



Clean Power, Healthy Communities 2017

Background Information for the *Housing, Displacement and Other Community Crises Breakout Session*

Energy is one of the necessities of life, like clean air, water, food, shelter and healthcare. For more than 100 years control and ownership of energy resources has been in the hands of large corporations -- Shell, Chevron, PG&E -- you get the picture.

The ability to produce electricity using wind and sun, with wind turbines and solar panels has opened up the possibility that all of us, as communities, could generate our own electricity; we could take control and ownership of that essential resource away from corporations and put it in our hands. This is what we mean when we talk about energy democracy.

Communities that own and/or control their own energy resources can get many benefits. There are direct benefits such as switching to cleaner, renewable energy and getting rid of polluting power plants, addressing the urgent crisis of climate change, and lowering energy bills by eliminating the need for huge profits.

But there are other benefits such as creating jobs and increasing business activity that result when we decide to develop those clean energy resources right in our communities, through rooftop solar, community-scale solar projects and wind farms. There are programs such as community shared solar that offer opportunities for everyone to be part owners in these clean energy projects, and profit from the electricity they produce.

Many cities and counties in California, including Alameda County, are setting up public not-for-profit Community Choice energy programs as alternatives to private, for-profit utilities like PG&E. Because these public agencies are governed by elected officials, community members can push for programs and policies that increase local control and ownership of energy resources and address pressing issues such as skyrocketing rents, unemployment, and systemic poverty in low income communities and communities of color--those that have been most harmed by the fossil fuel economy.

Alameda County is launching its own Community Choice energy program, East Bay Community Energy, next year. It's up to us to make sure it serves our community.

The purpose of this breakout session is to brainstorm ways in which local public control and ownership of energy resources could benefit renters and others being displaced by the rising cost of housing. The following questions are provided to help guide the discussion, but we encourage you to come up with your own.

Housing/displacement Questions

- One key way to slow gentrification is to create more family-sustaining wage jobs for community members vulnerable to displacement. Local renewable energy projects can provide these jobs, but how can we make sure the jobs go to those who need them the most?
- As a public alternative to PG&E, Alameda County's new Community Choice energy program can reduce customers' utility bills by buying power on the market, which is less expensive in the short term than investing in local renewable resources. However, investing in programs to

build local clean energy projects and improve energy efficiency can bring much greater, long lasting benefits to communities over time, like jobs and lower, more stable energy prices. How can we balance immediate needs with long term benefits when addressing issues like rising housing costs?

- A Community Choice energy program could also offer benefits associated with ownership of renewable generation and electricity bill savings through energy efficiency improvements. What are ways that incentive programs could be structured to mitigate high housing costs and address the displacement of Alameda County residents? How can benefits go first to communities most impacted by pollution?
- A Community Choice energy program can offer incentives for new housing developments to put solar on the roof and reduce energy use through energy efficiency retrofits. How can advocates ensure that the benefits of these measures go to renters, and not just landlords?
- A community shared solar program can offer the benefits of solar to those who otherwise would not be able to install solar where they live or work. It enables folks to own “shares” in a community shared solar project. How could such projects help offset high rents?
- What are some policies and programs, like a no shut-offs commitment, that we can advocate for with Alameda’s East Bay Community Energy program that will help ease the housing and displacement crises?