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Greener Power Likely Coming to Lafayette

By Cathy Tyson

City leaders want residents to have a choice of where their electricity comes from.

After weighing all the options, Lafayette City Council members voted to move forward with Marin Clean Energy - a nonprofit that procures electricity from renewable sources such as solar, wind, bioenergy, geothermal, and small hydro, then partners with PG&E to deliver it - so that they can conduct a membership analysis. Assuming the analysis is positive in terms of rates and environmental impact, the city will join MCE.

The energy used in homes, businesses and municipal buildings is now provided solely by PG&E, which currently reports that 27 percent of its energy production comes from renewable sources. The utility is working toward one-third of its energy portfolio from renewables by 2020.

By going with MCE, residents will have a choice of power options: stay with PG&E, or pick from MCE's power options: "light green" with 56 percent renewable energy, "deep green" 100 percent renewable, or "Local Sol" with 100 percent local solar.

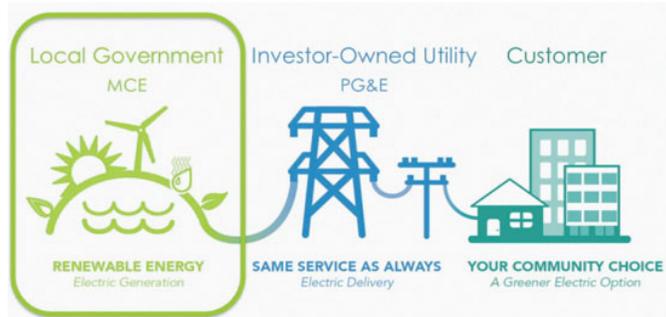
With a unanimous affirmative vote, Ordinance 644 was officially introduced, and continued to March 14 for its second reading and adoption. The ordinance approves the Marin Clean Energy Joint Powers Agreement and authorizes the implementation of a Community Choice Aggregation program.

"Today we don't have a choice," said Mark Higgins, Environmental Task Force member. "Joining a CCE (community choice energy) provider enables more competition where there currently is none - two competing entities that have to compete for customers. At the end of the day it's the market that wins."

By offering service with Marin Clean Energy, Lafayette joins a Community Choice Aggregation program, or CCA, which enables local governments to acquire cleaner renewable power on behalf of residents and businesses, and creates a partnership with local utilities - in this case, PG&E - to deliver it through its power lines, benefitting customers with affordable rates, local control and greener energy. PG&E would continue to provide consolidated billing, still owns the grid, provides customer service and maintains power lines.

Since 2002, when the state of California passed AB 117, public agencies and joint power authorities are able to pool the electricity demands of their constituents to provide a local power choice.

Residents can expect to see a robust outreach campaign by MCE to help customers make an informed decision later this year, with actual electricity service starting in late summer or fall 2016, if the membership analysis is positive. Additional outreach will include local events and workshops, as well as presentations to clubs and organizations. Customers will have the choice of opting out of the MCE arrangement and can return to PG&E service at any time.



Offering this option has no fiscal impact on the city. In addition, this move coincides with the city's Environmental Strategy that was adopted in 2006 to encourage a more environmentally sustainable community.

Although Contra Costa County is in the initial phase of creating its own CCE, it is unknown how long that may take and there is uncertainty about start-up costs, rate competitiveness, timing and risk.

City leaders chose to go with MCE, an existing provider that was formed in 2008, serving customers since 2010, with a proven track record. According to the City of Lafayette Staff Report, MCE currently serves 165,000 customers in all of the cities and unincorporated areas of Marin County. The organization is addressing climate change by reducing energy related greenhouse gas emissions through a range of renewable energy sources, providing 50 to 100 percent of their electricity through renewable sources: solar, wind and waste-to-energy. So far MCE reports that it has reduced more than 131 million pounds of greenhouse gas emissions, and in the process, is saving its customers more than \$5.9 million via lower electricity rates.

The environmental task force has been actively investigating energy options since 2014. It evaluated a long list of considerations before making its recommendation to the city council to join MCE, including rate volatility, financial liability, the impact of greenhouse gas emissions, control over governance and more. The group concluded that taking no action would limit customer choice.

Acknowledging that it's unfortunate that Contra Costa County is not further along the CCE path, Council Member Mike Anderson said, "This is something that is available now that we can take advantage of - we get a choice to our residents quickly."

Mayor Mark Mitchell agreed: "Who doesn't like choice?"

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