



Draft energy plan released

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The Redwood Coast Energy Authority has released for public comment a draft of the energy element that is being developed as part of Humboldt County's current General Plan update.

California state law requires each city and county to adopt and periodically update a general plan, which serves as a local blueprint for future physical development, and guides most land-use decisions.

By law, general plans must include seven required focus areas, called "elements," which include issues like land use, circulation, housing and conservation.

In addition, jurisdictions are encouraged to include optional elements that help to give clarity to important local issues, such as the draft energy element released today.

"The draft energy element provides a comprehensive approach to issues of long-term availability, reliability and affordability of energy in Humboldt County," said RCEA Executive Director David Boyd. "It's a road map to a sustainable future."

According to Boyd, the plan lays out a compelling vision of a future based on conservation, efficiency and maximized use of renewable energy, articulates local policies necessary for achieving that vision, and suggests strategies that can be adopted to implement those policies.

The energy element includes policies and strategies that promote adaptive local energy planning, enhanced standards for energy-efficient building design and operation, encouragement of renewable energy and distributed generation, and investigation into possibilities for increased local management of energy supplies.

When adopted and implemented, this approach will help to ensure more reliable and secure energy supplies, reduce dependence on imported energy, retain more energy dollars in the local economy, and help to address local and global environmental issues associated with energy use.

The RCEA and its consulting team, led by Planwest Partners of Arcata, has been working on the energy element since January.

The Planwest team, which includes the Schatz Energy Research Center, the Center for Environmental Economic Development, Net Gain, and Winzler and Kelly, spent the past six months gathering information, researching options and compiling public input, which has been incorporated into the draft element.

The element includes a detailed technical background report, prepared by the Schatz Energy Research Center at Humboldt State University, which analyzes Humboldt County's current and historical energy supply and use, and projects future energy needs.

It also inventories existing generation and transmission facilities, as well as local energy resources and promising new technologies.

“It’s the most in-depth analysis of Humboldt County’s energy use ever produced, and was instrumental in identifying the key constraints and opportunities that are addressed by the energy element,” Boyd said.

Now that the draft has been released, RCEA would like to receive additional public comment before a final version is turned over to the county for inclusion in the General Plan update.

The draft energy element is available for review at the Redwood Coast Energy Information Center in Eureka, or can be downloaded from RCEA’s Web site, www.redwoodenergy.org.

RCEA will wrap up the comment period with a public hearing on Sept. 8 in Eureka.

“Through their participation in meetings held earlier this year, the public helped to shape the direction of the energy element,” Boyd said. “Now that the draft has been completed, we want to get it out for additional review before we turn it over to the county. Energy use touches every aspect of our lives, and we need to make sure we get this right.”

In response to a recommendation from RCEA last September, the Board of Supervisors directed the Community Development Services Department to include an energy element in the updated general plan.

To support this effort, RCEA was successful in bringing together a number of funding sources, including ratepayers through Pacific Gas and Electric and the California Public Utilities Commission, the U.S. Department of Energy’s “Million Solar Roofs Program,” and the North Coast Unified Air Quality Management District, a partnership that has allowed for a comprehensive approach to local energy issues.

RCEA was formed in 2003 as a joint-powers association, representing seven cities (Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Trinidad and Rio Dell) and Humboldt County.

RCEA’s purpose is to develop and implement sustainable energy initiatives that reduce energy demand, increase energy efficiency, and advance the use of clean, efficient and renewable resources available in the region.