March 13, 2017

Dear Contra Costa City and County Leaders,

A Community Choice Energy program has the potential to reduce greenhouse gases and provide savings to its customers—but it can also do much more for Contra Costa County.

Community Choice Energy (CCE) presents an amazing opportunity for economic growth and the creation of good jobs through local build-out of clean solar and wind energy projects. City and county leaders should look carefully at which of the three options under consideration is most likely to maximize energy development within our county.

The Draft Technical Study for a Community Choice Aggregation Program in Contra Costa County finds that CCE policies emphasizing greenhouse gas reduction and local green energy development also produce the greatest annual job gain (p. 49). And it suggests that a stand-alone Contra Costa CCE “would have the greatest interest in developing in-county renewables and thus could potentially have the greatest positive economic impact” (p. 65).

A CCE that prioritizes local development of green energy can create hundreds of family-sustaining jobs a year. It can adopt policies requiring prevailing-wage jobs, employer neutrality in union drives, and pathways to the new jobs for disadvantaged and displaced workers—a Just Transition to a clean energy economy.

Contra Costa has tremendous potential to become a producer and exporter of green energy, generating significant revenue for the county. Only one-tenth of Contra Costa’s total contaminated “brownfield” space, identified by the federal Environmental Protection Agency as suitable for clean energy projects, could generate three times the electricity needed for all the county’s homes. With other counties’ CCEs looking to buy clean energy, Contra Costa clean energy projects could realize considerable income.

An aggressive program to build clean energy projects could support development of the former Concord Naval Weapons Depot as well as the Northern Waterfront Economic Development Initiative. Forty percent of the brownfield acreage identified by the EPA is in the NWEDI area. Clean energy projects could provide jobs and contribute to economic growth without generating pollution.

A CCE can foster local clean energy development without undertaking all—or even most—of the projects itself. A CCE that makes local energy development a real priority can help individuals and investors, local businesses and cooperatives, and cities and other public agencies to generate clean energy. Projects can range from residential rooftop solar to shared community solar, to larger-scale clean energy production on brownfields, the roofs of large buildings, public properties, and more.
A CCE can make clean energy development a good investment by augmenting and promoting existing programs such as Net Metering (reducing the electricity bill if the customer feeds power back into the grid) and Feed-in Tariffs (buying electricity at a premium from producers of less than 1 MW of electricity). It can foster the development of shared community solar, in which solar panels for many homes are located on one site, separate from the residences, for about one-third the cost of putting solar on each roof. For developments of any size, Power Purchase Agreements can give investors proof of a guaranteed income stream—something they can take to the bank, making it easier to obtain credit.

A CCE can provide outreach, education, and technical assistance in developing clean energy projects. It can also help in accessing the many federal and state programs that provide funding for investors and help low-income individuals finance solar panels.

In addition to the jobs created and economic development benefits, local clean energy development could provide Contra Costa County with a stable source of electricity. By generating its own electricity, the county would protect itself from future price increases on the market.

While we put clean energy development at the center, let’s also insist upon a CCE strategy that provides maximum accountability to the county. Our representatives must have the opportunity for close oversight of CCE operations, and our residents must have the opportunity for representation—not only by board members, but also through a representative community advisory committee.

County supervisors and city council decision-makers must choose a CCE program fully dedicated to community oversight, local energy generation, and much-needed job creation. Let’s not settle for what’s merely expedient. The right CCE can provide Contra Costa with a unique opportunity for robust and sustainable economic development, one that we shouldn’t squander.

Sincerely yours,

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