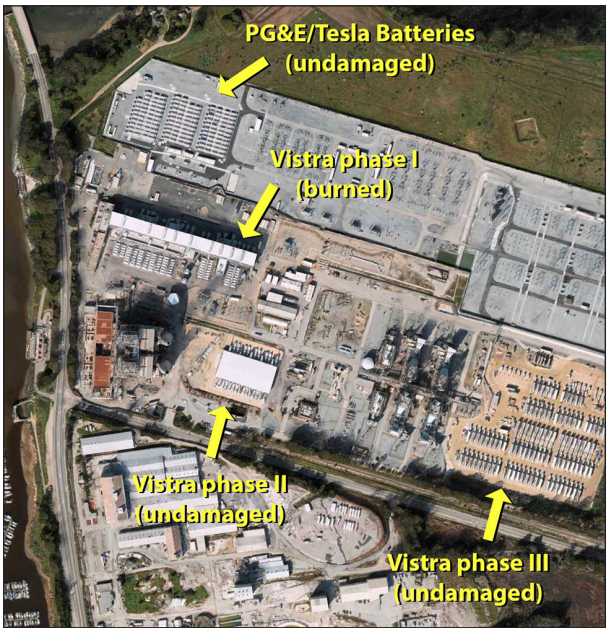


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County opposes restart of Moss Landing batteries

By KELLY NIX

MONTEREY COUNTY officials are urging utility giant PG&E to halt a plan to restart its battery storage



CARMEL PINE CONE GRAPHIC

An aerial from before the Vistra fire in January shows the four energy storage facilities in Moss Landing, including the PG&E outdoor battery storage area (top) and the adjacent Vistra building that burned. Highway 1 runs along the left side of the photo.

facility in Moss Landing on June 1 — about four months after a fire broke out at the nearby Vistra storage plant.

A spokesperson said Monday that Monterey County has urged PG&E to wait to reactivate its energy storage operation at the Moss Landing Power Plant until details of an emergency response plan have been worked out. The plan, proposed by State Sen. John Laird, would in part require each battery storage facility in the state to coordinate with local fire agencies during an emergency.

Evacuations, health concerns

The legislation was introduced after a Jan. 16 fire at the Vistra Energy plant which led to the evacuation of about 1,200 people, environmental concerns, reports of adverse health symptoms and several lawsuits.

Though its facility in Moss Landing was undamaged, PG&E voluntarily shut it down after the fire. Vistra also has undamaged batteries that could be restarted.

“We asked Vistra and PG&E to wait until the cause of the fire has been determined,” Monterey County 2nd District Supervisor Glenn Church told The Pine Cone Tuesday. “This does impact PG&E, even if it wasn’t the source of this fire.”

Unlike Vistra’s batteries, PG&E’s are outdoors, which would make a fire easier to contain. Still, Church said there’s potential for a fire to spread to PG&E’s property and the public needs to know just how the Vistra fire started.

“In addition, PG&E had a fire in one of their units in 2022 that caused Highway 1 to shut down and for

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Monterey Fire to take over Carmel’s ambulance

By MARY SCHLEY

SKY-HIGH OVERTIME, staffing shortages and lack of management have plagued the city’s ambulance service for years. Last week, the Carmel City Council decided that the City of Monterey, which took over fire service in the city in 2012, should take over the ambulance, too.

While the deal is expected to add \$267,000 to the \$2,136,209 assistant city administrator Brandon Swanson anticipates the department will cost, as is, in the 2025-2026 fiscal year — a figure that includes salaries and benefits, supplies, repairs and administration — it will bring stronger oversight, consistent staffing and other benefits.

Rights threatened

Police Chief Paul Tomasi has been in charge of the ambulance — which is atypical for a police chief, Swanson pointed out — and while Tomasi has developed expertise in that area, whoever succeeds him is unlikely to have it. In addition, short staffing has taken the ambulance out of service 30 days during the past 12 months, prompting a warning from Monterey County that the city could lose the right to operate it.

“Our ambulance has been out of service 30 days over the last 12 months,” he said, because there weren’t enough

employees available to work. The ambulance requires two people — an EMT and a paramedic — and the department calls for a staff of six people. But with ongoing vacancies, the inability to operate was not unusual.

