

MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

Climate Action Working Group: February 15, 2019

Muir Woods Conference Room, 175 N. Redwood Blvd., San Rafael

Present: Chairman Doug Wilson; Terri Thomas, Camila Fishtahler, Nikk Novero, Adelaide Robinson, Elias Lopez, Cricket Swannucci, Tamra Peters, Bill Carney, Pat Nelson, Ken Strong, David Kunhardt, Sarah Loughran, Ed Mainland, Dale Miller, Ken Drexler, Belle Cole, Meg McCabe, Robert Gould, Mary Sackett, Nancy Benjamin, Ken Jones, Carleen Cullen, Rebecca Collins, Felicia Chavez, Eileen Robinson, James Bill, Lawrie Mott, Laura Lovett, Bettina Hughes, David Haskell, Bob Miller, Dan Segedin, Kurt Johnson, Kate Powers, Pam Reaves, Kiki La Porta.

Guest Speakers: Greg Thomson, Doug Karpa, Lorenzo Kristov (by phone).

Chairman Doug Wilson called the meeting to order at 9:08.

Brief Introductions

Agenda and minutes: The adequacy of the agenda and minutes was not specifically raised as an item. No one raised issues regarding the agenda and minutes.

9:12 Discussion 1: Presentation and discussion of Advanced Community Energy Initiative and other proposed legislation

Chairman Doug Wilson introduced the topic and speakers: Greg Thomson, President of Green Solutions and Technologies, founding member of Advanced Community Energy initiative; Doug Karpa, Policy Director, Clean Coalition; and Lorenzo Kristov, formerly of CAISO.

Greg: The Advanced Community Energy (ACE) Initiative carefully analyzes where energy comes from and, on the basis of that analysis, sets forth what its members believe to be the right architecture and governing body to accelerate and support the transition to clean energy. A task force has been formed to drive the initiative forward.

The current electricity-delivery system is rooted in the last century; the grid is antiquated and cumbersome (like continuing to use IBM mainframes when more efficient technology exists). The system does not serve the goals of decarbonization, resilience, and energy security. ACE is a local initiative-based framework that reflects community-level needs. It is consistent with state legislation promoting renewable energy. A critical piece of the transition to renewable energy is the electrification of transportation and buildings. A local supply of renewable energy promotes its goal and provides resilience and energy security in the event of an interruption in the central grid, which the Department of Homeland Security has identified as a source of vulnerability and a security risk. Building a local energy supply also improves local economies and reduces infrastructure costs.

The objective is not to completely replace the grid but to coordinate and share the load, with local sources of backup power that would reduce the effect of peaks in demand. Local authorities would select the best locations to store energy for the entire community—for example, at a mall. The technology exists to coordinate supply and demand cost-effectively and to supply reduced-emission energy more securely. The new energy-supply system could be implemented in coordination with community Climate Action Plans. San Leandro is an example of a community that established a citywide renewable energy program by initiative, placing solar microgrids on the large rooftops of big energy users. This benefited the business community and the community at large.

Transportation is the largest category of carbon emissions, followed by commerce and industrial emissions. Controlling these emissions requires a legislative framework, a California Advanced Community Energy (CACE) Act. This legislation would designate the California Energy Commission as the regulatory agency. The CPUC currently regulates investor-owned utilities (IOUs). IOUs are not compensated correctly. Currently, they are compensated for building infrastructure; thus the current utility business model with its institutional preference for costly infrastructure. Compensation for utilities should be performance-based. This would be a big change, a movement in which Hawaii is leading the charge. If IOUs received compensation based on their performance, this could help to eliminate the conflict with CCAs. They could partner with, support, and enable CCAs. IOUs and CCAs could work with cities to implement Climate Action Plans and expand the market for distributed energy resources (DERs).

Questions and Comments

Robert G.: Could you describe the difference between transmission and distribution? A. “Transmission” is sending energy from a distant source. “Distribution” occurs when energy comes into the community.

Doug: Think wires v. poles.

