

City of Colorado Springs

Planning Commission

Meeting Minutes – Excerpt

Wednesday, May 14, 2025

5.A. PDZZ-25-0001 - Tava Mountain Battery Energy Storage Facility

An Ordinance amending the zoning map of the City of Colorado Springs relating to 6.18 acres located at 1133 South Royer Street from GI (General Industrial) to PDZ (Planned Development Zone District; Non-Residential; 180,000 maximum square footage; 80 feet maximum building height) (First Reading to set public hearing date for June 24th, 2025) (Quasi-Judicial)

Related Files:

Located in Council District 3

Presenter:

Allison Stocker, Senior Planner, Planning Department

Kevin Walker, Planning Director, Planning Department

Joseph Bransky, member of the public, requested the Tava Mountain Battery Energy Storage Facility to be called off the consent agenda.

Tamara Baxter, Planning Supervisor, presented the application for Tava Mountain Battery Energy Storage consisting of 4.49 acres located at 1133 South Royer Street. The zone change is from General Industrial to Planned Development Zone; non-residential; 180,000 maximum square footage; 80 feet maximum building height. The land is currently used as heavy equipment storage and part of the development is a proposed detention area. Ms. Baxter City of Colorado Springs Page 2 Printed on 6/6/2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes - Draft May 14, 2025 said zoning is required to provide community benefits such as landscape and sustainable development practices that will be determined at the time of the development plan. Standard notice was done, and comments were received with concerns about safety issues with the battery storage, additional vehicle and work traffic. City Agency Review was done, Traffic Engineering indicated that the applicant will be responsible for any improvements on El Paso Street. All other comments were addressed. The project is compliant with PlanCOS, and the application meets the review criteria.

Applicant's Presentation

Chris Beasley, Project Developer for esVolta, said that Tava Mountain Energy Storage provides a 100 megawatts of energy capacity for four hours, that will charge during the day and discharge in peak hours. He said the main reasons they chose this site are Federal tax incentives, the utilization of existing transmission infrastructure, and the parcels being zoned industrial. Mr. Beasley provided a slideshow with maps of the area with existing uses. Mr. Beasley said some of the community benefits coming from this project are 4.6 million dollars in taxes over the 20-year project life cycle, the reinforcement of local energy reliability, and supporting equitable outcomes through cost efficient Development. He said that the battery facilities are operated remotely, so there will be minimal traffic for routine maintenance; they only use water for landscape irrigation, and there will be no emissions or discernible noise. Mr. Beasley said that the batteries meet or exceed the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) requirements and comply with the standard for installation of stationary energy storage systems. There is 24/7 monitoring, and there will be an emergency response plan and annual responder training.

Public Comment

Patrick Meade, property owner, spoke in support of the project. Mr. Meade said he has been working with Mr. Beasley for three years and he feels that they are professional. He said this project is a perfect neighbor for daily operations. He spoke to a resident in the area and said he appreciated the low impact the business will have in the area.

Joseph Bransky spoke in opposition to the project, as he lives in the area, and it attracts a lot of people. He described the neighboring properties and facilities, and their occupants. He said that he has done some research that indicates that battery storage facilities are prone to various faults that can lead to fires and explosions, as it happened in Germany and Poland. Other examples are a massive e-bike fire in a storage facility in New York, and plant fires in California and Montana, due to the thermal runaway, defect in battery chemistry, overheating, poor air conditioning, incorrect design and parameters, and short circuit caused by defects. Mr. Bransky said that even with safety promises, fire or explosions still happened in California, and the areas took a long time to recover.

Applicant Rebuttal

Chris Beasley, Project Developer for esVolta, expressed that the battery systems have come a long way in the last few years, and there is even more opportunity for improvement of the code and equipment until 2028 or 2029 when the project will be built. He explained how the testing for each battery cell is done, and because of the quality, it is very difficult for a battery

to go on fire. He said the project will be compliant with the NFPA and safety requirements, will have fire detection technology, equipment spacing, monitoring systems, deflagration panels, fire department staging area, fire suppression water and explosion prevention.

Commissioner Questions

Commissioner Hensler asked what the applicant meant by developing the project with CSU in mind, if there will be a contract with them that they will be utilizing the storage. Mr. Beasley said CSU is currently reworking their IFP to meet the needs of Colorado Springs and expect to publish it in the next couple of months, and the RPF by end of the year. He said that they intend to contract with CSU, however, CSU typically wants to see a project with full permits in hand, and the interconnection transmission studies completed. Mr. Beasley said they plan to have a viable project for CSU in the next six months.

Commissioner Hensler asked if they are trying to rezone and develop the property before the contract because CSU requires the site to be ready, instead of going through this process once the contract has been awarded. Mr. Beasley said that CSU wants to make sure that all the due diligence was done before they sign a contract.

Commissioner Hensler asked about setbacks from the property line, if there is fencing, and what are the risks and mitigations in case of an explosion. Mr. Beasley said the setbacks are 10 feet from the property line, and there will be a six-foot chain-link fence with one-foot barbed wire fence. He said if there are any concerns they could place a block fence eight-foot high. Mr. Beasley said he will get more information regarding the impacted area in case of an explosion, but he does not expect it to happen thanks to the mitigation measures that are in place, especially with the venting.

