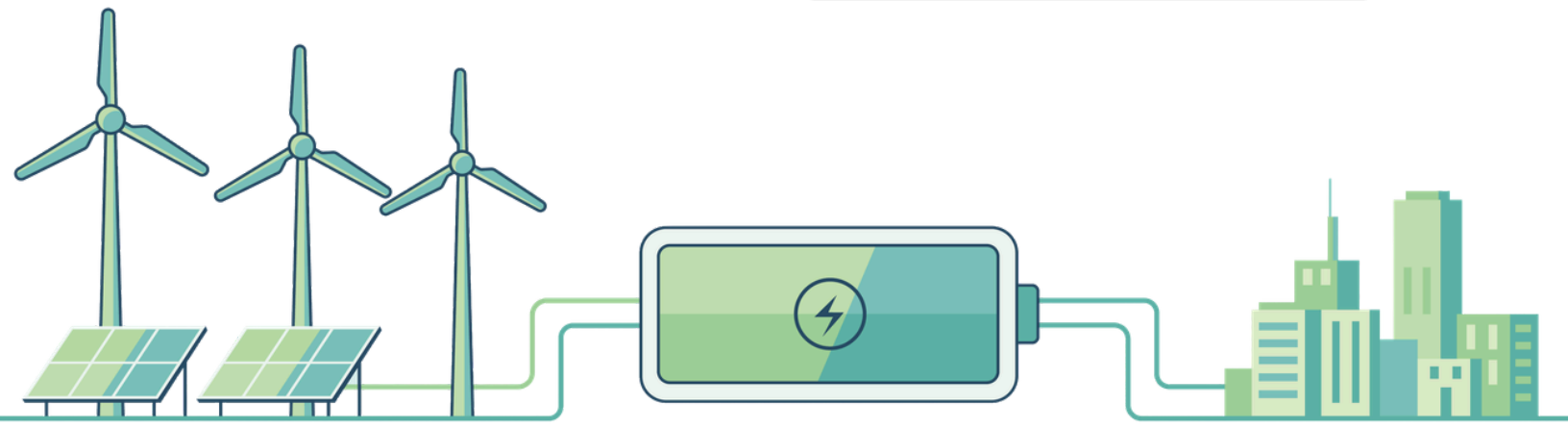
What is BESS?

Battery energy storage systems, often referred to as BESS, store electricity for later use. When electricity generation exceeds demand, electricity from all energy sources, including wind, solar, hydropower, geothermal, and natural gas, can be stored in batteries and discharged when additional power is needed.

Why do roles matter?

BESS projects are strongest when the right people are involved early. Local governments do not need to have every technical answer in-house, but they should know who to bring into the process, what information to request, and how each participant can help evaluate the project.

Clear roles can help communities review projects more consistently, address concerns earlier, and make decisions based on adopted standards, local priorities, and reliable information.



Project Review at a Glance

1. Early Coordination

Goal: Understand the project purpose, site, process, and key review needs before concerns escalate.

Who is typically involved: Local government staff, project owner or developer, utility or grid operator, emergency responders, nearby property owners, and community stakeholders.

Key questions:

- What energy need is the project intended to serve?
- Why was this site selected?
- Who needs to review safety, site design, emergency access, and local impacts?
- How will the public receive clear information early in the process?

2. Technical and Local Review

Goal: Evaluate whether the project meets applicable standards and whether conditions are needed to address site-specific impacts.

Who is typically involved: Planning staff, fire and emergency response partners, public works, utility staff, engineers, technical experts, legal or permitting advisors, and the project team.

Key questions:

- Does the project meet applicable zoning, fire, building, electrical, and safety standards?
- Has the local fire district, fire marshal, or Authority Having Jurisdiction reviewed the safety information?
- How will the project address access, setbacks, screening, lighting, noise, stormwater, vegetation, and decommissioning?
- What local benefits may result, and how are they documented?

3. Decision and Long-Term Operations

Goal: Make a decision based on clear criteria and establish expectations for construction, operation, emergency coordination, and decommissioning.