Lorenzo: For a hundred years, the industry has viewed the customer as autonomous: we can’t influence demand. Under this view, the industry builds infrastructure to accommodate the peak load—infrastructure that is not used most of the time. Now, demand can be managed at the local level, avoiding this infrastructure cost.

Doug: Achieving 100% renewable energy is not about managing at the grid level but managing at the distribution level.

Greg (cont.): We have 40-years-plus of investment in excess grid capacity. Now we have decarbonization policies, but we don’t recognize that we have the wrong architecture for implementing these policies. The PG&E bankruptcy occurred at an opportune time for considering the idea of breaking the system into segments—segments that can work together but also have the ability to act as independent systems when needed. A performance-based system will make them operate better. Everyone benefits. The ISO operates at the state level. It supports the vendor community. In terms of balancing, it’s a simpler, cleaner model.

Doug K.: Regarding next steps, there is a clean energy working group in which several legislators who have CCAs in their district are involved. This could evolve into a caucus.
Greg: We also meet with the CPUC. We are developing language for a draft bill regarding removal of regulatory barriers at the CPUC. There is a symposium at the California Energy Commission next week, which is open to the public. We need support from interested groups.

Lorenzo: We're talking about bringing together energy planning and urban planning, transforming the economy. The Air Board recognizes the role of cities and counties, but there is no explicit state structure in which the state enables local governments to conduct electrification efforts. This requires collaboration with the electricity industry.

Doug K.: Organizations like Marin Conservation League and Drawdown Marin play a critical role. Marin is pretty far along. We need to bring together land, energy, and transportation planning. The top-down and bottom-up perspectives are converging. The CPUC has an important series of pilot projects.

David: Is it easy to identify what is broken in the system that led to the recent wildfires? A. (Greg): Wildfires are a piece of what we need to resolve. (Doug K.): Yes, it is easy to identify problems in transmission and distribution. It depends on the instance. Distribution issues are more frequent. (Lorenzo): In the Paradise fire, it was the transmission line. Utility operators can take the precaution of de-energizing the wire. The drawback is that all customers lose service. "Islanding" capacity facilitates the ability to de-energize without eliminating service. There is more flexibility in managing the grid.

Comment: There is a need to educate local authorities and to incentivize the market with compensation for behind-the-meter battery storage. A. (Doug K.): There are two levels of local government education. Technical expertise comes from the utilities, CCAs, and local planners—integrated planning. There is also the education that supports political will. Monetization is performance-based. Reliability is interconnected with customer satisfaction.

Greg: In the last century, distribution was at a higher level, not at the individual-house level.

Doug W.: This is new to most people, requiring education regarding basic concepts. There is some question as to what people need to know in order to advocate effectively.

Ed: There is a DER Bill of Rights (Weiner). How does that relate? A. (Greg): That depends on the wording. Focus on behind the meter. (Lorenzo): The bill does not think in terms of communities.

David: See <https://www.solarrights.org>.

Question: How will the utilities involved in building infrastructure get their money? A. (Greg): This initiative would change how utilities operate. There would not be a conflict.

Doug W.: The compensation system would motivate utilities to assist with change.

Greg: Lorenzo wrote a paper on this issue. The utilities would not be involved in deciding what is attached to the grid.

Lorenzo: It's related to utility flexibility. CCAs can contract directly with energy providers. The utility just provides the interconnection.

Doug K.: The existing system is what drives barriers to local energy and increases costs. Under the open-access model, utilities just provide the platform.

Carleen: What is the opposition, and the solution? A. (Doug K.): Some parties are married to the idea of big, remote generation, or they profit from owning transmission. Opponents that profit from the existing system include labor, big solar, and utilities. Local construction is not unionized. Utilities in general are risk-averse, but SDGE likes the initiative.

Doug W. (Wrap-up): We need to get the message out. This completes the evolution of the CCA model. Cite examples. Marin can lead. Drawdown has a complete set of solutions at the local level.

Greg: The community is a resource, an asset we're not using.

Lorenzo: We're conditioned to trickle-down solutions. We need a mind-shift. There should be community-based solutions.

Greg: Marin created CCAs.

