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## **Marin County to provide power, oust PG&E**

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Marin County is poised to jump into the public power business, despite fierce opposition from Pacific Gas and Electric Co.

In a series of votes tonight, officials with the Marin Energy Authority are expected to take some of the last key steps necessary to start providing electricity to many of the county's residents and businesses, taking over a role now filled by PG&E. The organization is a joint-powers authority formed by the county and all of its cities except Corte Madera, Larkspur, Novato and Ross.

The authority's board is scheduled to vote tonight on a proposed contract with Shell Energy North America to line up wholesale electricity supplies from power plants, wind farms and solar facilities. The board also is scheduled to set the authority's electricity rates, matching PG&E's rates for most customers.

"This is the final seal on a lot of the work we've been doing," said Dawn Weisz, the authority's interim director. "We've been working on this for seven years."

If all goes as planned, the Marin Energy Authority would start supplying electricity to some customers in May.

It would be state's first example of a new kind of public power, known as community choice aggregation. Created by a state law in 2002, community choice allows towns, cities or counties to buy electricity for their residents, while traditional utility companies such as PG&E continue to own and operate the electrical grid. San Francisco is developing its community choice aggregation system.

"I'm just totally thrilled that it's finally happening," said Paul Fenn, who drafted the law

and now helps communities adopt community choice aggregation. "This is a very big thing."

But Marin's plan still faces hurdles placed in its path by PG&E.

The utility, based in San Francisco, argues that Marin residents will end up paying more for power in the long run if the authority moves forward. PG&E also has complained that, under California's laws, the authority should have performed an environmental impact report before setting up its system.

PG&E has funded an initiative on the June ballot that would make it far harder for anyone to adopt community choice aggregation in the future. Although the initiative would come too late to stop Marin, it could complicate any efforts by the Marin Energy Authority to expand.

Finally, PG&E has threatened not to deliver electricity to the authority over the utility's power lines.

"We are obligated to not deliver power if we believe that (the authority) is not complying with (community choice aggregation) tariffs and the law," said PG&E spokeswoman Katie Romans.

But the community choice aggregation law explicitly requires utilities to cooperate with communities that adopt the system, said Marin County Supervisor Charles McGlashan, who also serves as the energy authority's chairman. PG&E's threat, he said, "is patently illegal, but they don't seem to care."

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