

# Marin Voice: Energy independence for Marin

*By Shawn Marshall, Damon Connolly and Lew Tremaine, 11/22/2009 Marin IJ*

There have been a number of articles lately focused on the Marin Energy Authority's potential selection of Shell Energy North America as its initial supplier for its Marin Clean Energy program.

Not surprisingly, these communications contain a mix of genuine inquiry, valid points and, in some cases, innuendo and misinformation.

Unfortunately, the conversation has been reduced to the "lesser of two evils" in the world of fossil-based energy - PG&E vs Shell. This level of debate misses the larger point and diverts our attention from MEA's ultimate goal of providing local clean energy options for Marin residents and businesses.

The conflicting information also creates confusion for a savvy public that rightly wants to know what's what, why and what's happening next.

Over the past few months, MEA has worked with energy experts to draft a five-year supply agreement, and Shell is currently in first position for that contract. Of the 12 bids received, Shell's qualifications were strongest, including available renewable supply, strong indicative pricing to meet or beat that offered by PG&E, organizational experience and capacity, and an "A-1" credit rating.

The trade-off is that Shell is an oil and gas company - not what we would choose in a perfect world. But Shell offers what we need to get started at the lowest price and the least risk to MEA and its Marin customers.

Here are a few key provisions of the master contract:

1. Meeting or beating PG&E's costs is a MEA requirement.
2. Increased energy efficiency is a major part of MEA's greenhouse gas reduction strategy
3. Local control of renewable assets is the ultimate goal for MEA. The contract allows MEA to substitute MEA-owned renewable supply for energy delivered by Shell. Discussions are beginning now to explore local solar, wind, and biomass opportunities. The goal is to be Shell-free and using local renewable supply within five years.

With PG&E alone, Marinites have no choice but to accept electricity that is 85 percent "brown." We also are subject to the costs of a monopoly where energy rates are set at the state level and fees are added to cover private-sector salaries, expensive overhead, the decommissioning of nuclear plants, bankruptcy recovery and shareholder returns.

While PG&E is moving in the right direction with renewables, it already has announced that it won't meet the state's Renewable Portfolio Standards.

MCE, on the other hand, will exceed the RPS on day one, and expects to deliver 100 percent renewable energy by 2016.

In the next three months, each of MEA's member cities and towns will decide whether they want to participate in the program.

Shortly after the energy contract is signed in February, MEA will begin sending "opt-out" notices to customers, allowing them to stay with PG&E if they choose.

In June 2010, the first customers (municipalities and large commercial) will begin being served by

Marin Clean Energy.

Smaller commercial and residential customers will be part of the second phase.

In addition, MEA will begin developing renewable assets and offering energy efficiency programs tailored to Marin residents.

Nobody wins by focusing the debate on PG&E vs. Shell. The fact is, neither company has good environmental records and both have serious human rights skeletons in their closets.

Conversely, both have renewable energy assets and neither deserves absolute vilification. MEA has no desire to defend or condemn the track records of either company.

But you have to walk before you run, and MEA needs both in the short term to achieve our long-term goals: Energy choice, local renewable power generation, price stability and all the economic and environmental benefits of an energy-independent Marin.

Mill Valley Councilwoman Shawn Marshall is vice chair of the Marin Energy Authority board. Damon Connolly, a San Rafael councilman, and Fairfax Town Councilman Lew Tremaine are members of the MEA executive and technical committees.

Public workshops on the MEA plan will be held on Nov. 23, 6 to 9 p.m. at San Rafael City Hall and on Dec. 1, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Mill Valley Community Center.

*[http://www.marinij.com/marinnews/ci\\_13845236](http://www.marinij.com/marinnews/ci_13845236)*