

Sonoma Clean Power Created

Sonoma Clean Power is scheduled to start serving customers next May. It promises to be the biggest action under local control to reduce greenhouse gas. For this reason, it has been the Climate Protection Campaign's top initiative for years.

"We are thrilled that Sonoma Clean Power is a reality," said Climate Protection Campaign Executive Director Ann Hancock. "We want to do it right and inspire other communities."

Debut in Five Cities and the County

On July 30, the Santa Rosa City Council voted unanimously to join Sonoma Clean Power along with the County, Windsor, Cotati, Sebastopol, and Sonoma. Hope remains that Petaluma, Rohnert Park, and Cloverdale—the other eligible cities—will join when the next enrollment window opens next year.

A Long Road

In 2005, the Climate Protection Campaign issued a paper that described a little-known

policy called Community Choice. Three years later, Community Choice headlined the Sonoma County Community Climate Action Plan.

In 2010, Marin County survived PG&E's \$4 million attack and became the first operational Community Choice program in California. It has exceeded expectations for financial management, reliability, and rates.

"Marin's example was invaluable," said Woody Hastings, Climate Protection Campaign Renewable Energy Manager. "An important role for Sonoma County remains—to show how Community Choice can be a platform to rapidly develop local energy resources."

In early 2011, the Sonoma County Water Agency began a public process to investigate Community Choice. Key milestones include:

- A feasibility study in 2011 concluded that a local program would be viable.
- In December 2012 the Water Agency and the County Board of Supervisors created a joint powers authority to oversee the program.

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Focus on Local Power

Now that the Sonoma Clean Power Authority exists, attention turns to optimizing this game-changing innovation platform for maximum local benefit. We aim to use Community Choice to rapidly wean ourselves from remote fossil and nuclear sources of power. The shift will be to local renewable generation and reduced energy consumption, all the while maintaining competitive rates.

The Implementation Plan already includes two key elements to help spur local clean power. A net-metering program will offer better payback on solar systems for homeowners and small businesses. A feed-in tariff will buy power at a fair price for a fixed period of time from medium-sized generators such as operators of large solar arrays or small wind turbines.

Sonoma Clean Power also plans to apply to become the administrator of several million dollars of existing ratepayer funds now administered by PG&E, thereby enabling implementation of our own locally tailored energy efficiency programs.

Descriptions of other promising programs follow.

"Step up to local" would give customers an additional option—100% green local power at a higher cost. This program would create an investment pool from the very start designated for new green energy construction within the county.

On-bill financing is a mechanism that enables residents and businesses to invest in solar and

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John Johnson

The newly seated Sonoma Clean Power Authority Board is meeting twice per month to make decisions about how the new program will work.

Cities Make Their Marks

Each of the cities that voted to participate in Sonoma Clean Power added its unique stamp.

- A vote was not expected at Windsor's May 15 hearing, but indeed the council voted yes on a 3-2 cliffhanger. As the first city to vote, Windsor set the stage for the other cities.
- Sebastopol's hearing ended with an epic, inspirational Q and A session between the council and Geof Syphers that lasted nearly to midnight.
- Cotati wins the award for the most uplifting vote that included an audience drumroll and a unanimous "yes."
- In Sonoma, Councilmember Steve Barbose thought on his feet when he used a parliamentary maneuver to revive the proposal after a failed vote. Mayor Brown magnanimously voted yes the second time.
- A critical weekend negotiation between Santa Rosa Mayor Scott Bartley and Syphers turned the tide after most observers had concluded the city would not join. ■



Supporters of Sonoma Clean Power fill the Santa Rosa City Council Chambers to urge the council to vote for choice.

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- In April 2013 the board of the Sonoma Clean Power Authority voted to take all steps necessary to launch a program, including finalizing the Implementation Plan to submit to the state, negotiating contracts for power supply, finalizing a loan for startup funds, and encouraging cities to join.
- By July 2013, five cities had voted to participate in the program.

Community Support

Community members provided strong "wind in the sails" to make policymakers feel public support. They spoke at meetings, wrote letters, made calls, circulated petitions, and worked in other ways to show they wanted Sonoma Clean Power to happen. More than 1600 people signed petitions to city council members in support of Sonoma Clean Power. Hundreds attended council and board meetings. Many policymakers said they were influenced by the public's outpouring of support. ■

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Community Choice Spreading in California

As we work to make Sonoma Clean Power the best program possible, we also look forward to sharing our lessons learned with other Community Choice efforts throughout California.

At least twelve other California communities are now considering setting up programs of their own. Four of the most advanced efforts are in San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Monterey, and Davis.

In San Francisco, a Community Choice program has been under consideration for years. Initial efforts to create a program with 100 percent renewable energy were not successful, giving supporters the opportunity to regroup with a modified approach.

Working with our partner LEAN Energy U.S., the Climate Protection Campaign will continue assisting allies throughout the state in the establishment of Community Choice energy programs, along with innovative financing mechanisms for local clean energy. ■

Clean Power Heroes

Sonoma Clean Power would not be possible without the heroic work of many people. It was a team effort with many all-stars.

