

TEMPERS FLARE AT BESS DISCUSSION

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North Glengarry council and its fire chief were both on the hot seat on the evening of Monday, March 10, when a large contingent of angry residents attended the council meeting to voice their opposition to a planned Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) earmarked for a 1.5 acre patch of land north of Skye Road near Dunvegan.

The day before the meeting, an organization operating a website called savesdg.com issued a press release calling for the Township to reverse a zoning amendment bylaw that it passed in February, one that paves the way for the BESS installation. The group claims that there are a number of problems with these systems, including fire and explosion risks, environmental concerns, health risks (exposure to electromagnetic fields and chemical leaks) as well as security risks. They also claimed that council was not transparent on the matter. "Many residents were not informed before this decision was made," they claimed.

As for the BESS system itself, it is a technological system that captures energy from various sources (including the Hydro One grid) and then stores it for later use. In the case of the Skye Road BESS, it will consist of 11 units that will look like shipping containers.

At the March 10 meeting, Township CAO Sarah Huskinson said that there were no objections to the zoning amendment when council passed the motion at its Feb 25 meeting. She said that the last date to appeal the decision was March 17, 2025 (20 days after the given notice) and that the next steps will be a building permit application. She further noted that

before the BESS can be connected to Hydro One, there will need to be a hazard mitigation analysis, fire protection design documentation, and emergency response plan including fire department training.

This did little to sway the protestors as they spent more than an hour peppering council with questions and comments. One Skye Road resident asked what council was going to do to protect groundwater from the BESS runoff. Mayor Jamie MacDonald said that there is no runoff but the resident – who gave his name as L. Castelli of Skye Road – said that he'd read a study from South Korea where there were 27 fires at BESS units and runoff occurred.

Mr. MacDonald said that took place in 2022 and that the BESS technology has improved every year. Maxville Ward Councillor Gary Martin referenced the article in question, noting that of the 27 fires, 23 of them were recorded in the year 2018. He said that as a result of these events, South Korea formed a committee to investigate. Five months later, it determined that there wasn't a proper protection system for the batteries that identified and stopped short circuits, that there was insufficient management of the operating environment, poor installation quality, and insufficient monitoring and control systems.

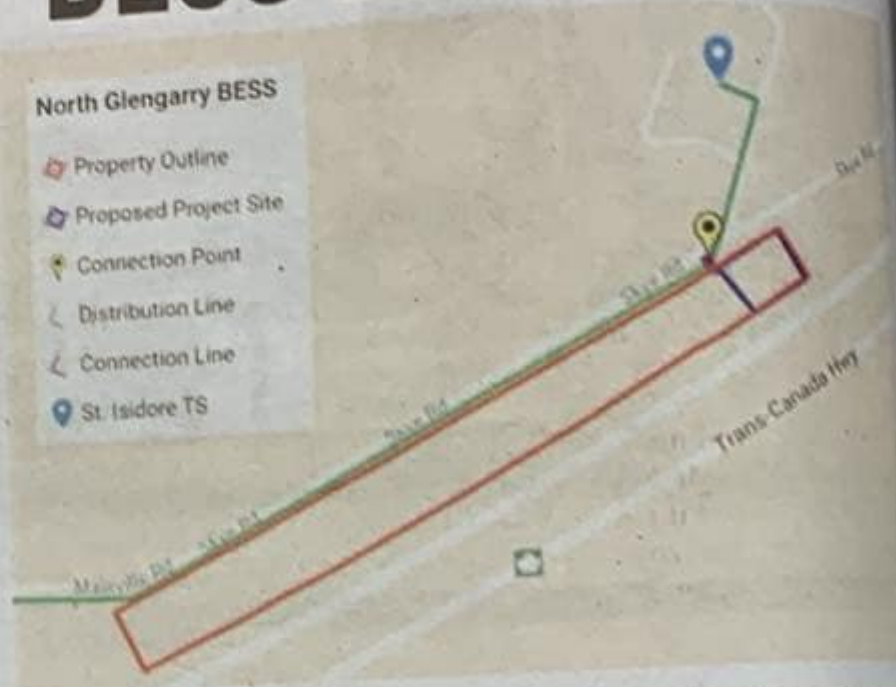
"So basically, they were putting in these systems and nobody was looking after them."

Fire Chief Matthew Roy added that there are national standards in place for thermal runoffs, which, he said, can be mitigated through risk prevention, proper planning, and training.

It was on this point that Chief Roy was vigorously challenged later. A man named Dylan Winter stepped to the microphone and claimed that he had worked for one year with the National

North Glengarry BESS

- Property Outline
- Proposed Project Site
- Connection Point
- Distribution Line
- Connection Line
- St. Isidore TS



The facility will be located on a 15.07-acre property along Skye Road near Dunvegan, adjacent to Highway 417 and approximately 120 meters from the existing Hydro-One St-Isidore Transformer Station. The BESS will encompass 11 container-like units using five of the 15 acres of agriculture land rezoned to accommodate the facility. The BESS will be fenced for security and the surrounding land will continue to be farmed.

