

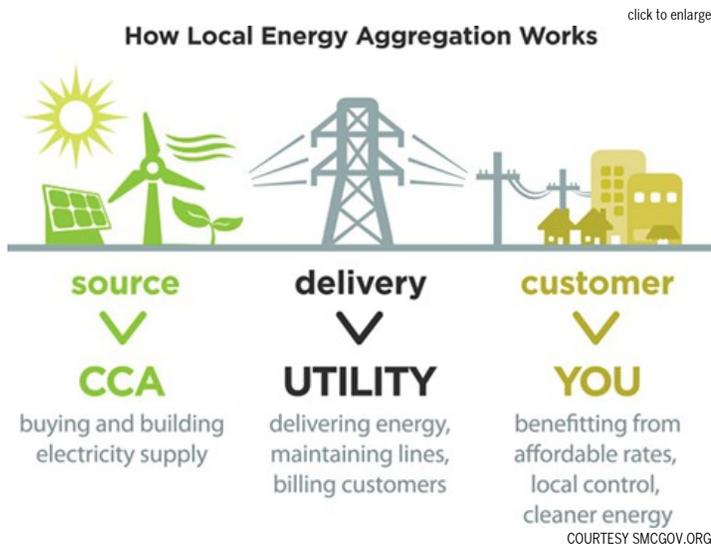


Opinion » Guest Columns

February 19, 2015

## A new energy future awaits

By Mike Guingona



A community-choice aggregation plan has been proposed for San Mateo County. Daly City and other cities in the county will consider whether to join the clean-energy program. Residents would have the ability to opt-out of the program.

Daly City recently took a small step forward to change the way in which our community will buy and consume electricity.

Our city recently volunteered to join a countywide study to evaluate the feasibility of forming a local community-choice aggregation agency, an effort led by San Mateo County supervisors Dave Pine and Carole Groom. A CCA, despite its bureaucratic name, is a simple but dynamic tool that will allow cities and counties to pool the purchasing power of residents and businesses to buy electricity. In short, a CCA would become the provider of electrical power rather than our local utility. Even though a CCA agency provides the energy, power delivery, grid maintenance, customer metering and billing, and customer-service functions remain with our existing utility.

For our communities, there are many potential advantages to forming a CCA. These include highly competitive and often cheaper electricity rates — new choices of what kind of power we buy, including electricity generated from clean sources. And that is the real long-term benefit of a CCA — offering clean-energy products directly to consumers. By offering a robust green-energy portfolio, a CCA will help communities reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and lower our carbon footprint while incentivizing the growth of renewable-power generation regionally and nationally. Such development can also spur local job production and, better still, local energy production that can continue to help reduce energy costs for consumers within a local CCA agency.

Operating a CCA agency does not require any public subsidy as it functions as a not-for-profit organization supported by revenues and is directly answerable to our community. Should Daly City join such a countywide CCA agency — and that remains an open question — residents will be automatically enrolled with the new agency as the provider of electrical power. Electric bills won't look much different though and any customer will be provided numerous opportunities to opt-out should they wish to and can return to the traditional utility. Gas service will remain with the utility company regardless.

There is a great deal of information available for those interested in learning more about CCAs, both in development and those operating already such as in Marin and Sonoma counties. For more information about the effort underway in San Mateo County visit the website of the county's Office of Sustainability: <http://green.smcgov.org/> community-choice-aggregation.

The process to create a CCA agency in San Mateo County is now in its infancy and there are many steps ahead of us yet but this is an exciting endeavor that I hope Daly City will be a part of.

*Mike Guingona is a Daly City city councilman.*

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## Erica Etelson: San Mateo County providing model for community-choice energy programs

By Erica Etelson Special to the Mercury News  
Posted: 03/27/2015 03:00:00 PM PDT

MercuryNews.com

Local governments in California looking for ways to achieve their climate action goals should take a page from San Mateo County's new community choice energy initiative. Community choice energy programs are nonprofit agencies that consolidate the buying power of local residents and businesses to buy clean electricity.

Along with San Mateo, the counties of Alameda, Santa Cruz and Monterey, and the cities of Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Cupertino and others are conducting feasibility studies as a first step toward creating community choice programs. San Francisco expects to launch its program by year's end. Within a few years, the majority of California's population could be served by a community choice program or a public utility like Silicon Valley Power, but only if local governments forge ahead with uncharacteristic alacrity.

