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Good afternoon.

I would like to take a moment to offer my thoughts on the Battery Energy Storage System being proposed in the South March area. I know that many of you have been waiting to hear what my position would be, and in the spirit of healthy and informed conversation, I first wanted to give the community a chance to ask the applicant questions, receive answers, conduct research, and discuss this proposal with other community members.

My goal was to gather input from as many residents as possible before coming to a position.

I have met with and heard from residents and stakeholders – some are supportive of the project, and some are opposed to a project of this scale in their community. At this point, it is abundantly clear what the majority position is amongst the residents of Ward 5, and I want them to know that I will fiercely defend the voice of my constituents.

After careful consideration, the community strongly believes that the chosen location, combined with the large scale of the project, and the valid concerns about the potential risks of accidents—especially given that the technology is new and rapidly evolving—mean that the project cannot be supported at the proposed location.

Addressing Opposition Claims

Some have suggested, including one of my council colleagues, that any opposition to this project is simply based on misinformation from social media or ideological resistance to BESS technology. While there are a small number of people who are likely opposed to any form of BESS in any location, I firmly believe the vast majority of residents in ward 5 have carefully reached their conclusion and respectfully voiced their concerns. I reject any insinuation that the residents of ward 5 are being unreasonable or simply don't know what they are talking about.

Community's Commitment to Progress

Our community is home to several large-scale solar projects, hydroelectric dams, conservation areas, and many agricultural operations whose future relies on being good stewards of the land. I remain the only Ottawa City Councillor who has ever brought a motion to the Council table to give a Municipal Support Resolution to a BESS project.

Our community is not against progress.

Additionally, the future of our province's energy grid or the planet's climate does not rest in our hands with this single project. Framing the debate in this way will never lead to a positive path forward for projects of this nature.

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Issues with Evolugen's Consultation Approach

While the company has made some effort to improve its communication since last spring in Fitzroy, I remain disappointed with Evolugen's approach to consultation with the residents of Ward 5. The company has made several decisions that I believe have damaged its credibility and trust with the community.

For example, I advised them to ensure they had detailed answers to people's questions and concerns when they began their consultation on the new site. It has now been more than a full year since their original submission, and they still cannot articulate how they would deal with a fire. The best they have been able to do is to repeat, word-for-word, the Ottawa Fire Service's general statement on responding to BESS fires, which include strategies that are not possible at the site they're targeting.

At the event held at WCSS, the company used the official OFS logo on their promotional material. Not only did they not seek permission from the City or OFS, the OFS Chief says the company was directly told to remove the emblem. Its use implies an official endorsement or relationship with OFS, which is offside, especially since fire considerations are such a core concern of residents.

To summarize, Evolugen has not submitted any type of fire management plan to OFS for review, OFS has not endorsed the project, and the proponent should not have been using the OFS emblem.

Lack of Town-Hall-Style Engagement

After much feedback from the public, and from me as their representative, it was suggested to Evolugen that they should consider moving to a town-hall style event where residents could ask questions and hear the answers to those questions collectively. They decided not to accommodate this request from the community. While that is their right, it is not indicative of a company looking to genuinely build a relationship with our community.

Community Decision-Making

Many of the advocates for this project will have you believe that opposition to this technology in this location is grounded in scare tactics and misinformation. As with all public conversations in this day and age, there has been some misinformation spread. At every opportunity, I have tried my best to address this to ensure our decisions were being made rationally.

I can assure anyone with those concerns that our community knows how to read, can see through obvious bias, and has come to a thoughtful decision.

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Efforts to Bridge Information Gap

In an attempt to fill that information void, I worked alongside community members, City staff, and CAFES, to host an information event for our community that discussed our power grid, how it works, and the important role various technologies will play in strengthening our grid in the future. I invited the Independent Energy System Operator (IESO), the provincial crown corporation responsible for managing our grid and the procurement process for the many companies and organizations that supply that grid.

Sadly, the IESO refused to attend that meeting.

I think this would have been a perfect opportunity for them to provide information and answer questions from the community. They have since told me they do not believe it is their job to facilitate these conversations and will continue to rely on the applicants themselves to make the case for their projects.

This reflects a failure on the part of the IESO and the province. They've put the community in an unfair position, feeling that the future of our grid relies on our community supporting a project they are not comfortable with in the location proposed. This is not right.

Further to that point, the 250MW project being proposed in our community is the only one the IESO has ever given a contract to without having a Municipal Support Resolution (MSR). They have also since amended their policy so that all applicants must now have an MSR when their application is submitted. That means that they have put our community in a unique and very awkward position.

The situation we have found ourselves in is not the fault of this community because it is uncomfortable with this large-scale project. It is the fault of the IESO and the applicant who have both failed at their jobs.

To my constituents who are supportive of this technology, please know that I am not opposed to the technology or the idea itself. But these projects need to be sited properly, and community support is essential. Every member of ARAC and Council supported an MSR for a BESS project close to the Trail Road Landfill because there were far fewer concerns around safety in a location close to a waste facility and an aggregate and mineral extraction area.

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Evolugen will argue that these sites have been selected because they are in close proximity to main transmission lines. However, their planned project at Trail Road is not, and will use approximately 4km of cable to hook up to transmission lines. I cannot help but think that if this proposal was sited more appropriately, we would be having a different conversation.

Again, I have supported BESS projects in the past where the location made sense and where the community was supportive. If this project was to be moved to a more appropriate location, and the community is properly consulted, then I would be happy to reconsider my position. In fact, I would even be willing to assist in finding a more fitting location for a such a project. Ottawa has industrial and other areas that would be much more appropriate.

Summary

Some will inevitably make the claim that I am simply taking the easiest political position. The fact of the matter is this: I was not elected to tell people what to think. I was elected to be their voice at the Council table and the position of the community, in this case, is clear.

There is too much at stake to get this wrong.

As always, it is both a pleasure and an honour to represent the great people of West Carleton-March.

Sincerely,

Clarke Kelly

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