Solar and Battery Storage Fire Readiness Program

A shared program for the fire protection districts of Yolo County

Capitol Public Finance Group | Roseville, California | September 2026

The situation

Commercial and utility-scale solar and battery energy storage projects are coming to rural Yolo County. The County already regulates both. Yolo County Code section 8-2.1104 governs solar energy systems and provides that all of them shall meet the health and safety standards and requirements of the local fire district. Section 8-2.1105 governs energy storage systems above 600 kWh and requires a decommissioning fund or bond. Neither section refers an application to the district that will respond, and neither funds fire readiness. When a project is built inside your boundaries, your district is the first and primary responder to it.

A battery storage incident is not a structure fire. The accepted practice is controlled burn-down with boundary cooling and protection of exposures, sustained for hours or days, with large water supply, gas monitoring, and specialized protective equipment. Being ready for that costs money whether or not anything ever burns. That cost is the Cost of Readiness.

Why existing revenue does not cover it

- **Impact fees do not reach these projects.** Fire facility fees are charged on building square footage. A solar array or a field of battery enclosures has almost none. The Mitigation Fee Act also prohibits using fee revenue for personnel, training, or operations, which is most of the readiness cost.
- **Property tax arrives late and small.** A district receives a small share of the one percent levy, and only after the facility is enrolled on the roll following completion. Under current law, active solar systems completed before January 1, 2027 are excluded from assessment as new construction.
- **General revenue is already committed.** Your property tax funds baseline service to existing residents. Absorbing readiness for a new industrial hazard means taking something away from them.

What the program does

The program gives each district a standing, predictable process so it is prepared before a project arrives rather than after. Three documents make it work: a board resolution, an adopted policy, and a project intake form.

1. The applicant notifies the district and meets and confers with the district early, consistent with Senate Bill 283, which requires a battery storage applicant to meet and confer with the fire authority having jurisdiction within 30 days of filing, whether the application goes to the County or to the California Energy Commission.
2. The applicant submits the intake form and a $30,000 analysis deposit. The deposit funds the district's review, including counsel and consultants, and is replenished if costs run higher. Unspent balances are refunded.
3. Capitol PFG, as the district's consultant, prepares a project-specific readiness analysis: what responding to this project requires, what the district lacks, what closing the gap costs, and how shared costs are allocated across projects. The applicant sees the draft and may comment.

4. The district negotiates a fire mitigation agreement with one-time capital funding, annual funding escalated by index, event-driven cost recovery, training and drills, access and water requirements, and successor obligations.
5. The board approves the agreement at a public meeting after counsel review. Contributions are accounted for separately from general revenue and reported annually.

What it is, and what it is not

The program is	The program is not
A negotiated, project-specific mitigation contribution supported by a documented cost basis	A tax, a special assessment, or an impact fee, and it fixes no rate or schedule
A defined process the County and applicants can rely on	A permit condition the district can impose on its own; the district has no land use authority
Compatible with your inspection and sign-off duties, which continue regardless of funding	A basis to delay or withhold any inspection, plan review, or code determination
Restricted money for readiness: apparatus, equipment, training, and incremental staffing	General operating revenue

Where the leverage comes from

Your district cannot condition or deny a project. Its position is enforced through three channels, and the program is built to use all three:

- **Senate Bill 283.** The applicant must meet and confer with you and cannot begin commercial operation without your inspection and sign-off, at the applicant's cost.
- **County conditions of approval.** The County's own code already provides, in section 8-2.1104(d)(1), that all solar energy systems shall meet the health and safety standards and requirements of the local fire district. The districts will ask the County to carry that principle into section 8-2.1105 for energy storage and, for both, to add referral of applications to the responding district and a fire mitigation agreement as a condition of approval.
- **State certification.** Under the AB 205 opt-in program a project may bypass the County entirely and be certified by the California Energy Commission. The Commission has conditioned certification on the owner reaching agreement with the responding fire district on one-time and annual funding, with binding arbitration if the parties cannot agree. A district that has documented its capability on the record is positioned to obtain that condition.

Why join as a group

- One framework, one point of contact for the County, and one consistent set of terms for applicants, so no district is played against another.
- One consultant and a common capability record format, so a volunteer district is not asked to run a 45-day analysis on its own.
- A single, credible request to the County of Yolo from the districts together rather than six separate ones.

Cost to join

A district's cost to join is capped at $5,000: a flat $2,500 for the documents and up to $2,500 for adoption support, billed on actual time. Everything after adoption is project work, funded by the applicant's deposit. The $30,000 deposit is designed to cover the district's costs to evaluate a project and obtain a fire mitigation agreement, including Capitol PFG's time, district counsel, and other third parties, and the district may adjust it for a particular project. If projected costs exceed the deposit, the district requires replenishment before work continues.