Commissioner Cecil asked how long the tax incentives would likely provide the benefit of a discounted rate to make the stored energy attractive to CSU. Mr. Beasley said the tax incentives apply once they start spending money on the project, so they hope to start buying equipment and start working before the benefit expires. Commissioner Cecil clarified her question about the time frame in which the benefits they get from the credit depreciate, as Mr. Beasley had mentioned they will have 15- 20% below the normal resell cost. Mr. Beasley said they can easily predict their income and expenses for the next 20 years because their economic model is relatively set and flat, and the utility does not change unless an annual increase is agreed on.

Commissioner Cecil asked where the remote monitoring is located. Mr. Beasley said that it usually takes place in Houston, and it is connected to “The Rock” with fiber and it has near immediate feedback. Commissioner Cecil said these facilities can be targeted for cyberattacks and asked how the mitigation for disruption and what are their backups. Mr. Beasley replied that all similar facilities are regulated by NCERT and follow their requirements to mitigate that risk and is very secure. Mr. Beasley will follow up regarding the backups.

Commissioner Cecil asked about phosphate emissions. Mr. Beasley said they are not emissions, but the older batteries chemistry was lithium-ion cobalt, which is a higher energy density and better performance, but more liable to go into thermal runaway and catch on fire. Mr. Beasley said the new standard is lithium-ion phosphate for battery cells for standalone storage, which are less efficient and take up more space but has a higher resistance to go into thermal runaway and mitigate the risk of fires.

Commissioner Cecil asked if there were any concerns about the rail uses directly adjacent to the site. Mr. Beasley said the site is located on a hill and separated by the automotive scrap yard with natural barriers around.

Commissioner Cecil asked how the batteries are disposed. Mr. Beasley said it depends on the manufacturer and rules are constantly changing. He said their provider is Sungrow, a Chinese company. He said commissioned batteries will go back to Sungrow and they can reuse what they can in the future and dispose of the rest. Commissioner Cecil asked where Sungrow is located. Mr. Beasley said they are a Chinese company. He said Colorado passed a law requiring battery sellers to figure out a way to recycle. Mr. Beasley said that they would not be recycling their batteries for 25 years.

Commissioner Cecil said according to the Battery Energy Storage System Failure Incident Database, incidents ranging from 2016-2024 showing a decrease than an increase in 2024.. Mr. Beasley said he could not give a direct commentary as he has not personally seen these numbers, but some incidents have occurred with legacy systems with different battery chemistries.

Commissioner Cecil asked why Colorado Springs Utilities chose to develop on a new site, instead of the almost 40 acres site they just cleared. Mr. Beasley said he cannot speak for Colorado Springs Utilities, but in the past, they have offered that acreage for battery storage in previous RFPs that never went forward. He said oftentimes these utilities are looking for

additional resources to add to their network, but it is a lot of work and risk, and they prefer to split 50-50 with third parties.

Commissioner Casey asked if the use was not permitted in the current GI zone. Ms. Baxter said this type of use is a major public facility which is only allowed in PF, and since the project will not start until 2029, they will continue to use it as heavy storage. She said by doing the PDZ they will follow GI dimensional standards and uses, so that battery storage or that major public facility, would be allowed in the PDZ zone district.

Commissioner Robbins asked if the income from this is paid by City utilities or are they expecting to get paid back through utilities overtime. Mr. Beasley said they would sign a contract with Colorado Spring Utilities for a set monthly amount for the expenditures and operational part so CSU can provide the power. Commissioner Robbins asked if they are looking at other locations. Mr. Beasley said he personally is not and Colorado Spring Utilities contracted with NextEra, which is currently under construction, and there is another project near the airport.

Commissioner Robbins asked if they were planning to build anything other than battery storage. Mr. Beasley said that it will be the battery storage which looks like large shipping containers.

Commissioner Hensler said having the technical information has been helpful and said the use is compatible.

Mr. Walker asked Commissioner Cecil to make comments to the no vote for Council. Commissioner Cecil said some of the responses to the questions she asked were disheartening and has an overarching concern with the placement. Commissioner Cecil said after seeing what happened at Moss Landing and not knowing the health effects on the 1500 residents from the evacuation, or whether they can safely grow and store food. Commissioner Cecil said she does not feel that it is worth it for the location to intensify the use in a potentially catastrophic way, while there is still capacity in terms of space for locating this away from residents.

Motioned by Commissioner Hensler and seconded by Commissioner Casey to recommend approval to City Council the zone change of 4.49 acres from GI (General Industrial) to PDZ (Planned Development Zone; non-residential; 180,000 maximum square footage; 80 feet maximum building height) based upon the findings that the request complies with



the criteria for a Zoning Map Amendment as set forth in City Code Section 7.5.704.

The motion passed on a vote of 6-1-2.

Aye: 6 - Vice Chair Foos, Commissioner Hensler, Commissioner Robbins, Commissioner Sipilovic, Commissioner Casey and Commissioner Gigiano

No: 1 - Commissioner Cecil

Absent: 2 - Commissioner Rickett, Chair Slattery, Alternate Benenati and Alternate Case