

ALAMEDA COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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Agency Director

September 1, 2011

Agenda Item #12
September 13, 2011

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The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County Administration Building
1221 Oak Street, Fifth Floor
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Board Members:

SUBJECT: Proposed Policies for the development of Solar Energy Facilities in Rural Alameda County

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board accept the policy paper attached to this letter and direct the Planning Department to initiate a public process to amend the County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance as recommended in the paper.

BACKGROUND:

The increased demand for solar energy resulting from California's Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS) target of 33%, combined with State and federal financial incentive programs to encourage the development of Solar Energy Facilities (SEFs), has led to rapidly increasing interest in locating solar facilities in Alameda County. On April 12, 2011 the Board of Supervisors heard a report from staff on the need for policies to address issues concerning the development of SEFs in the County. Since this interest has been primarily in the rural areas of the East County, the Board directed staff to develop policies for determining appropriate locations in rural areas for large-scale solar photovoltaic facilities that generate electricity primarily for use off-site. While recent development proposals have been primarily in the Mountain House area, the proposed policies are intended to apply throughout the rural unincorporated area.

Based on the Board's direction, the attached paper focuses mainly on the rural County; however, staff recognizes that it is also the Board's intent to promote the development of solar facilities in the urban unincorporated areas. To that end, upon completion of this process for rural areas, staff will undertake a similar process to address the development of solar facilities in the urban area.

DISCUSSION/SUMMARY:

The intent of the policy direction proposed in the attached paper is to reconcile the sometimes competing goals of resource protection and the development of renewable energy sources. Taking into consideration public input, as well as policies, ordinances, and mitigation

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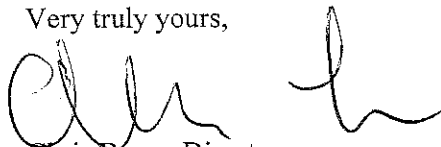
measures that have been adopted or are being considered by other jurisdictions in the state, the paper proposes concepts to be considered in amendments to the County's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The general plan and ordinance amendments will require a public process that will include public hearings before various advisory bodies as well as a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis. Staff believes that, with the acceptance of the Board, the policy recommendations in the paper can serve as guidance in the consideration of pending applications in advance of the adoption of the proposed general plan and zoning ordinance amendments. It should also be noted that a site-specific CEQA analysis would be required for each SEF development application.

CONCLUSION:

Given the urgent need for renewable energy in the state, it is important that the County consider the development of SEFs, but it is equally important that this development does not adversely affect such valued resources as open space and agricultural and biological resources. Having strong policies in place will help to protect these resources.

Staff recommends that the Board accept the policy paper attached to this letter and direct the Planning Department to initiate a public process to amend the County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance as recommended in the paper.

Very truly yours,


Chris Bazar, Director
Community Development Agency

Attachments:

Proposed Policies for Solar Energy Facilities in Rural Alameda County, September 13, 2011