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Residents ask Orinda to join Marin Clean Energy

By Sora O'Doherty

Orinda Mayor Dennis Fay joined a Zoom meeting on March 7 organized by Carol Weed of 350 Contra Costa to hear a presentation by representatives of Marin Clean Energy. MCE representatives Leanne Hoadley and Mariela Herrick gave the presentation to explain how MCE works.

Orinda has on several occasions declined to join the community choice aggregator (CCA); neighboring Lafayette and Moraga are already members of the joint powers authority. However, the Orinda City Council recently requested a new staff report, which will be presented to them, probably in the latter half of April according to City Manager David Biggs.

MCE was the first community choice aggregator in California following the passage of Assembly Bill 117 in 2002, that allowed the formation of local, not-for-profit government agencies to take over electricity generation services, offering customers a choice about how their electricity is generated. Energy distribution remains the purview of the Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

Currently in Contra Costa County 15 cities have joined MCE, while four have not. MCE has 37 total member communities across four counties: Marin, Napa, Solano and Contra Costa. There are now 24 CCAs in California. MCE's mission is to address climate change by reducing energy-related greenhouse gas emissions.

MCE is governed by its board of directors, composed of 30 elected officials. Fay was interested to hear that a community may choose to be represented on the MCE board by another director. Thus, for example, it would be possible for one director to represent the interests of Orinda along with Moraga and Lafayette. Moraga is currently represented by Town Council Member Teresa Onoda and Lafayette by City Council Member Gina Dawson, both of whom also serve on MCE's technical committee.

According to Weed, MCE is cleaner and often cheaper. She has started a petition at change.org to ask the Orinda City Council to join MCE. Both MCE and PG&E offer different choices about the source of electricity. MCE offers three choices: light green, which is at least 60% from renewable resources, deep green, which is 100% from renewable sources, and local sol, which is 100% produced from local solar power.

The current open enrollment period for MCE ends on July 1. If Orinda does not choose to join by then, the city would have to wait for the next open enrollment period. In response to questions at the MCE presentation, Hoadley said that MCE does the heavy lifting to help cities join. She said that there is a standard "join MCE" ordinance available. In answer to other questions, she affirmed that a city that joins can opt out of receiving their own energy from MCE but leave the choice open for residents.

Mayor Fay suggested that MCE reach out to meet with Orinda City Manager David Biggs, adding that he would encourage Biggs to meet with them. Hoadley confirmed after the meeting that MCE is putting together a list of frequently asked questions that will be submitted to Orinda.

Information about PG&E's energy sources may be viewed at this link:

www.pge.com/pge_global/common/pdfs/your-account/your-bill/understand-your-bill/bill-inserts/2020/1220-PowerContent-ADA.pdf

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