Kiki: Who is funding your effort? A. Nobody. It was convened through the Sonoma Climate Protection Authority.

10:12 Discussion 2: Report and discussion on CCA and CPUC issues (Ken S.)

Ken: The CPUC regulates IOUs, and there are at least 15 ongoing proceedings that affect MCE, including the PCIA proceedings. A recent CPUC decision adopted the view favored by the IOU and unfavorable to MCE. The CCAs have petitioned for a rehearing. The next phase concerns the truing-up of brown energy—in which the IOUs will seek to dump the costs of unprofitable contract on to the CCAs.

The CPUC issued a proposed decision on the resource adequacy issue in December. This decision would designate IOUs as central buyers of energy for the region, which would jeopardize the ability of CCA to procure energy.

PG&E bankruptcy is up in the air. The CPUC is reevaluating the use of a special-purpose entity or CAISO. Bankruptcy issues include vegetation management. Newly elected Gov. Gavin Newsom is creating a strike force. PG&E will have the ability to reject its unprofitable contracts for renewable energy, raising possible breach-of-contract issues and possibly leading to a sell-off of generating capacity.

Doug W.: We need to watch these proceedings and push for the right decisions.

Bob M.: We talked with the CEO of MCE regarding increasing requirements for renewable energy, information-sharing and other issues. The bankruptcy weakens a primary foe of CCAs, creating a window of opportunity.

Doug K.: There was a Cal CCA briefing. Contact your representatives.

Ed: There is an action alert regarding the CCA decision. Local officials should send a draft letter. The resource adequacy decision would hamper CCA procurement and take us backward in time to benefit collapsing utilities. Local officials need to make their voices heard.

Doug W.: Local energy procurement promotes local renewables.

Discussion 3: Drive Clean Marin Presentation (Carleen, Kurt)

Kurt: Transportation is the next frontier in GHG reduction, accounting for more than 50% of emissions. The San Anselmo Climate Action Plan includes a strategy to accelerate the adoption of EVs, which was unanimously approved. Elements of promoting EV adoption include the availability of charging stations, outreach, and conversion of the municipal fleet. A draft resolution proposes amendment of the city's General Plan concerning EV readiness. The goal is to have 3,000 EV's in San Anselmo by 2030 (23%); currently they have 377. Data is tracked by DMV, so progress is measurable. San Anselmo's success in adopting their EV strategy is due in part to a good town planner and buy-in from the Public Works Director. There is a detailed document on the website. The strategy that came out of meetings with the Town Council and Planning Commission was to use the word "consider" and set the framework for specifics that will come later—specifics that will be consistent with approved policy. There was a supportive crowd at meetings. The next step is a press release. This development in San Anselmo will create a template for other communities.

Carleen: The council members asked questions that showed a need for outreach to the public. 350.org will take the lead in drafting language regarding the climate emergency. One EV is equivalent to 30-plus other climate-related actions. The issue is how to bring the consumer on board and move the transportation market. The goal is one EV in every garage. The adoption rate is now 4% in Marin. EVs provide multiple benefits to consumers: each EV adds KWHs to the household, promotes clean air, and weakens big oil. Cool the Earth and Drive Clean Marin are engaging in a collaborative campaign. The campaign is consumer-facing, promoting wide engagement. We will present to the Air District and submit a proposal to do a pilot program in Marin, Sonoma, and Napa counties. The program will be data-driven, and there will be a kickoff meeting in March.

Sarah: Will you focus solely on EVs or also consider plug-in hybrids? A. Each can come to the meeting with their own viewpoint.

10:38 Discussion of CAWG business (Doug W.)

Doug addressed the potential role of CAWG subgroups in becoming more effective and taking organized action. He noted the progress of Drawdown Marin on their first two topics: renewable energy and transportation. CAWG needs to develop a proposed carbon tax policy to present to the MCL board, which would support sending an MCL letter.

Robert G.: Regarding a carbon tax, we need to advocate at the state and county level.

Bill: The first step: We need clarity re legislation in Congress. Citizens Climate Lobby and the Sierra Club have positions.

