

County Connection

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At its January 12 meeting, the Board of Supervisors voted to remain in the Marin Energy Authority.

From the very beginning of this venture, I have looked at Community Choice Aggregation (also known as the Marin Clean Energy project of the Marin Energy Authority JPA) through one lens: "What is the most fiscally responsible path to meet the mandates imposed on local governments by AB 32?"

AB 32 mandates are real. In the fall of 2006, California signed into law the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB32), requiring the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG's) to 1990 levels by 2020. This represents reductions of around 25%, with an estimated cost to local governments of \$3,800 per household to achieve.

Marin County has been working hard to investigate all the ways we can meet AB 32. Thus far we have used a combination of one time funds and grants from State and Federal sources. This effort includes all the analysis done on Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) and its joint powers authority, the Marin Energy Authority (MEA), but I want to be very clear that our analysis and the dollars spent have also produced important results that are critical whether CCA moves forward or not.

These results include: (1) a greenhouse gas emissions inventory that is essential to measure progress against benchmarks; (2) a comprehensive analysis of local renewable capacity down to the level of exactly which rooftops and other areas on commercial and public buildings have the highest potential for solar energy; and (3) a full analysis of AB 811 programs such as the pilot in Berkeley and the fully launched programs in Palm Desert and Sonoma County that provide for financing of solar PV systems and energy efficiency measures through a property tax mechanism.

It is important to note that with or without CCA, Marin is pursuing AB 811 which has a proven countywide model in Sonoma.

After spending more than a year meeting with PG&E on numerous occasions to discuss, encourage, and brainstorm potential ways the County could partner with them, I was of course disappointed that no detailed proposal came forward from them that we could consider alongside a CCA approach to meet AB32 requirements.

As part of their next step, MEA is seeking \$1.6 million in start up funding, and has indicated it may approach our Board to consider co-signing a loan for that amount -- or perhaps half if they are able to secure another co-signer. I am not willing to support that.

When the proposal of a CCA was first brought to Marin, the County was not facing the budget impacts we are today, due to a severe economic downturn and massive State cuts to

mandated programs, as well as State takeaways of local dollars. Today, in 2010, the County is taking

action to address a \$20 million structural budget deficit that would go to \$50 million in five years if not addressed.

The County is in a budget year filled with excruciating choices. We are asking our county departments for a 20% cut in their budgets this year. If we were to back another loan that, for whatever reason, could not be repaid, it would be much harder to even consider choices such as the one recently supported by a majority of our Board to commit \$2.5 million to backfill the State IHSS workers' pay cut. Assuming we are only asked to co-sign half of the \$1.6 million, \$800,000, if lost, would be the equivalent of risking the jobs of at least 8 county employees for one year, or eliminating the option to consider steps like supplementing underserved children's healthcare targeted by State cuts.

Many of our county workers are already doing double duty because of cuts in positions. I can't consider risking general fund taxpayer dollars that represent further potential cuts to services and jobs.

I have always applauded new and innovative ventures. I was ridiculed by some for endorsing SkyTran in Marin. I still do, and I sincerely hope that MEA is able to secure the necessary start up money to move forward. Regardless of the next step on CCA, we will continue pursuing an AB 811 program with all of Marin's cities.