Who is typically involved: Planning commission or hearing body, elected officials as appropriate, local staff, emergency responders, project owner or operator, and community members.

Key questions:

- What conditions are needed to address local impacts?
- Who is responsible for operations, maintenance, monitoring, and emergency response coordination?
- How will local responders receive training or site information?
- What happens at the end of the project's useful life?

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WHO	ROLE	TYPICAL RESPONSIBILITIES
Local Government	Guides the review process and applies local standards. Local governments help determine how BESS projects fit within local plans, zoning, permitting requirements, and community priorities. Depending on the jurisdiction, this may include elected officials, planning staff, hearing bodies, public works, transportation, utility staff, and economic development staff.	• Identify the appropriate review and approval process • Apply zoning, land use, and permitting requirements • Coordinate review across departments • Evaluate site design, access, traffic, stormwater, lighting, noise, and decommissioning • Help the public understand what the jurisdiction can and cannot regulate • Consider local benefits, community priorities, and long-term responsibilities
Fire and Emergency Response Partners	Review safety planning and emergency response needs. Fire districts, fire marshals, emergency managers, law enforcement, and other public safety partners should be engaged early so safety and response planning are part of the project review, not an afterthought.	• Review emergency response plans and fire safety documentation • Evaluate site access, equipment spacing, signage, and shutoff information • Understand monitoring, alarm, and emergency response procedures • Participate in training, tabletop exercises, or site walk-throughs • Coordinate with the project owner or operator before and during operations
Utility or Grid Operator	Explains how the project connects to the electric system and what grid need it may serve. Some BESS projects are developed by utilities, while others are developed by private companies and connected to the grid. Utilities, public power providers, rural electric cooperatives, transmission providers, and regional grid operators may all play a role.	• Evaluate interconnection requirements • Identify reliability, capacity, or flexibility needs • Explain how the project may support the local or regional grid • Coordinate technical requirements with the project team • Help clarify how the project may support reliability, affordability, or better use of existing infrastructure

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WHO	ROLE	TYPICAL RESPONSIBILITIES
Developer or Project Owner	Proposes, designs, permits, builds, and operates the project. The developer or project owner is responsible for explaining what is proposed, why the site was selected, how impacts will be addressed, and how the project will operate safely over time.	• Explain the project purpose and need • Manage permitting and technical studies • Provide site plans, safety documentation, and emergency response information • Engage local officials, emergency responders, neighbors, and community stakeholders • Commit to design, safety, mitigation, operations, maintenance, and decommissioning responsibilities
Technical Experts	Provide specialized analysis and help translate technical information into project review. BESS projects may involve civil, electrical, environmental, acoustic, fire protection, engineering, land use, and safety experts. Their work helps local governments and responders evaluate the project based on current standards and site-specific conditions.	• Prepare site plans, technical drawings, and studies • Evaluate noise, stormwater, traffic, environmental, and fire safety considerations • Design access, grading, drainage, electrical systems, and equipment layout • Review compliance with applicable standards and codes • Support first responder training and emergency planning
Community Members and Local Organizations	Provide local knowledge, identify concerns, and help shape community understanding. Residents, property owners, neighborhood groups, business organizations, environmental groups, and clean energy organizations may all have an interest in how a BESS project is reviewed and designed.	• Participate in public meetings, briefings, or comment periods • Raise questions about site design, safety, traffic, noise, views, and nearby land uses • Help local officials understand neighborhood priorities and concerns • Share information with members, neighbors, or community networks • Provide perspective on local needs, economic development, reliability, and community values

Scan for sources

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SOURCES:

- University of Michigan Center for EmPowering Communities: Planning & Zoning for Battery Energy Storage Systems: A Guide for Michigan Local Governments
- Pacific Northwest National Laboratory: Energy Storage in Local Zoning Ordinances
- The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA): Battery Energy Storage Guidebook
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA): Energy Storage Systems Safety Fact Sheet
- Idaho Power: Melba Battery Energy Storage System Incident Review

QUESTIONS?

Contact renewables@renewablenw.org