Reports and Announcements

Drawdown Marin (Doug): Things are moving fast now. There are three topic groups underway, plus the managerial and steering committees.

Carleen: The transportation topic has several sectors. Electrification is the big-picture strategy.

Robert: Regarding renewables, Drawdown is drafting several sets of interrelated solutions. These include storage behind the meter, resilience, partnering with MCE to promote local DER, re-engineering costs, demand flexibility, and working with EV groups. We need to get out of silos, partner with other groups, and manage collectively.

Doug K.: We need to consider EV input to the system and electrification of buildings—how the parts talk to each other in a smart system.

Doug W.: The built environment topic is getting underway.

Greg: The infrastructure is out there. We need a system to support, to listen to stakeholder groups.

Doug W.: This is in process. The group is open to the public.

Bob M.: What is the status of the steering committee? A. (Robert): It is coalescing as a group around a shared vision. The issue is how to create a clear, transparent, solid process for goal-setting. And to find creative ways to fund the project.

Environmental Forum of Marin (Sarah): There is an event upcoming on Feb. 27, Building to Cool the Planet: Beyond “Green Building.” It’s about innovation. Go to the EFM website to see events for March and April.

Citizens Climate Lobby (David): The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act has been referred to committee. There is no such thing as a county carbon tax. There will be a Book Passage with Peter Joseph and David Kunhardt on February 23, 10:00 – 2:00, on Climate Change: Present Realities and Promising Solutions.

Sustainable San Rafael (Bill): San Rafael has adopted the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) 2030. Proceedings on the General Plan are wrapping up re the Housing element and are considering open space and wildfire.

Resilient Neighborhoods (Tamra): 2018 activity highlights include 78 households going Deep Green (218 over time); 30% of participants utilizing EVs (67 over time); 111 actions to make home more efficient, 62% of participants reducing use of plastics, 100% of participants considering climate impacts when making purchases. Other actions addressed by the teams include switching to a plant-based diet, creating an emergency plan, and connecting with neighbors. A

Resilient Offices team has graduated. Four teams are in process now. Nine volunteer coaches have been trained. There are 1,161 graduates of the program. The program has achieved a reduction of 6,188,818 lbs. of annual CO₂ emissions.

Doug: Resilient Neighborhoods is a champion of the bottom-up approach.

Golden Gate EV Assoc. (Dale): We are looking for parking lots with fewer than 25 spaces for free installation of charging infrastructure. Regarding the argument that electric vehicles get a “free ride” re gas taxes, EVs pay their way via their vehicle registration fee. Efforts to block the shift to 5G hampers the creation of the network that is need to achieve efficient, cost-effective EV charging.

OFA Marin (Belle): OFA will give a presentation: Marin “Firestorm 2” in April at the San Rafael Community Center. This is a follow-on presentation from a 2017-18 presentation. OFA is partnering with the San Rafael Fire Department. The event will bring in specialists with different perspectives and present an inventory of what various groups are doing.

California Native Plant Society (Laura): CNPS will present an exhibit, “Beauty and the Beast,” at the Bay Model in April – May. The exhibit will illustrate the change in native flora, with big-picture speakers addressing fire and water implications. The exhibit draws on a 5-year study on how to manage native landscapes to retard fire. We need to incorporate plants in our planning process. More than 50% of the carbon in the atmosphere comes from poor management of soil. Clearing land evaporates carbon.

350.org (Ken, Jodi): The Global Youth Climate Strike will take place on March 15, and there will be a Bay Area component. Last month a climate emergency resolution was pulled off the Fairfax town council agenda. It will be back on the agenda in March. There will be a library event to discuss the resolution. There will be interns present, to provide a youth perspective.

Kiki: The League of Women Voter will lobby for change in the General Plan update. We should create overlays to illustrate vulnerabilities in each community in the planning process.

Doug: Where are we going next month? Possibilities for discussion include the Green New Deal, ocean acidification, or What is the Nature of Climate Change (how does it work?).

Next meeting will take place on March 15.

Adjourned: 11:12.

Minutes: PN.