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Chickens and Energy Efficiency

By Sophie Braccini

At its Feb. 11 meeting, the Moraga Town Council authorized the launch of a small farm animal ordinance study and accepted the participation of the town in a free energy efficiency assessment program for homeowners. Council also authorized staff to look into streamlining the permit process for solar panels and research possible participation in the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) loan program, a funding mechanism for homeowners to finance energy investments.

The topics were brought to the council as a result of the Climate Action Plan accepted by the town at the end of last year.

PACE programs allow homeowners to invest in energy or water saving equipment and pay the loan back over time as a voluntary property tax assessment. A representative of the Home Energy Renovation Opportunity program - one of the companies offering PACE programs locally - attended the council meeting. "There would be no cost and no risk to the town," she said. "We have funded 25,000 projects so far that represent \$481,000 and created 4,000 jobs." The majority of Contra Costa County cities participate in the program.

The town of Moraga decided to participate in the California Youth Energy Services (CYES) program in partnership with the city of Lafayette. The program trains young adults ages 16 to 22 to conduct free energy audits in homes, propose measures to improve performance and inform owners of possible actions and available rebates. Assistant Planner Ella Samonsky, who presented the information, said she talked to the city of Martinez, which has been using the program for a year and is enthusiastically signing on for another year.

Lafayette and Moraga are partnering to pool resources. Lafayette will provide the electronic equipment for CYES youth, while Moraga will give them access to office space at the Hacienda de las Flores. A \$20,000 grant from East Bay Energy Watch will pay for the cities' contribution to the program. The council unanimously approved the town's participation for the summer of 2015, after Councilmember Teresa Onoda made sure that CYES would exclude homes of sex offenders from those being visited by the youth.

On the topic of small farm animals, council members recommended that staff review the Lafayette ordinance that allows homeowners to raise a small number of chickens, rabbits or bees on their property, and the Pleasant Hill ordinance that categorizes chickens (not roosters) and rabbits as pets and allows people to have a small number of them. At this time Moraga residents need to have an acre of land in order to keep any kind of farm animal.

Staff will return sometime this year with a proposal to council about this, the potential streamlined solar panel process and the possibility for Moraga residents to participate in the PACE program.

What is the PACE program?

PACE is a State Assembly-authorized program to finance energy efficiency, water efficiency and renewable energy projects with little or no up-front costs. It is available for commercial, municipal and residential owners. The project is paid back over time as a voluntary property tax assessment through the existing property tax bill. The idea is to keep the monthly payments low enough that the utility savings may exceed payments. Examples of eligible investments include attic insulation, heating, ventilation and air conditioning replacements, solar photovoltaic and thermal systems, and low-flow toilets.

Source: <http://energycenter.org>

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