



JIM DESMOND
SUPERVISOR, FIFTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: May 24, 2023

09

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT:

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF DECARBONIZATION EFFORTS BY CONDUCTING A LOCAL ANALYSIS OF EXISTING RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL AND OTHER INFILL RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY AND IDENTIFYING REMAINING AVAILABLE ROOFTOP, PARKING LOT AND OTHER INFILL CAPACITY FOR FUTURE RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

In an effort to reduce the region's reliance on traditional sources of energy and combat climate change, on January 27, 2021 (3), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) voted to create a plan that would outline realistic, data-driven pathways for local governments, industries, businesses, etc. to collectively reach net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – focusing namely on carbon dioxide (CO₂) - from our region by 2045. This plan was officially dubbed the “Regional Decarbonization Framework” (RDF), which is currently in draft form and is anticipated to return to the Board for further consideration in late 2023 or sometime next year. To shape the RDF, County staff contracted with the University of California San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy, the Energy Policy Initiatives Center (EPIC) at the University of San Diego School of Law and other technical consultants to ensure scientific knowledge guides this effort at decarbonizing San Diego County's energy, transportation and building systems.

Although the RDF is an extensive framework covering a broad range of topics including climate change, equity, green jobs, public safety and so forth, the Technical Report portion of the RDF ultimately contemplates nine different scenarios for renewable energy infrastructure that, in combination with other efforts, would guide the region in achieving net zero GHG emissions by mid-century. Each scenario includes its own unique cost-benefit considerations that would have to be weighed carefully by local decision-makers, including this Board, to ensure everyday San Diegans will benefit from decarbonization. Examples of these considerations include but are not limited to 1) the degree to which any given scenario is able to achieve estimated 2050 electricity demand; 2) the levelized cost of energy in dollar amount per Megawatt hours generated; and 3) impacts to conservation and agricultural lands.

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I agree we should harness the power of renewable energy sources. At the same time, we need to carefully consider possible destabilizing effects on the existing energy grid, which is becoming an all-too-common threat as electricity demand is quickly outpacing current supply, especially in the summer months. We must consider various approaches to decarbonization and embrace a range of energy supply sources, which increases reliability and community resilience to energy emergencies such as blackouts and brownouts, and would also help ratepayers maintain some degree of control over their energy needs.

It is in this spirit that I ask my colleagues to vote that an analysis of local, existing renewable energy conditions be conducted by staff. The scenarios highlighted in the RDF Technical Report were generated relying largely on state and federal data sources and models. While this is contextually beneficial, a better understanding of local conditions relating to existing residential, commercial and other infill renewable energy generation, with an emphasis on existing solar is needed before we should move forward. This should also include an analysis of remaining rooftop and infill solar capacity in order to provide information that will inform and guide the Board in our decarbonization efforts.

It's prudent to collect a more detailed local accounting of existing renewable energy generation and remaining capacity in San Diego County. Again, the intent of today's item is meant to give us more information to ensure we maximize energy production while minimizing impacts as California moves away from traditional sources of energy. Ordinary San Diegans must be the largest beneficiary of our local decarbonization efforts. Taking steps now to make sure the RDF is reflective of local reality and focuses on ratepayer control over their energy needs is critical for the wellbeing of every community in the region, for both existing and future generations.

Today's action would direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to conduct a local analysis of existing residential, commercial and other infill renewable energy infrastructure throughout the region (with an emphasis on existing solar) and provide a report inventorying existing conditions by supervisorial district. Today's action would also direct the CAO to perform an opportunity analysis identifying remaining available rooftop, parking lot and other infill capacity for future renewable energy projects.

RECOMMENDATION(S)
SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND

1. Find that the proposed actions are not a project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15378(b)(5) of the CEQA Guidelines.
2. In accordance with Section 401, Article XXIII of the County Administrative Code, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a solicitation or solicitations for a study of renewable energy generation, transmission, distribution, and storage capacity in the San Diego region that considers resiliency from power outages, economic benefits and costs, and local community context, and upon successful

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negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award contracts for a term of two years, with two option years and up to an additional six months if needed, and to amend the contracts as needed to reflect changes to services and funding.

3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to report back to the Board in 180 days on the progress of the study and include the study in future Regional Decarbonization Framework reports and updates.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Low-income and other vulnerable communities often bear the brunt of energy insecurity and high utility bills. As the County continues its decarbonization efforts, we must prioritize reliability, affordability and ratepayer control over an “at-all-costs” approach to emissions reductions. Actions we take to completely transform our energy systems and existing power grid will have a profound impact on our constituents and ratepayers throughout San Diego County and will set the stage for future generations. We must ensure that our actions around decarbonization do not disproportionately impact low-income and other vulnerable communities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County’s commitment to sustainability requires us to consider the long-term consequences of our actions on the environment, economy, and social well-being of our communities. While the environmental benefits are often touted, I also recognize the potential economic benefits of pursuing renewable energy solutions, such as job creation and reduced reliance on imported energy sources. However, as we begin to invest heavily in alternative forms of energy, it is imperative we do so in a way that creates a more resilient and prosperous economy for everyone in the region, both now and for future generations.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Operational Plan in the Land Use & Environment Group Executive Office (LUEG). There is no impact to net General Fund costs, and there will be no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

In an effort to reduce the region’s reliance on traditional sources of energy and combat climate change, on January 27, 2021 (3), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) voted to create the “Regional Decarbonization Framework” (RDF). Currently, the RDF is in draft form,

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and is anticipated to return to the Board for further consideration in late 2023 or sometime next year. As we consider the various scenarios presented in the RDF Technical Report to achieve net zero GHG emissions by mid-century, it is important to reflect on the data to ensure our decisions have the intended outcomes at the local level. When future generations look back to the moment our region set upon a path to decarbonize our economy and energy systems - as is the aim of the RDF - they will ask if those leading the effort did everything they could to put a plan into motion that included the facts, took seriously the reliability risks of supply and demand and considered ratepayer control over their energy needs. While the RDF does not recommend or identify a “right” or “best” decarbonization scenario for the region, it does identify “least cost” scenarios that propose utility-scale solar generation in the backcountry, desert areas and Imperial County with new transmission lines to the coastal and urban areas in our region. I have heard from many of my constituents who are concerned with the simple fact these scenarios are identified as “least cost.” Again, the assumptions in the RDF Technical Report were generated relying largely on state and federal data sources. It’s in this spirit that I ask my colleagues to vote with me that a thorough analysis of local, existing renewable energy conditions should be conducted by staff, to include an opportunity analysis identifying remaining available rooftop, parking lot and other infill capacity for future renewable energy projects, including a cost/benefit analysis.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today’s proposed action supports the Sustainability: Climate and Resiliency Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego’s 2023-2028 Strategic Plan. By challenging the high-level data in the RDF with a local analysis of existing renewable energy conditions and remaining capacity, we can help accommodate the transition to a more reliable and just renewable energy future. Decarbonizing our economy must be based on facts, ensure the greatest degree of social well-being among all residents in the region, and increase grid resiliency and reliability in the face of anticipated growing electricity demand in the coming years.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Desmond', with a stylized, cursive script.

JIM DESMOND
Supervisor, Fifth District