Community choice is a win-win for consumers and the planet. The electricity sector accounts for one-third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Statewide, only 23 percent of the electricity mix of monopoly utilities comes from renewable sources of power. Contrast that with community choice: At 10 months old, Sonoma Clean Power is a mere babe in the redwoods, yet it has managed to provide its customers with a power mix that, in addition to being cheaper than PG&E's, has 34 percent fewer carbon emissions.

Like Sonoma Clean Power, Silicon Valley Power manages to keep electricity rates among the lowest in the state while still offering a nuclear-free power mix that's cleaner than the statewide average. It's amazing what a public utility can accomplish when it's not squandering revenue on shareholder dividends and lavish executive compensation packages.

Public antipathy toward the monopoly utilities is mounting, whereas community choice has growing, broad-based appeal: Consumers value the savings; progressives relish the opportunity to wrench control from monopoly utilities; local elected officials drool over the prospect of local green job creation; and conservatives cherish local control and the fact that community choice offers consumers a choice where previously there was none.

Another key selling point is that this all comes without any government spending. The startup costs of a new program are fully recoverable once the program launches and starts generating revenue. As large electricity consumers themselves, local governments and school districts in community choice jurisdictions stand to reap substantial savings. A public school district that buys its electricity from Marin Clean Energy shaved \$72,000 off its 2013 energy bill.

Many Silicon Valley companies, including HP, Apple and Cisco, have aggressive clean energy generation goals. Community choice can help them achieve these goals, and their collective buying power will stimulate the clean energy sector and drive down prices for everyone. According to California Energy Commissioner David Hochschild, every time demand for solar doubles, the price drops by another 20 percent.

Already, the cost of renewables in California is the same or less than grid electricity. As wind and solar prices drop further, community choice programs will buy more of it, driving a virtuous cycle in which renewables scale up faster than the planet melts down. Municipalities looking to advance their climate action goals and protect their residents from soaring electricity costs should roll out community choice post haste, before the electricity monopolies find a way to kill it.

Erica Etelson is a journalist and founding member of Californians for Energy Choice. She wrote this article for this newspaper.

## San Mateo County looks to ditch PG&E, jump into renewable energy movement

By Aaron Kinney [akinney@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:akinney@bayareanewsgroup.com)

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MercuryNews.com

### San Mateo County looks to ditch PG&E, jump into renewable energy movement

**SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT** (publ. 2/25/2015, pg. A4)

*A story incorrectly reported a price comparison between Marin Clean Energy and PG&E. Marin forecasts that its basic residential service for a typical customer will cost \$80.14 a month once a rate increase goes into effect April 1, while PG&E's service will cost \$81.58. Marin's rate includes a \$5.71 fee that PG&E imposes on Marin customers.*

REDWOOD CITY -- In the latest sign that a Bay Area renewable energy trend is picking up steam, San Mateo County is taking a close look at buying its own power on the open market, instead of relying on PG&E, in a bid to lower its greenhouse gas emissions.

The county is exploring whether to establish a community choice aggregation program, which allows local governments to create their own energy portfolios that rely more on alternative sources like wind and solar and less on fossil fuels. On Tuesday, the board of supervisors will vote on allocating \$300,000 toward a technical study of the proposal.

Marin County pioneered the community choice aggregation model in California. Since launching in 2010, Marin Clean Energy has grown to serve roughly 125,000 customers. The nonprofit claims it delivers more than twice as much renewable energy as PG&E at a slightly reduced cost to consumers.

Sonoma County followed suit last year with Sonoma Clean Power, and numerous jurisdictions are now looking into the model, including Alameda County and the South Bay cities of Cupertino, Mountain View and Sunnyvale.

Supervisors Dave Pine and Carole Groom are spearheading the initiative in San Mateo County. Pine said community choice aggregation, enabled by a 2002 bill authored by former Bay Area state Sen. Carole Migden, is a powerful tool for local governments to do their part in fighting global climate change.

"If we don't get our carbon emissions under control," Pine said, "we face catastrophic risks."

Under the initiative, the county would buy power from suppliers and distribute it to customers on PG&E's grid. The transition would be seamless for customers, who would continue to receive bills from the utility.

Pine and other proponents tout the program as "the biggest change you'll never notice." Customers who prefer to stay with PG&E could simply opt out and keep their existing plans.

Cities throughout the county would choose whether to join the program. Fifteen of the county's 20 incorporated towns and cities have already signed up to participate in the technical study. The city of San Mateo has identified the program as a key element of its sustainable resources plan.