Research Council of Canada, where he tested hydro dams and other structures. He said that while he was there, workers were forbidden from testing lithium batteries inside buildings due to dangers and risk.

"Can the fire chief tell me exactly what the procedure is for fighting a lithium fire?" he asked.

The chief said that the fire department would attend the incident and would likely adopt a defensive approach and would work toward removing any threat to life, environment, and property.

This did little to mollify Mr. Winter, who said that the chief should be able to provide specific information on how he would fight a lithium battery fire. The Mayor responded that the fire department would be receiving training and that the company in charge of the BESS, Compass Renewable Energy Group, would pay for that training.

But Mr. Winter persisted. "And you signed off before you did?" he asked, adding that Canada doesn't have a preferred method for handling lithium fires. "They are handled on a case-by-case basis."

Chief Roy insisted that every incident has its own specifics and that he had plenty of experience responding to dangerous goods situations on Highway 417 and on the railway.

"We deal with these incidents on an ongoing basis," he said.

As for the BESS, the mayor said that there are safety measures in the machine itself, saying that if it heats up beyond a certain level, everything will automatically shut down.

A QUESTION OF NOTICE

While most of the questions dealt with safety matters, quite a

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few protestors claimed that council could have done more to inform them about the pending development. They also asked why a public meeting about the BESS – which took place in October of 2023 at the Dunvegan Recreation Hall – took place during harvesting season.

Councillor Jeff Manley reminded the assembly that that meeting was not organized by the Township but by Compass Energy. Council replied that they had advertised the pending bylaw change in newspapers and via social media. Mr. MacDonald added that the Township send notices to anyone who lived within 120 metres of the BESS.

“We have 80 of these applications every year,” Mr. MacDonald said. He then asked if anyone had shown up for the zone change discussion regarding changes at Herb’s truck stop near the 417, which took place the same evening as the BESS zoning bylaw approval.

“We have to treat everything the same. If we had to send out notices by mail to everyone, it’s not doable,” the mayor said.

Later in the meeting, Alexandria Ward Councillor Michael Madden reminded the assembly that council meetings are streamed online and that if people were engaged, they would be watching them.

WHO PAYS?

Richard Hudon, press director for savesdg.com, wanted assurance that the BESS owners will take on costs associated with the project and not pass them on to the taxpayers. Mr. Hudon, who says he has engineering knowledge and is well educated, said “If I was in your chair, Mr. Mayor, I’d be uncomfortable with the kind of reaction you’re getting here.” He urged council to reconsider its rezoning decision and to gather more information on the alleged dangers of the BESS system.

One lady, who did not give her name, claimed to be an expert with a graduate degree in genetic toxicology who acted as co-chair for cleanup protocols for the Great Lakes and was head of Health Canada’s renewal of the Canadian Environment Protection Act. She asked if the Township would provide her the information it has received on the BESS so that she could review it at no extra charge to the Township.

The Mayor agreed to pass its information on to her and that if she concludes that part of the proposal would be unsafe, her findings would be passed on to Compass Energy.

Another North Glengarry resident, Heinz Kazwurm, asked if council had really weighed the costs against the benefits.

“All I see is liability,” he said,

adding that the BESS could affect farmers, livestock and that there’s a possibility people who live in the area might have their insurance cancelled because of it.

The mayor, visibly flustered at this point, denied that insurance would be cancelled. He said that the BESS system would likely be needed at one point and that he is not about to put North Glengarry residents at risk.

“This [BESS] will be important for our infrastructure in the future,” he said, adding that the Township is looking at building 250-350 new housing units in Alexandria and between 800 and one thousand in North Glengarry.”

Deputy-Mayor Carma Williams agreed with the Mayor, even admitting that she wasn’t exactly overly eager when Compass first presented the BESS to council back in 2023. She said that she told Compass she would not support the project unless she had the confidence that they would ensure that it’s a safe a project as it could be.

However, Ms. Williams said that she got the answers she needed and also came to the conclusion that systems like BESS might be a necessity. She said the Township has attended a number of conferences and met with various provincial ministers, who told her that the province will soon have an energy crisis if it doesn’t start managing the supply.

Mr. Kazwurm suggested that

the energy crisis is a red herring – as evidence, he said that hydro power dams along the St. Lawrence River only use about 40 per cent of the power – and that companies like Crisis are interested in making a profit and so wouldn’t be very likely to talk about negative issues associated with the BESS.

SAVE SDG

The Save SDG website includes a youtube link to a video about the Jan. 15, 2025 fire at the Moss Landing Battery Plant in California. Last year, the plant was described as the largest of its kind in the world. Recently, news sources have said that it’s expected to take more than a year to clean up after the fire.

The website also has a link to an online petition that says: “We, the residents of North Glengarry, oppose the BESS facility approved under Zoning By-law Amendment Z-01-2025. The project was passed without enough research and due diligence about the potential impact and with limited public consultation. No proper environmental or fire safety reviews were done. BESS facilities pose fire, health, and national security risks. We demand the by-law be revoked, independent safety assessments be conducted, and a fair consultation be held.”



Please note that this image is of a different BESS facilities and may not exactly represent the final design of the Dunvegan project.

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