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OEB Provides Guidance Regarding Distributed Energy Resources Projects

By Fred D. Cass

On November 26, 2020, Ontario Energy Board staff issued two letters providing guidance to support the efficient and timely connection of Distributed Energy Resources (DER) projects.

In one of the November 26 letters, OEB staff addressed information requirements to aid discussions between DER proponents and electricity distributors at the outset of DER connection projects. This letter indicates that an issue emerged in the OEB's DER Connections Review about the ability of proponents to determine the potential for a specific project in a timely way and, as a first step, to determine the availability of capacity on the electricity distribution system to connect a proposed project. Priority was given by the DER Connections Review Working Group to consideration of improvements to information-sharing to allow early and quick decisions about project viability. As well, a set of recommendations was developed for the exchange of information between DER proponents and distributors at the beginning of a potential project to facilitate a determination of feasibility to proceed to the connection impact assessment stage. A listing of such information to be exchanged in a written format is provided in an attachment to the OEB staff's letter. OEB staff also provided sample forms for a Preliminary Consultation Application and a Preliminary Consultation Report, which lay out expected information from project proponents/customers and distributors, respectively.

The other November 26 letter addressed a more technical subject, namely, a sample protection philosophy for use with connection projects intended for self-supply that use non-exporting, inverter-based technologies. This letter emanated from a suggestion that a common understanding of potential requirements for the protection interface between a proposed DER project and the distribution system would enable project proponents to submit better applications for connection to the distribution system. With the letter, OEB staff made available to electricity distributors a sample protection philosophy for non-exporting, inverter-based connections, including storage, solar and wind, that can be shared with proponents/customers as a reference to aid in improving the quality of connection applications. OEB staff expressed the view that the use of a common approach will likely reduce costs for distributors and customers and will facilitate responses by distributors to DER connection inquiries.

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