Item	Amount	Who pays
Program documents: resolution, policy, and intake form customized for the district	$2,500 flat, per district	District
Document adoption: one in-person board presentation, coordination with district counsel, and coordination with the County	Up to $2,500 per district, billed on actual time at $250 per hour	District
Project work by Capitol PFG as the district's consultant: meet-and-confer, intake review, cost of readiness analysis, applicant review support, collaboration with district counsel	$250 per hour, charged against the applicant deposit	Applicant deposit
District counsel and other third-party costs of a project review	Actual cost, charged against the applicant deposit	Applicant deposit
Ongoing consulting after adoption, outside a project review	$250 per hour	District

What joining involves

1. Indicate your district's interest and identify a target board meeting date.
2. Provide the district information the documents require: career and volunteer staffing, staffed stations, and your district's share of the one percent levy.
3. Route the resolution and policy to district counsel for review and approval as to form.
4. Adopt the resolution at a noticed public meeting. The policy and intake form take effect with it.
5. Join the common transmittal to the County of Yolo and the other districts.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Is this a tax, a fee, or an assessment?

No. It is none of the three. A tax requires voter approval. A special assessment requires a Proposition 218 ballot proceeding and a special benefit finding. An impact fee is adopted under the Mitigation Fee Act on a fixed schedule. This program fixes no rate and imposes nothing unilaterally. Each contribution is a negotiated agreement, approved by your board, supported by a written cost analysis for that project.

We have no permitting authority. What makes an applicant participate?

Three things. Senate Bill 283 requires the applicant to meet and confer with you and obtain your inspection sign-off before operating. The County's code already says solar systems must meet your health and safety requirements, and the County of Yolo can make a fire mitigation agreement a condition of approval, and the districts will ask it to. And if the project goes to the California Energy Commission instead of the County, the Commission can condition certification on a funding agreement with your district, which it has done. An applicant who declines to participate will find that request, with your documented capability record, in every one of those forums.

Will this drive projects away from our district?

The program is designed to negotiate, not to obstruct. Applicants get a defined process, a defined timeline, a draft analysis they can comment on, and a board decision at a public meeting. Developers already fund fire mitigation in other jurisdictions and in Commission proceedings. Predictability is what they ask for, and this provides it.

Why a $30,000 deposit, and is that the ceiling?

The deposit is not a charge on the project. It is held against the district's actual cost of the analysis, consultants, and counsel, with a written accounting and a refund of any unspent balance. It is sized to cover the district's costs to evaluate a project and obtain a fire mitigation agreement, and the district may adjust it for a particular project. It is not a ceiling. If projected costs exceed the deposit, the district notifies the applicant and requires replenishment before further work proceeds. The only way a district carries cost is if an applicant declines to replenish and the board elects to continue, which is the board's decision at that point.

What does it cost the district to join?

No more than $5,000. The documents are a flat $2,500 per district. Adoption support, meaning one in-person board presentation and coordination with your counsel and the County, is billed on actual time at $250 per hour and capped at $2,500. After adoption, project work is funded by the applicant's deposit. Consulting outside a project review, if a district wants it, is $250 per hour.

Who does the work, and who is paid from the deposit?

Capitol PFG is the consultant to the districts under the program. It supports the meet-and-confer, reviews the intake form, prepares the cost of readiness analysis, supports the district through the applicant review, and works with district counsel on the agreement, at $250 per hour charged against the deposit. District counsel and any other third-party cost are also charged against the deposit. The district pays counsel and third parties directly and recovers those costs from the deposit.

What can the money be spent on?

Anything the analysis identifies as readiness: apparatus and appliances, water supply and access improvements, gas detection and monitoring instruments, protective equipment, training and drills, pre-incident planning, and incremental staffing needed to mount and sustain a response while still covering the rest of the district. That is the main practical difference from an impact fee, which cannot fund training or personnel.

Does this affect our duty to inspect or respond?

No. The resolution and policy state that the district will not condition, withhold, or delay any inspection, plan review, sign-off, or code determination on funding discussions, and that participation is not an endorsement of any project. Your duty to respond is unchanged.

What about projects already approved or already operating?

A project already approved or certified but not yet built is not subject to the requirement, though the district may seek a voluntary agreement and its inspection role still applies. A project with an application on file but not yet approved is covered. An existing agreement stays in place until the project expands, repowers, or renews.

What if the County does not amend its ordinance?

The program still works. The County channel is one of three. Senate Bill 283 and the Commission certification process operate regardless of the County's action, and the districts can still ask the County to condition individual approvals.

Who prepares the analysis, and is it independent?

Capitol PFG, as the district's consultant, reporting solely to the district. The applicant's deposit pays for it but gives the applicant no say in the consultant, the scope, or the conclusions. The applicant does receive the draft with its data and assumptions and has 15 days to comment. One consultant and one capability record format across the county keeps the work consistent from district to district.

What happens if the applicant and the district cannot agree?

The mitigation agreement provides for final and binding arbitration at the applicant's cost, decided on the documented analysis. That mirrors the structure the Energy Commission has used in its own conditions of certification.

What does the board have to do?

Adopt one resolution at a noticed public meeting after counsel review. The policy and intake form are attached to it. Every mitigation agreement comes back to the board for approval; nothing in the program delegates authority to bind the district.

What information do you need from our district?

Career and volunteer staffing, the number of staffed stations, your district's share of the one percent property tax levy, the name of your counsel, and a target meeting date.