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Memo to the Marin Energy Authority - April 1, 2009
From Barbara George, Women's Energy Matters

State and federal grant opportunities have unexpectedly catapulted the Marin Energy Authority into another dimension of the Marin Clean Energy plan — the development of local clean energy resources. The MCE business plan did not anticipate that money would be available to develop local resources until well after the start of MCE operations.

We celebrate these opportunities, but it's sad that the funds are being provided because of the severe financial emergency, which is having a devastating impact on many aspects of the clean energy industry, our communities and our personal lives. We are grateful for Pres. Obama's commitment to making the clean energy gains overshadow the losses.

It would be appropriate for the MEA and MCE supporters to take a moment to reflect on the fact that we find ourselves involved in activities for which we have not fully prepared. What we have are detailed feasibility studies and a business plan that supports Navigant's preparation of the Request for Proposals, mostly for grid-delivered power from outside Marin. (Local aspects of the plan only specify Marin's share of state-mandated solar and efficiency programs.) This plan was developed over five years with more than half a million dollars from the County, MMWD and others.

No funds have been made available for a planning process for local resources. This is a serious drawback that needs to be remedied, probably through local channels. (The federal stimulus programs are not expected to include planning — they require “shovel-ready” projects, although there may be funds for “studies” that could be utilized.)

In a planning vacuum, Marin's unsolicited proposal submitted to the US Dept. of Energy last month was cobbled together in about a week by a volunteer team working with MEA staff, using snippets of ideas culled from various stakeholders. There was no process for public review or prioritizing the elements of the proposal.

Staff has made a laudable effort to broaden the team that is working on the next (final) federal stimulus proposal, but there may be little time for public review. Detailed guidelines may appear any day now, and the deadline to submit a final application is expected to be just before or after the May MEA meeting.

WEM believes it is essential to convene a public process to create a local resources plan and provide for integration of all elements of MCE's plans. This would first of all help to ensure that federal funds are put to the best possible use. Most importantly for the long term, a planning process would be able to address how to leverage the windfall of federal funding to lay the groundwork for the full flowering of Marin Clean Energy over the next quarter century.

The process would advise the preparation of the Implementation Plan to be submitted to the CPUC, including the guidelines for ongoing management of MCE resources.

As a way to begin, WEM submits the attached outline of a proposed public planning process that would take place over the next several months. It could provide a venue for review of the federal proposal, but the emphasis is on the long-term. Let's take time to get a broad picture and choose the best options to fulfill Marin's clean energy goals, develop local businesses and jobs, and realize MCE's economic benefits for the whole community.

WEM asks the MEA Board and/or individual members to endorse this program and help to obtain support for it, and plan on participating.

WEM PROPOSAL FOR A PROCESS TO PLAN AND COORDINATE LOCAL RENEWABLES AND EFFICIENCY THROUGH MARIN CLEAN ENERGY

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE. WEM envisions a series of meetings and workshops at venues including community centers and schools in all MEA jurisdictions and the Marin Center, to identify our communities' energy choices and formulate plans for the development and management of local/ regional renewable energy and energy efficiency resources.

Meetings would take place at various levels – from evening events designed for the general community to more technical meetings inviting local experts and committed individuals to delve into the details. These would culminate with a weekend organizing conference in fall, open to all N. California CCAs.

The process would include ample opportunities for community input and discussion, with the aim of facilitating county-wide acceptance and participation in Marin Clean Energy, and reducing opt-out levels. It would also address common stakeholder concerns and opposition to MCE.

MEETING DESIGN AND PROGRAMS. Meetings would be professionally facilitated and would be designed as participatory events. There would be presentations by energy policymakers and industry and financial professionals and opportunities to converse with them. The format of the meetings would model the kind of open communication that fosters mutual respect and maximizes creativity and resource-sharing as well as information exchange.

We would feature individuals from public energy and water agencies in order to increase the community's level of comfort with local energy management, and we would feature independent providers of power resources and energy efficiency to demonstrate the private sector's interest in the success of our endeavors.

Many meetings would feature a graphic interface such as those provided by Autodesk. Some would include phone hookups and/or web access for people unable to attend in person.

All meetings would include context-setting presentations and discussions about climate change and energy-related environmental, economic and social issues, and exercises designed to access "heart and soul" as well as intellect. Food and socializing intervals would be part of the mix. "Serious" meetings would alternate with community-building events, activities and entertainment.

COORDINATION AND OUTREACH. WEM's convenor role would include outreach and publicity inviting the widest possible participation by various stakeholder groups in meeting planning and execution and outreach to their constituents. We would begin by reaching out to access the talents, expertise, and organizing capabilities of MCE coalition

groups, the MEA Board, staff, advisors, and other electeds, as well as businesses and community groups already identified as supporters.

With these people as a base, WEM would launch systematic grassroots and grasstops efforts to identify more MCE supporters and meeting participants. Community-wide outreach would begin with organized labor, especially in health care, public employees, schools, and building trades, in an effort to increase their understanding of the jobs and economic benefits of MCE and ultimately reverse the opposition of the Labor Council. We also hope to tap labor's considerable organizing expertise and muscle to support MCE.

Outreach would also include targeted contacts to women's groups and low-income and Spanish speaking communities to encourage participation. Measures to ensure these groups' ability to participate would include child-care, translation services, transportation, meals and waiver of admission fees.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS. We propose for the group to work with college interns and school personnel to develop school and college curriculum for the 2009-10 school year, as well as summer activities relating to community outreach and education.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT. Concurrently with the meetings, there should be professional support for key functions in order to better explore development of specific resources, including site analysis, financing options and resource integration. Most importantly, there should be analysis of local economic impacts (jobs and other economic benefits), with a comparison to PG&E's current system as well as a comparison to whatever a PG&E "partnership" might offer.

OUTCOMES. The outcome of the meetings would be a greater degree of consensus on a long-term vision for MCE, including MW goals and development timelines for specific types of renewables and energy efficiency resources. We would also have a concrete startup plan for development of specific clean energy resources throughout the MEA jurisdictions, including project development, financing and rate impacts for both energy efficiency and renewables.

Some "shovel-ready" projects would be more clearly fleshed out by the time federal funds arrive (assuming MEA's projects are funded). The groundwork would be laid for sector-specific RFPs to be issued by the end of 2009 or early 2010 (or an all-inclusive RFP if MEA ultimately decides to use that model). Ideally, the Implementation Plan filed at CPUC would be a fully integrated plan including local resources and energy efficiency, along with the grid resources identified by the Navigant RFP.

The planning process would also provide an interface and resolution of any transitional issues between management of local renewables and EE, ESP management of grid resources, and the current Marin/PG&E EE partnership. The key issue of ratemaking for this combination of resources would receive serious attention.