

# Opinion: Who wants Oakland to control our electric power?

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## News

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Windmills on Altamont Pass. (File photo)

Bruce Jensen and Tom Kelly probably regret that their first stop in promoting a county-run electric system to compete with PG&E was at last week's Pleasanton City Council meeting.

They left empty-handed with Mayor Jerry Thorne and council members criticizing almost everything about the plan that would turn over control of electric rates and usage to environmental thought leaders in Oakland, Hayward and Fremont. These three larger cities would have more than a 50% control over the joint powers agreement (JPA) that would run the new power agency.



Called the Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) program, it is designed to enable local jurisdictions like Pleasanton to meet the state's requirement that 33% of all electric power used in a community come from renewable clean energy sources by 2020 and 50% by 2030. The CCA program would procure electricity services with "cleaner and more renewable sources of power" than currently available from PG&E.

Established by the State Assembly in 2002, California has two active CCA programs in Marin and Sonoma counties and in downstate Lancaster. The city/county of San Francisco and San Mateo County are about to launch the program, and several other jurisdictions, including Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties are exploring program possibilities.

But in talking up the program, Jensen and Kelly ran into a barrage of questions and unfavorable comments from the council, supported by a Pleasanton-backed independent study of the program by ESA Community Development.

The study showed risks for residents here to become part of a county-run energy agency, and not just because we are among the 10 of 13 cities in Alameda County that would be bound by what the three larger cities would determine with their majority rule of the JPA. ESA found shortcomings in the CCA's rate forecasting and its assessment of hydro-power availability and costs as well as the high costs of other renewables that would fuel the move away from PG&E's oil and natural gas sources of electricity.

In fact, Kelly, a consultant with the Sequoia Foundation, admitted under questioning by Councilman Arne Olson that the CCA would likely rely solely on wind and solar for the energy that will power Pleasanton customers when the system is fully established. It would not use power from the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant and probably could not find enough hydra-power to meet its needs. That would fit in with his Sequoia Foundation's mission to "hasten the transformation of the power supply to renewable energy sources."

The environmental conservation organization, based in La Jolla, is dedicated to research, public policy interventions and the application of solutions that address the environmental, occupational, demographic and genetic factors that adversely or beneficially affect human health.

Councilman Jerry Pentin noted that CCA plans to be generating 1,000 megawatts of electricity from renewable sources within 14 years, but called that figure misleading. He said there's no open space available to produce that much electricity from solar nor is it likely windmills can ever generate enough power to meet the demands of the Tri-Valley.

Councilwoman Kathy Narum pointed out that we rely on air conditioners during the hot summer months, probably much more than other cities that would be part of a JPA. She's concerned that an Oakland-run consortium would deprive electric customers here of an adequate supply when needed.

Other objections from the council included a provision in the proposed JPA that construction projects would require union labor and that PG&E is well underway to meet the state's clean energy plan and possibly at less costs.

Responding to Alameda County's representative Jensen's request that the Pleasanton council pass an ordinance by early December to join the JPA, the council indicated that won't happen.

"I'm sorry, but I think you have the cart before the horse," Olson said. "Creating a JPA should come after the response to our peer review studies of your plan."

Instead of scheduling a future meeting to consider the JPA bid, Pleasanton city staff plans to make its own independent study of the county's alternative energy plan available to other cities in Alameda County before Jensen and Kelly make more presentations about Community Choice.