



TERRA LAWSON-REMER

CHAIR

SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: December 9, 2025

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

EXPLORING COUNTY PARTNERSHIPS TO EXPAND AFFORDABLE CLEAN POWER FOR LOW-INCOME SAN DIEGANS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Mounting energy bills puts San Diego working families in the impossible situation of choosing between keeping the lights on and paying rent. Electricity rates in San Diego rank among the highest in the nation and their trajectory is alarming.ⁱ San Diego Gas & Electric's (SDG&E) rates doubled since 2013,ⁱⁱ outpacing both inflation and incomes.ⁱⁱⁱ Every indicator points toward continued escalation due to wildfire mitigation costs and the federal government's cancellation of billions of dollars in investments in clean power generation. One in four SDG&E residential customers has already fallen behind on payments.^{iv}

The County of San Diego (County) is tackling electricity affordability through active participation in San Diego Community Power (Community Power). Community Power is a not-for-profit clean power provider that partners with SDG&E to supply electricity to nearly a million households across the region, including the unincorporated areas. Community Power lowered power generation rates an average of 2.8% in each of the last two years and sells power at a 3-5% discount over SDG&E.^v In addition, Community Power offers a variety of programs and incentives designed to lower electricity bills further. The Solar Battery Savings program, for example, offers customers a substantial upfront rebate to install a solar battery system and ongoing performance incentives when the battery is discharged during peak demand hours.^{vi} Community Power and the County also lead the San Diego Regional Energy Network, which recently received \$124 million for a suite of energy efficiency programs for local homes and businesses.^{vii}

As the energy challenge mounts, the County must build on its partnership with Community Power to address cost and equity issues. The burden of California's electricity costs falls heaviest on those who can least afford it. Households earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level—\$74,000 for a family of four in 2025—spend 2.5 times more of their annual income on electricity than the median income household.^{viii} Low-income households also carry a disproportionate share of the

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state's \$2 billion in past-due electricity debt.^{ix} Geography compounds inequity, with the most burdensome electricity costs in the hotter inland and desert zones. For low-income San Diego households in places where air conditioning is a necessity, electricity bills eat into their budgets at an unsustainable pace.

Energy-burdened households tend to live in closer proximity to environmental health risks but lack access to solar installations that could provide relief. These households face multiple barriers to rooftop solar adoption: prohibitive upfront costs; the prevalence of renters who have no say in installation decisions; older homes requiring expensive roof replacements or electrical upgrades; lack of interest from installers and developers; and getting priced out of installation assistance programs because of the high cost of living in San Diego County. It is no surprise that San Diego census tracts designated as environmental justice communities based on environmental health and socioeconomic criteria have less than half the residential solar of non-environmental justice communities.^x

All San Diegans deserve affordable clean power and the County has an opportunity to broaden access by supporting the California Public Utility Commission's Disadvantaged Communities Green Tariff (DAC-GT) program. Administered locally by Community Power, DAC-GT funds the development of small-scale solar projects in disadvantaged communities and provides low-income households with 100% renewable power at a 20% discount. Potentially 9,000 low-income San Diego households stand to benefit from the DAC-GT program.

Today's item seeks to address a key barrier to DAC-GT's success. Solar developers want to participate but many struggle to find leasable sites that meet the tight specifications of the DAC-GT program. The County can help by identifying leasable sites on County-owned and -leased properties that are eligible for DAC-GT installations and coordinating with Community Power so interested developers may consider them for solar installations. Subsequent leasing and development decisions will adhere to existing County policies and procedures.

By taking this action, the County is helping to tackle electricity affordability and mitigate the inequitable energy burden and environmental health risks facing too many low-income San Diego households.

RECOMMENDATION

CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to determine if any County-owned or -leased properties are eligible for participation in Community Power's DAC-GT program and coordinate with Community Power so interested developers may consider leasing available sites for possible solar installations.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

DAC-GT is explicitly designed to address the inequitable energy burden and access to clean energy facing low-income San Diego households. By identifying eligible, leasable sites on County property and making that information available to interested developers, the County will help facilitate the delivery of 100% renewable power at a 20% discount to 9,000 income-eligible San Diego households. DAC-GT's focus on census tracts with elevated environmental health risks also serves to mitigate ongoing and legacy environmental health inequalities.

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SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's item advances the County's sustainability goals by helping to facilitate the development of 20MW of 100% renewable energy generation in underserved areas of the county through the DAC-GT program.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

By addressing a key barrier to business participation in the DAC-GT program, today's item makes it easier for solar developers to propose eligible DAC-GT projects and encourages them to serve the low-income segment of the rooftop solar market.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Mounting energy bills puts San Diego working families in the impossible situation of choosing between keeping the lights on and paying rent. Electricity rates in San Diego rank among the highest in the nation and their trajectory is alarming.^{xi} San Diego Gas & Electric's (SDG&E) rates doubled since 2013,^{xii} outpacing both inflation and incomes.^{xiii} Every indicator points toward continued escalation due to wildfire mitigation costs and the federal government's cancellation of billions of dollars in investments in clean power generation. One in four SDG&E residential customers has already fallen behind on payments.^{xiv}

