KitsapCounty

PLANNING COMMISSION

Executive Summary

Issue Title: Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Briefing

Meeting Date: 10/20/2026

Time Required: 45 minutes

Attendees: Jim Rogers, Long Range Planning Supervisor

Action Requested at this Meeting: No action; briefing only

Background:

This briefing is meant to update the Planning Commission on the status of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) code development. We will discuss what BESS systems can look like, the status of the moratorium, important issues to address, experts we have met with, significant issues to address, what's next and the remaining schedule for code adoption.

What is a BESS?

A BESS is a facility that stores electricity in rechargeable batteries—currently lithium-ion is favored—for use when energy demand is high or electricity generation is low. BESS facilities help stabilize the electrical grid, support renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, and provide backup power during outages. These systems range from small installations serving individual buildings to large, utility-scale facilities containing multiple battery units, inverters, transformers, and associated safety equipment. Larger utility-scale systems are often sited near utility substations for ease of development and transfer of power, and lower costs and line maintenance.

The moratorium

DCD received an application for a 170 Megawatt BESS in north Kitsap in mid-2024. The application prompted a moratorium, with one extension granted, and another being sought:

- A one-year moratorium was established on June 11, 2025;
- a six-month extension to the moratorium was approved on May 11, 2026; and
- a second six-month extension to the moratorium is being requested by DCD which puts the final date by which a BESS ordinance must be adopted at June 5, 2027.

Key issues

There several issues to consider when allowing any BESS to be sited:

- Definitions that separate BESS facilities into different classes; standardized approach and conditions for different class-sizes of BESS.
- Compliance with "outside" code requirements, eg, Underwriters Laboratories, National Fire Protection Association.
- Compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood and consistency with the intent of the zone being used, eg, noise, lights, viewshed impacts.
- Hazard mitigation and emergency response to and training for BESS fires. Code must consider environmental consequences of containing and eliminating fire, eg, plume toxicity, water-introduced toxins.
- Conditional Use Permit standards and conditions.
- Decommissioning guarantees and project bonding.

Experts counseled to date

DCD has met with several industry experts including:

- Puget Sound Energy staff, including Chris Green a renowned fire and life safety expert.
- Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, who has advised on narrow issues and zoning controls.
- Sandia National Laboratories (US Department of Energy), a major federal research authority on BESS, particularly on safety, reliability, and performance.
- The Electric Power Research Institute, an independent research organization that conducts research on electricity generation, transmission, distribution, and energy storage. It is one of the leading organizations researching BESS safety and failures.
- Industry guidance from WA Dept of Commerce, National Association of Counties (NACo), and Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC).
- Green energy advocates such as Greenlight America, Clean and Prosperous, and Renewable NW.
- Several counties and cities, largely to understand approach, concerns, and zoning controls.
- A site visit to Seaside BESS facility in North Portland, OR that has a power capacity of 200 MW.

Major issues for the PC to consider

The more significant challenges for the County will largely rest in two areas. While DCD feels that it can treat many of the issues identified above in zoning code, there are challenges:

- Where should the different sizes of BESS facilities be allowed and in which zones?
- What is the permissibility of different classes of BESS? We will likely have 4 classes of uses, with an accessory use being permitted outright (eg, Telsa Powerwall residential storage) to a Type III Conditional Use Permit before the Hearing Examiner (eg, 200 MW or larger).

DCD will provide recommendations and zoning documents to assist the Planning Commission in those discussions.

What's next?

DCD needs to start packaging a draft BESS ordinance for the Planning Commission (eg, zones, standards and conditions, and permissibility). DCD will be conducting outreach for the County, perhaps as early as November. DCD will be asking experts to attend meetings where they can, since many of the issues are deeply technical and beyond typical staff knowledge.

The draft schedule lands adoption in May.

Public Outreach Meeting #1	Mid-November
Planning Commission Scoping Briefing	December
Board Scoping Meeting	December
Draft Ordinance	January
Public Outreach Meeting #2	January
PC Public Hearing	February
Board Public Hearing	April
Board Adoption	May