Sonoma County Water Agency

Cordel Stillman, the deputy chief engineer of the Sonoma County Water Agency, coordinated the official proceedings and chaired the Sonoma Clean Power Steering Committee. Deputy County Counsel Steve Shupe was close at hand to address legal matters. Geof Syphers, working first as a consultant and now as the interim CEO, drew on years of experience in renewable energy work to draft the business plan and do the final outreach to cities. Water Agency General Manager Grant Davis maintained the agency's commitment throughout the process, and consultant Rusty Klassen helped bolster staff and policy makers as they formed the Authority.



Cordel Stillman, Steve Shupe, and Grant Davis address the Board as it considers Sonoma Clean Power.

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, who also comprise the Board of the Water Agency, dug into and supported the issue for more than two years, learning the complexities of utility operations and asking hard questions about the viability of local clean power. Supervisors Efen Carrillo and Mike McGuire were active participants on the ad hoc committee, and Supervisor Shirlee Zane worked hard to bring city councils along.

Funders

The list of people who contributed to Sonoma Clean Power by donating money to Climate Protection Campaign is too long for this newsletter. We especially thank donors who maintained their faith over the years, contributing money when Sonoma Clean Power was just a concept and renewing their support each year as we got closer to making it a reality.

We would not have been able to work on Sonoma Clean Power as we did without solid financial support from heroic, visionary philanthropists.

Businesses

We are fortunate to live in a community where many business leaders understand the need to take action to address climate change and see the business opportunity of clean energy. The proposal for Sonoma Clean Power benefitted greatly by a consistent focus on the job-creating potential of keeping our utility dollars in the community.

Business support came in many forms, from speaking in public and in private to writing letters to contributing funds. Although space keeps us from naming all business supporters, a few stars include Bodean Company, Energy Elective, Sonoma Compost, Sonoma Mountain Village, and Redwood Hill Farm. First Community Bank stepped up to provide startup financing for Sonoma Clean Power, a crucial contribution to the initiative. The full list of companies involved in Business for Clean Energy is on our website, and to all of those companies we give a big thank you.

Allies

Many organizations both within Sonoma County and beyond were key partners. Solar Sonoma County, Leadership Institute for Ecology and the Economy, League of Women Voters, Transition U.S., the Share Exchange, Daily Acts, and the Go Local Co-operative shared the hard work of spreading accurate information and building public support. LEAN Energy U.S. provided important technical support. Organizing for Action, the World Wildlife Fund, the Sierra

HERO HIGHLIGHT



Michael Friedenberg wrote one of the first two checks to the Climate Protection Campaign in 2001 and pushed us through the years to focus on Sonoma Clean Power. While battling cancer, he invested time and energy into getting approval for the program. We lost Michael in December 2011, but the creation of Sonoma Clean Power is part of his legacy. In his words:

“If climate change is not addressed, our world will be so altered that all the other good causes will be fundamentally undermined. Alternatives to oil and coal can be our economic engine, take us into a more prosperous future, and at the same time protect us all—our children and grandchildren—from an environmental collapse.”

Our children thank you, Michael.

Club, and other organizations encouraged their local members to weigh in.

Advisors

A kitchen cabinet of strategy experts advised us on navigating Sonoma Clean Power's roiling waters, including Herb Williams, Terry Price, Maddy Hirshfield, Eric Koenigshofer, and, before his death, Michael Friedenberg. Similarly, Jack Buckhorn and Lisa Maldonado offered important perspectives from organized labor. Doug Bosco's support was invaluable. ■

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efficiency measures using their utility bills to finance the investment. Customers save money as well as energy because their utility bills post-investment are less than their bills pre-investment. Renters who are excluded from many other financing mechanisms are able to participate in on-bill financing programs.

Another promising program is augmenting Sonoma County’s existing Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program, known as SCEIP or the Sonoma County Energy Independence Program. In contrast to the on-bill program that uses utility bills to finance solar and efficiency investments, PACE uses property tax bills. SCEIP now invests in solar and efficiency using public funds. These could be supplemented with funds from private companies that raise money from institutional investors.

Beyond these ideas, there are many new and emerging technologies and approaches for

creating the energy system of tomorrow. Our challenge is to integrate and sequence the pieces—financing, incentives, rate structure, energy efficiency, renewables, demand management, grid modernization, and more. Perhaps the most exciting opportunities will be those that will be proposed now that there is a willing partner. Rather than going through a five-year process at the state Public

Utilities Commission, entrepreneurs will be able to get quicker approval for new services and get them up and running without a cadre of regulatory attorneys.

Sonoma Clean Power will have a standing Business Operations Committee that will help evaluate such programs. Applications for that committee are now being accepted. ■



Tapping the potential for new local power generation is the biggest challenge ahead for Sonoma Clean Power.

Map courtesy of Permit & Resources Management Department, Sonoma County.