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The San Luis Obispo Tribune published an editorial on Sunday October 13 urging Morro Bay residents to **Vote NO on A-24**. Here is a copy of that editorial:

A controversial ballot measure is dividing voters in Morro Bay. Here's our take | Opinion

If you find Morro Bay's Measure A-24 confusing, you are not alone. What began as a campaign to stop construction of a battery energy storage system — or BESS — morphed into a landuse measure on the November ballot.

“When you look at it, it doesn't stop the battery project. It doesn't mention the battery project,” Measure A opponent and former City Councilmember Marlys McPherson told The Tribune Editorial Board. (Proponents of the measure declined to meet with us.)

Measure A-24 would give voters control over development of 103 acres that include the old Morro Bay Power Plant at the north end of Embarcadero Road, where Vistra Corp. wants to build a battery storage facility. That area has historically been an industrial one; in addition to the power plant, there's a PG&E substation there. If the measure passes, only visitor-serving uses, such as hotels, restaurants, shops and recreational fishing facilities, would be permitted — unless voters agreed to change the zoning.

“Our goal is to put the power in the people's hands,” Barry Branin, a proponent of the measure, told The Tribune back in July. Another hoop to jump through.

One caveat: The people won't necessarily have the power to block the controversial battery project.. Vistra has the option of bypassing the city and going to the California Energy Commission for a permit. That's thanks to a process called opt-in certification, which applies to “clean and renewable energy facilities.”

Because Morro Bay is in the coastal zone, the opt-in process would be more complicated; the California Coastal Commission would retain jurisdiction over the project, but the city would be left out of the permitting process.

While it may be powerless to stop the battery project, A-24 would create new hurdles for other applicants interested in developing projects that fall outside the visitor-serving category. They would have to go through the time-consuming and expensive process to to secure voter approval of a zoning change, adding another element of uncertainty to an an approval that's already risky enough.

Projects geared toward tourism would face roadblocks as well. In its current condition, this land is far from shovel-ready. The old power plant buildings need to be demolished, and there's some contaminated soil to contend with. It's hard to imagine that any hotel or restaurant developer would be

willing to sink millions into cleaning up the property on top of construction costs. If industrial developers are locked out and commercial builders aren't interested, the land could be in limbo for decades.

Project would generate millions for Morro Bay. That leaves Vistra Corp. as the most viable option. It's also the most financially beneficial. According to an economic study, [the Brattle Report] the project would generate \$11.4 million in sales or use taxes for the city during construction, plus \$1.3 million in annual property tax revenue once it's up and running.

On top of that, Vistra has already agreed to dismantle the power plant — including the stacks — and to fund a master plan for the site that could include several community benefits, including visitor-serving amenities. (The battery storage facility would cover only a portion of the site.)

But as tempting as those perks are, if the health and safety of citizens truly is jeopardized by the battery plant, then of course Morro Bay — or whatever entity is in charge of permitting — should not allow it.

Is large-scale battery storage risky? Given the recent history of battery storage projects in California, it's understandable that Morro Bay residents would be anxious about having one in their own backyard. There have been several fires at energy storage sites in the state, though no reports of deaths or serious injuries.

Still, that troubled history has caused some public agencies in California to take a closer look at whether to permit them. Solano County, located midway between Sacramento and San Francisco, passed a two-year moratorium in January, "to allow planning staff time to develop land-use standards that ensure public safety, health and welfare." In San Diego County, where there have been two battery storage fires this year that triggered evacuation orders, officials considered a temporary ban but instead passed additional permitting requirements. Public agencies should be cautious. We expect nothing less.

Yet given what's at stake, it's critically important that they also weigh risks versus benefits. Prioritize health and safety, but also recognize that we are in the grip of a worldwide climate crisis. Look at what's happening in Florida. Scientists say climate change has made hurricanes more intense, and according to reporting by the Associated Press, they warn that "continued burning of fossil fuels will lead to more hurricanes like Helene, with 'unimaginable' floods well inland, not just on coasts."

It's imperative that we cut greenhouse gas emissions by transitioning to clean energy, and we can't do that unless we have a method to store solar and wind power. That's why battery storage systems are so important. We cannot afford to automatically reject them based on incomplete or even obsolete information.

It's too soon to say whether the Vistra project, as currently proposed, is right for Morro Bay, but we can say that it deserves a fair hearing — preferably by the city of Morro Bay.

It's disappointing that a group of citizens would try to thwart that with a misleading ballot measure that could undermine local control over development of the facility and stymie other future development.

The Tribune strongly urges Morro Bay residents to vote no on Measure A-24.

Read more at: <https://www.sanluisobispo.com/opinion/editorials/article293506114.html#storylink=cpy>