

Monterey Bay Community Power is a good deal
By Jane Parker and Steve McShane

The Central Coast in general and Monterey County communities in particular have arrived at an important moment that will determine whether we continue to be leaders in the field of innovation and environmental protection.

On Feb. 14, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors will consider whether to join Monterey Bay Community Power, an effort several years in the making to create a new regional agency that will purchase clean-source electricity at a cost equivalent to PG&E.

The new agency will help create jobs, fund renewable energy projects and reduce carbon-based emissions. A week after the vote by Monterey County Supervisors, the Salinas City Council will vote, with votes by city councils elsewhere in the county also taking place over the next few weeks. Cities and counties throughout the Central Coast have already expressed support for this movement to seize our energy future.

Monterey County should not turn its back on this opportunity. Not only does Monterey County have the chance to determine our energy sources and even reduce prices for our residents, but the profits from Monterey Bay Community Power would be reinvested back into the community. No longer would our hard-earned dollars be sent off to corporate headquarters elsewhere in California.

Communities across California are benefiting from similar opportunities. Marin County, Sonoma County, San Mateo County, San Francisco and Lancaster have all established their own community choice energy agencies, reducing carbon footprints in those communities while offering energy at comparable prices to the big utilities.

Community choice energy works. Here on the Central Coast, it would be governed by a joint powers agency overseen by a publicly accountable 11-member board. Following exhaustive studies and dozens of public meetings over the last several years, this agreement has been hammered out between local governments in Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties. Nearly every one of them, including the County of Monterey and the City of Salinas, has formally expressed interest in joining.

The power-sharing agreement fosters collaboration by giving no county the ability to dictate to others – the kind of collaboration so desperately missing from our national political scene. Still, Monterey County communities would have five of the 11 votes on the board, compared to four for Santa Cruz County and two for San Benito County.

This proposal before the Monterey County Board of Supervisors and other jurisdictions gives Monterey Bay Community Power a clean slate from which to eventually make decisions that will benefit our local residents – from which types of renewable energy we should pursue to where important green jobs should be located within the community. And it does so while preserving Monterey County's prevailing influence within the region.

Monterey Bay Community Power is a good deal for Monterey County. It positions us to create green

jobs to support renewable energy generation. It puts decision making in the hands of locals. It gives customers the choice to opt out and stay with PG&E if desired. It keeps electricity rates comparable to PG&E for all customers, even factoring in all PG&E fees, while still giving us the choice to potentially reduce electricity rates. Sonoma Clean Power recently announced it would drop electricity rates 10 percent for residential customers due to falling prices for solar energy.

Thanks to the visionary state legislation that makes Monterey Bay Community Power possible, PG&E will still provide line maintenance and customer service. So we'll continue seeing those blue and white trucks carrying crews who work hard to maintain the transmission lines and keep the power on throughout the county.

At the state level, we have great leadership on climate change. We don't know yet what President Trump's administration will do on climate change, or how it would impact the state's ability to act, but the early signs aren't good. But we can act locally.

Over and over, the voters of Monterey County have sided with self-determination and environmental protection. Local governments across the Monterey Bay region stand on the precipice of perhaps the most important vote we have ever faced on those issues. We strongly support Monterey Bay Community Power and hope our elected colleagues throughout Monterey County will join us by voting yes.

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