Superior service

“We received notification from the county that we are at risk of losing our 201 rights,” Swanson said, referring to a state law passed in 1980 that set standards for agencies electing to manage their own ambulance services. Monterey, Pacific Grove and all the other cities in Monterey County elected to give up their 201 rights and use the county contractor, which is American Medical Response, but Carmel preferred to continue operating its own, as it has since 1930.

Once 201 rights are relinquished, they cannot be reinstated, according to Monterey Fire Chief Andrew Miller. He said when the ambulance is operating, the city’s residents and visitors receive an unusually high level of service, with response times often under three minutes.

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PASTOR BUYS BIG SUR RETAIL, RESTAURANT PROPERTY

By MARY SCHLEY

PATRICE PASTOR, who has accumulated considerable amounts of real estate in Carmel over the past decade and is working on several significant projects here, last week purchased The Village complex next to the Big Sur River Inn. In a private deal that involved no realtors, Pastor bought the property from Patrick Orosco for \$4 million, according to Monterey County property records.

The Village is Pastor’s second Big Sur holding. He acquired the 2.5-acre Rocky Point Restaurant, which includes three attached apartments, for \$8 million in November 2021.

Reopened last summer

Orosco had owned The Village — comprising an event space and a restaurant, coffee bar, shop and yoga studio that are generally open Friday through Sunday — since May 2017, when he purchased it from Jali and Cynthia Morgenrath for \$1.65 million. Orosco is the son of the late Don Orosco, a well-known real estate investor and developer, and has been involved in numerous projects throughout the Monterey Peninsula under the auspices of The Orosco Group, of which he is a managing partner.

After remodeling The Village, Orosco reopened the complex in 2019. By then a six-year resident of Big Sur, he envisioned a community-based space that would fill

CPUC sides with Cal Am on need for new water

■ Big step toward desal construction

By KELLY NIX

THE CALIFORNIA Public Utilities Commission ruled Monday that California American Water’s projections of long-term water demand for the Monterey Peninsula are largely correct — a landmark decision that adds momentum and legal justification for Cal Am to build the desal plant it has sought for more than 20 years.

A 47-page proposed decision released May 9 by PUC administrative law judges Robert Haga and Jack Chang sided with Cal Am’s projected 2050 water demand of 13,732 acre-feet per year and current water supply of 11,204 acre-feet per year.

“A total 2050 demand forecast projection of 13,732 acre-feet of water is reasonable,” according to the judges.

The PUC ruling on supply and demand was one of the conditions of the California Coastal Commission’s November 2022 approval of Cal Am’s desalination plant.

“The proposed decision is great,” Cal Am spokesman Evan Jacobs told The Pine Cone. “I wish we’d gotten it a couple of years ago, because we are ready to move forward on the desal plant. The ruling clearly demonstrates that desal will be needed by 2050.”

Cal Am’s approved estimate includes 500 acre-feet of water for tourism rebound, 1,180 acre-feet for legal lots of record and 325 acre-feet in so-called Pebble Beach entitlements, which is water the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District granted to the Pebble Beach Company for developing a \$67 million wastewater reclamation project to irrigate its golf courses.

To explain its projected water demand for tourists, Cal Am argued that Monterey hotel occupancy is expected to increase 12 to 15 percent over the next several decades. The local hospitality industry agrees that more water is necessary for “expected increases in tourism on the Peninsula,” the judges noted.

And according to the decision, legal lots of record are the “backlog of vacant commercial, industrial and residential properties that remain undeveloped and currently cannot be developed due to the existing moratorium on new

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Sacramento on track to spend \$1.1 billion on Capitol Annex

By CAITLIN CONRAD

ITALIAN STONEWORK, secret hallways and a price tag rivaling a professional sports stadium. No, we’re not talking about the new police station in Carmel, we’re talking about the Capitol Annex in Sacramento.

With a budget of \$1.1 billion, the project is under construction in Capitol Park and is poised to be one of the most expensive office buildings in state history — but just how the money is being spent is shrouded in mystery.

The 500,000-square-foot project was approved by the Assembly’s Joint Committee on Rules in 2017 and was initially budgeted to cost taxpayers \$543 million — a figure that was supposed to cover the cost of an office building for lawmakers, a parking garage and a visitor center.

The approval included the demolition of the old stone

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some notable gaps. “It has always seemed odd to me that Big Sur didn’t have a vegetarian restaurant, it didn’t have a

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PHOTO/COURTESY THE VILLAGE

The Village property includes Solstice, a restaurant that focuses on wood-fired cuisine.