

OP-ED: The Power to Choose in Alameda County

By Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty

February 8, 2017

Communities throughout the state, and the nation, are embracing Community Choice Energy (CCE) programs for the procurement of cleaner energy. For more than 100 years, private electrical utilities have monopolized the market, leaving the consumer, the people, with neither a voice in how their electricity was procured and delivered, nor in the rates they are required to pay. Now, however, six states, including California, allow local governmental jurisdictions to procure their own electricity supplies, to manage their community's energy resources, and to meet local and individual consumer objectives. The County of Alameda and partnering cities are currently hard at work in effort to give the people "the power to choose".

What is Community Choice Energy?

A Community Choice Energy program is a means by which local governments pool their electricity customers to provide electricity and related energy services on their behalf. As a result, the local community shapes the program to prioritize desired benefits and meet community goals as they relate to: climate action, jobs creation, rate stability, lower cost to the consumer, etc.

A CCE program's primary focus lies in power generation (the buying and selling of electricity) and the management of a community's energy resource (demand reduction and generation), thus still requiring a partnership with the existing utility — in Alameda County, the existing utility is Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E). Power delivery, grid maintenance, customer metering/billing and customer service functions all remain with PG&E (in our case). The environmental impact and community and consumer benefits following the transition to a CCE have proven to be apparent and significant.

Once launched, the CCE program becomes the default electricity provider, and all customer accounts are automatically rolled over. Customers continue to receive and pay their bills to PG&E, but their purchasing options increase, and the rates associated decrease in most cases (depending upon level of "green energy" selected).

It is important that customers are aware that they always have option to "opt out" at any time and return to PG&E service at no cost or consequence.

Has CCE been successfully done in California?

Currently, there are four successfully operating CCE programs in the state of California: Marin Clean Energy, Sonoma Clean Power, Lancaster Choice Energy and Peninsula Clean Energy. With these public programs leading the way, numerous communities throughout the state, including Alameda, Contra Costa and Santa Clara Counties, are either in the process of, or considering, building/joining a CCE program. Why? Because CCE delivers significant benefits, including:

- Cleaner power supply;
- Competitive electricity rates;
- Better rates for customers who generate their own power and sell back surplus energy;
- Direct investments into local energy programs such as energy efficiency upgrades, electric vehicle charging stations and energy storage;
- New renewable power development, both locally and statewide; and
- Local jobs creation.

What's happening in Alameda County?

The East Bay Community Energy (EBCE) Joint Powers Authority (JPA), a result of 18 months of hard work and deliberations by the East Bay Community Choice Energy Steering Committee, convened for its inaugural meeting on January 30, 2017. The Authority is comprised of elected officials from the County of Alameda and all the Alameda County cities that are taking part in EBCE; the Cities of Pleasanton and Newark declined to join EBCE at this time, and City of Alameda already operates under its own CCE program. As a first order of business, I was elected chair and Oakland Councilmember Dan Kalb was elected vice chair.

We want you to be informed about EBCE and we invite your participation as the program is being developed — East Bay Community Energy Joint Powers Authority meetings are open to the public, and are scheduled to be held as often as twice per month as we aggressively work toward a launch by Fall/Winter 2017. **The next EBCE JPA meeting is February 15, 2017 at 6:00pm at the Hayward City Council Chambers, Hayward City Hall, 777 “B” Street, Hayward, California.**

A CCE program offers new tools to meet increasingly urgent carbon emission reduction goals, while maintaining competitive rates and providing significant benefits for the local economy. These benefits will be achieved without public subsidy or additional cost to taxpayers because CCE programs are revenue-supported — as all utilities are — and require no public funds to operate. I urge the residents and businesses of both Alameda and Contra Costa Counties to learn more about EBCE and support this important initiative. For more information, please see the EBCE website at <http://www.EBCE.org>.

Scott Haggerty serves on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

- Learn more at: <https://www.acgov.org/cda/planning/cca/>