The County of San Diego (County) is tackling electricity affordability through active participation in San Diego Community Power (Community Power). Community Power is a not-for-profit clean power provider that partners with SDG&E to supply electricity to nearly a million households across the region, including the unincorporated areas. Community Power lowered power generation rates an average of 2.8% in each of the last two years and sells power at a 3-5% discount over SDG&E.^{xv} In addition, Community Power offers a variety of programs and incentives designed to lower electricity bills further. The Solar Battery Savings program, for example, offers customers a substantial upfront rebate to install a solar battery system and ongoing performance incentives when the battery is discharged during peak demand hours.^{xvi} Community Power and the County also lead the San Diego Regional Energy Network, which recently received \$124 million for a suite of energy efficiency programs for local homes and businesses.^{xvii}

As the energy challenge mounts, the County must build on its partnership with Community Power to address cost and equity issues. The burden of California's electricity costs falls heaviest on those who can least afford it. Households earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level—\$74,000 for a family of four in 2025—spend 2.5 times more of their annual income on electricity than the median income household.^{xviii} Low-income households also carry a disproportionate share of the state's \$2 billion in past-due electricity debt.^{xix} Geography compounds inequity, with the most

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burdensome electricity costs in the hotter inland and desert zones. For low-income San Diego households in places where air conditioning is a necessity, electricity bills eat into their budgets at an unsustainable pace.

Rooftop solar offers a pathway to lower electricity bills yet the households most burdened by electricity costs have the least access to this affordable energy solution. Low-income households face multiple barriers to rooftop solar: prohibitive upfront costs; the prevalence of renters who have no say in installation decisions; older homes requiring expensive roof replacements or electrical upgrades; lack of interest from installers and developers; and getting priced out of installation assistance programs because of the high cost of living in San Diego County. It is no surprise that San Diego census tracts designated as environmental justice communities based on environmental health and socioeconomic screens have less than half the residential solar of non-environmental justice communities.^{xx} This pattern represents a troubling paradox: the households most burdened by electricity costs, who also tend to have greater exposure to sources of air and water pollution, have the least access to a clean energy technology that could provide relief.

The California Public Utility Commission's Disadvantaged Communities Green Tariff (DAC-GT) program administered by Community Power tackles both the affordability and access challenges facing low-income households. Community Power's DAC-GT program funds local, new-build, small-scale solar projects near disadvantaged census tracts and enrolls income-eligible households in 100% renewable power at a 20% discount on their bills. Community Power has been allocated 20MW for its DAC-GT program, making it the largest DAC-GT allocation in the state with the potential to serve 9,000 low-income San Diego households.

A key obstacle to the success of DAC-GT is the difficulty interested developers face in identifying leasable sites that meet the tight specifications of the DAC-GT program. Sites must be located in or within five miles of a disadvantaged community, defined by the California Public Utilities Commission as a census tract that either scores at or above the 75th percentile in the current CALEPA CalEnviroScreen 4.0 on a statewide basis, or is one of the census tracts that scores in the highest 5% of CalEnviroScreen's pollution burden, but does not have an overall score. In addition, sites must be suitable for projects between 500kW and 15MW in size.

Today's item directs the County to identify leasable sites on County-owned and -leased properties that are eligible for DAC-GT installations and share a list of those sites with Community Power for consideration by interested developers. Development of any identified County site would be subject to future site analysis confirming the site can meet DAC-GT, County, and any applicable zoning and permitting requirements. Future development of a site would also be subject to successful lease negotiations between participating developers and the County, or if a lease site, potentially the current owner. If any sites move forward as a County lease, staff will return to the Board if necessary.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's action supports the Sustainability and Equity initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan by supporting a program that promotes clean energy, addresses environmental health inequities, and lowers energy bills for San Diego's low-income households.

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Respectfully submitted,



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ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A

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- ⁱ [San Diego has highest electricity rates in the country | cbs8.com](#)
 - ⁱⁱ [Our annual look at San Diego customers behind on their utility bills – San Diego Union-Tribune](#)
 - ⁱⁱⁱ [Assessing California’s Climate Policies—Residential Electricity Rates in California](#)
 - ^{iv} [Opinion | How income-based fees can lower California's energy bills](#)
 - ^v [San Diego Community Power lowers rates for 2025, with some uncertainties ahead – San Diego Union-Tribune](#)
 - ^{vi} [Solar Battery Savings - San Diego Community Power](#)
 - ^{vii} [Public Utilities Commission Approves San Diego Regional Energy Network — CalREN](#)
 - ^{viii} [Low-Income Households Struggle with the Cost of Electricity Bills - Public Policy Institute of California](#)
 - ^{ix} [Bridging the Equity Gaps in California’s Income-Based Electricity Rate Proposal](#)
 - ^x [Environmental Health Coalition - Energy Democracy](#)
 - ^{xi} [San Diego has highest electricity rates in the country | cbs8.com](#)
 - ^{xii} [Our annual look at San Diego customers behind on their utility bills – San Diego Union-Tribune](#)
 - ^{xiii} [Assessing California’s Climate Policies—Residential Electricity Rates in California](#)
 - ^{xiv} [Opinion | How income-based fees can lower California's energy bills](#)
 - ^{xv} [San Diego Community Power lowers rates for 2025, with some uncertainties ahead – San Diego Union-Tribune](#)
 - ^{xvi} [Solar Battery Savings - San Diego Community Power](#)
 - ^{xvii} [Public Utilities Commission Approves San Diego Regional Energy Network — CalREN](#)
 - ^{xviii} [Low-Income Households Struggle with the Cost of Electricity Bills - Public Policy Institute of California](#)
 - ^{xix} [Bridging the Equity Gaps in California’s Income-Based Electricity Rate Proposal](#)
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