

## **Marin Clean Energy clears another hurdle; Facebook becomes Prop. 16 battlefield**

[Marin Independent Journal : Richard Halstead](#)

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The Marin Energy Authority has cleared yet another financial hurdle in its effort to compete with Pacific Gas and Electric Co., as it continues to vie with the utility over methods of soliciting customers and promoting Proposition 16.

Sacramento-based River City Bank has agreed to drop a previous requirement that the authority come up with \$400,000 in cash collateral to guarantee a \$500,000 loan for working capital.

The authority, which consists of the county of Marin and seven Marin municipalities, needs the money to make initial electricity purchases until it begins collecting from its new customers. The town of Fairfax, an authority member, has agreed to guarantee \$100,000 of the loan, in return for a \$7,300 payment.

"Financially and operationally, things were going very smoothly and looking very good and they (River City Bank) agreed it really wasn't necessary any more to have that guarantee requirement in place," said Dawn Weisz, the authority's interim director.

Weisz said authority managers met with bank officials a month ago and briefed them on the Marin Clean Energy initiative's progress. The authority is offering some of PG&E's Marin customers the opportunity to receive electricity from at least 25 percent renewable sources for the same price they're paying PG&E.

"They were particularly encouraged to hear that we were providing power to customers, that we have a locked-in power supply agreement with Shell, and we have more customers than anticipated," Weisz said.

River City Bank has also loaned the authority an additional \$950,000 to supply it with start-up capital. The authority cleared a major obstacle in February when Marin County supervisors voted to guarantee that loan.

The authority has a little more than 6,900 customers, Weisz said. Only residents who live in the municipalities that belong to the authority have the option of joining. The authority began sending notices to 7,500 of Marin's biggest users of electricity in early February notifying them that, under state community choice aggregation law, they would automatically become Marin Clean Energy customers unless they contacted PG&E to opt out. The authority began mailing to an additional 2,700 customers on April 10.

So far, about 16.6 percent of the customers have opted out, Weisz said.

She said the authority is still waiting for PG&E to comply with a California Public Utilities Commission directive to supply it with the names of customers who have opted out, when they opted out and by what means. On May 3, Paul Clanon, executive director of the commission, sent a letter to PG&E ordering it to stop its solicitation of opt-outs. PG&E had been using newspaper ads, phone banking, mailers and other means to collect opt-outs. Clanon said these means were not allowed and said PG&E would have to revoke some of the opt-outs previously gathered.

Weisz said so far about 500 opt-outs have been nullified. She said 300 of these resulted due to a letter that PG&E sent to 6,000 Marin County residents on May 4, the day after

Clanon issued his warning.

Katie Romans, a PG&E spokeswoman, said the mailing was a mistake that was the result of a computer glitch.

Weisz said the authority believes more of the opt-outs should be invalidated, and it needs the detailed information on the opt-outs that PG&E has been instructed to provide.

"We are currently working with both the MEA and the CPUC to resolve any privacy issues that may present to our customers," Romans said.

Meanwhile, several supporters of the Marin Clean Energy initiative say that their names have appeared in Facebook ads endorsing Proposition 16 on Tuesday's ballot, and e-mails have been sent to their Facebook friends that make it appear they support the initiative.

PG&E has spent some \$40 million on the measure, which would make it tougher not only for Marin residents - but residents throughout the state - to get their power from anyone else. The initiative would require two-thirds approval from local voters before cities or counties could choose an alternate energy provider.

Christy Michaels of Terra Linda said she became suspicious when she saw the name of a friend in a Facebook ad endorsing Proposition 16.

"What had happened is she had gone into the fan page for 'taxpayers right to vote,' and at that time she said the only way to get in was to sign on," Michaels said. The fan page was posted by the campaign committee backing Proposition 16.

Michaels said her friend assumed she would be able to remove her name later but couldn't.

"She didn't realize they'd take out an ad and start posting it to all her friends," Michaels said.

Michaels said she followed the same steps as her friend but didn't sign on.

"I backed out. I didn't go to the page," Michaels said.

Nevertheless, Michaels said when she returned to her own Facebook page she found an ad with her name saying that she supported "taxpayers right to vote." Michaels said one of her Facebook friends also received an e-mail purportedly from Michaels "asking her to vote yes on Prop. 16."

Robin Swanson, a spokeswoman for the Yes on 16 campaign, said, "That's not the way Facebook works. There is no way we could get their information unless they clicked that they were fans, and anyone who is telling you otherwise is lying."

Facebook representatives could not be reached for comment.

Barbara George of Fairfax said Michaels is just one of a number of Proposition 16 opponents who have complained of similar experiences. George said she has asked the California secretary of state, the state attorney general and the Public Utilities Commission to investigate.

"The whole point of Facebook is to be in touch with people you know and trust, so for PG&E's campaign to misappropriate Facebook identities and friends lists in order to falsely claim that people 'like' Prop. 16 is an intolerable invasion of privacy," George said.

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