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Could Greener Power Come to Lafayette?

By Cathy Tyson



It is an interesting concept: greener electricity delivered by PG&E to your home. PG&E still reads your meter and issues monthly bills, delivers energy through its lines and provides the same maintenance and repair service - but the actual electricity is generated from clean, renewable sources and it's slightly cheaper. It's happening right now in Marin and Sonoma counties, along with the city of Richmond. Alameda County is in a very preliminary stage of investigating the option. Contra Costa County is looking into it.

While it's relatively new in California for the energy provider to be different than the transmission and distribution company, this model is used in several other states. "This is where the electron hits the road," said Alex DiGiorgio, community affairs manager of Marin Clean Energy, explaining that it's a way to "democratize energy"

by giving customers a choice.

A recent presentation hosted by Lafayette's Environmental Task Force, which strongly supports Community Choice Aggregation, or CCA, highlighted the process and benefits to a group of city and county leaders and concerned citizens.

While many Lafayette residents are keenly aware of their respective carbon footprints, it's unclear if the concept of a CCA will become an option. Informative speakers discussed advantages and disadvantages, job creation and reduction of greenhouse gases. Lafayette, if interested, could potentially join an existing CCA or collaborate with a newly formed county CCA. To get the ball rolling community support would be necessary, along with technical expertise, financial consideration, and a feasibility study.

Homeowners who have existing solar panels, whether purchased or leased, could continue to use their home-generated power as usual; the only difference is, if approved, the energy they do purchase would come from greener sources.

The benefits of a CCA include cheaper, greener power produced from sources like solar, wind, bioenergy and hydroelectric that provide for at least 50 percent of the electricity. Customers who are not interested can always opt out of the program and continue with PG&E. Unlike PG&E, a CCA is a public agency that doesn't pay income tax, and with no shareholders and significantly fewer staff, has lower overhead.

A fairly stable customer base is necessary to form critical mass for the CCA to be offered. For example, 93 percent of Sonoma residents are on the CCA; only 7 percent have opted out from PGE as their default energy provider. In Marin, 80 percent of customers are now with the CCA. PG&E still reaps transmission and distribution fees from these customers. This meeting was a first step in gathering information - look for updates on the city website, www.lovelafayette.org. For more information on Marin Clean Energy go to www.mcecleanenergy.org.

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