"A single measure can achieve two-thirds of the greenhouse gas emission reduction that the city is required to meet through our climate action plan," said Kathy Kleinbaum, the city's sustainability manager.

The county anticipates that the program will lower rates for consumers and generate savings that can be

plowed into local renewable energy projects.

Marin Clean Energy and Sonoma Clean Power have seen promising results. Marin forecasts that its basic package, which consists of 50 percent renewable energy, will be \$80.14 a month for a typical user in 2015, compared to \$81.58 a month for PG&E power that is 22 percent renewable.

Marin customers can pay more for premium plans -- \$84.77 for power that is 100 percent renewable and \$107.92 for energy delivered entirely from local solar farms.

Marin Clean Energy's rates include a special fee of \$5.71 that PG&E tacks on to the bills of Marin customers to cover the loss of their business. PG&E would apply a similar fee to San Mateo County customers.

A PG&E representative did not respond to a request for comment. A 2011 law prohibits the company from using ratepayer revenue to market against community choice aggregation.

Despite the early success of Marin and Sonoma, some critics question how green the new model is. The most prominent skeptic of Northern California's community choice aggregation movement is the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1245, which represents about 20,000 utility workers throughout the state, including roughly 12,000 employees of PG&E.

Hunter Stern, spokesman for the Local 1245, said Marin Clean Energy's approach is flawed, relying too much on renewable energy certificates to meet its alternative energy targets. These certificates, purchased from renewable energy suppliers, allow the group to take credit for renewable energy generation without actually buying it.

Stern said the union does not oppose community choice aggregation in principle, but wants Marin Clean Energy and other programs to eschew the certificates and focus more on developing new green energy sources.

"Our union and fellow brothers and sisters in the labor community will work to present the best possible implementation plan to benefit workers and residents and build local projects in San Mateo County," Stern said. "If they pursue a Marin-type approach, the 1245 will fight them."

Tuckey, of Marin Clean Energy, noted the nonprofit buys power from a new solar farm at San Rafael Airport and is developing several other projects, including three solar facilities in Richmond, which voted to join Marin Clean Energy in 2012.

Seth Baruch, a renewable energy consultant who is helping Alameda and San Mateo counties investigate community choice aggregation, said the certificates are best viewed as a bridge. They can be useful in establishing the programs and then reduced or eliminated once the organizations have built up the customer base, revenue and experience to develop more local energy sources.

"You can't really start riding a bike uphill in 10th speed," Baruch said. "You need to build some momentum."

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## San Mateo County clean energy plan moves ahead

February 25, 2015, 05:00 AM By Bill Silverfarb Daily Journal Staff

A joint venture to buy clean energy in bulk called Community Choice Aggregation was given the green light Tuesday by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, which approved spending \$300,000 for the program.

The Office of Sustainability will use the money to complete the first phase of a three-phased project to form the program.

Currently, half of the county's 20 cities have passed resolutions to participate in a process that would ultimately result in the formation of a joint powers authority to act as an independent nonprofit to buy clean energy such as solar or wind using Pacific Gas and Electric's infrastructure.

The other 10 cities in the county have either agendized the item or provided verbal confirmation to participate, said Jim Eggemeyer with the Office of Sustainability.

Cities are now collecting data on megawatt hours and peak demand levels from its electricity users.

There are currently three of the aggregation programs operating in the state now including Marin Clean Energy and Sonoma Clean Energy. A third, Lancaster Choice Energy in Los Angeles County will start in spring.

A JPA between the county and cities could be formed later this year and the program could launch by September 2016, Eggemeyer said.

Launching the program is expected to cost \$1.5 million but that money could be recouped by ratepayers in the future, said Supervisor Dave Pine, who first brought the idea to the board.

South San Francisco Councilman Pradeep Gupta noted that corporate giants Apple and Google are in the process of securing long-term renewable energy contracts to power their facilities in both a move to save money and the environment.

He praised the county's effort to buy clean energy in bulk.

Menlo Park resident Jan Butts told the board the program might ultimately push PG&E to generate more renewable energy.

"There is no question we can't act fast enough to reduce our carbon emissions," Pine said at Tuesday's board meeting.

Community Choice Aggregation allows a local government, or group of local governments, to pool the electricity demand of their residential, business, and municipal accounts to purchase or develop power on their behalf, according to Pine's office.

The rates for renewable energy in most instances are lower than or competitive with PG&E rates depending on the percentage being purchased, according to Pine's office.

Customers will have a choice to purchase 100 percent renewable energy, solar, wind or other, or a 50/50 mix, according to Pine's office.

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