

Jim Zoellick
1766 Old Arcata Rd.
Bayside, CA 95524

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Humboldt County Community Development Services
Planning Division
3015 H Street
Eureka, CA

Dear Humboldt County Planning Commission,

I am writing to present testimony regarding the Humboldt County General Plan Update, and more specifically regarding the Revised Draft of Chapter 17, the Energy Element (dated July 17, 2007).

I would like to voice my primary support for the adoption of Alternative A. My second choice, in lieu of Alternative A, is to adopt Alternative B as staff recommends. What is most critical is that either Alternative A or B is adopted. Some members of the public have stated that there is no need for a County Energy Element, claiming that it would be redundant with current state and federal energy regulations. On the contrary, the State of California is encouraging municipal energy planning and is considering requiring the preparation of municipal energy elements.

In their 2006 Integrated Energy Policy Report Update (see: http://www.energy.ca.gov/2006_policy_update/index.html), the California Energy Commission (CEC) recommends that the legislature pass legislation requiring local governments to include energy elements in their general plans. They also suggest that the state require local governments to develop greenhouse gas reduction plans. The CEC even commends Humboldt County for their efforts to address energy issues in local planning. It is our responsibility to follow through on these efforts and work toward local sustainable energy policy.

The CEC's policy report recognizes that local governments are pivotal players in land use planning and that land use decisions have a profound impact on all aspects of energy. In addition, the Governor's Climate Action Team has identified "smart growth" and intelligent transportation systems as major elements of a unified program to meet the State's greenhouse gas reduction goals. Smart growth refers to the application of specific development principles to make prudent use of resources and create low-impact communities through enlightened design and layout. The CEC's policy report goes on to state that a host of related energy support services and infrastructure—fueling stations, transmission lines, power plants and pipelines—and the potential for distributed renewable generation and energy efficient design must also be considered in planning uses for land parcels.

It is clear that the State of California is encouraging and may even mandate local energy planning. It is Humboldt County's responsibility to follow through with their current energy planning efforts and adopt either Alternative A or B of the County Energy Element. In addition, it is critical that Policy E-P1, which recognizes the RCEA as the Regional Energy Authority and authorizes them to develop and administer the Comprehensive Action Plan for Energy, be fully implemented.

Finally, if Alternative B is adopted I recommend that the following key modifications be included.

1. Include policy E-P23 and standard E-S6. This would require that the County adopt green building standards for all new County facilities. This would be consistent with State Executive Order S-20-04 (Green Building Initiative). However, it is suggested that current references in the Energy Element to the “California Green Builder Program” (which is a specific industry sponsored program) be eliminated and instead language should refer to “a county adopted green building program” which can be determined at a later date. Note that such a program can be configured to save, rather than cost the County money.
2. Modify policy E-P34 to include a reference to California’s “Environmentally Preferable Purchasing” legislation, Public Contract Code Section 12400-12404. See: <http://www.green.ca.gov/EPP/>
3. Include implementation measure E-IM13 as part of the Circulation Element.
4. Include implementation measure E-IM29. This would be a simple, no cost measure that would allow for energy saving measures to be implemented and a portion of the resulting dollar savings to be reinvested in more energy efficiency projects. This is a win-win proposition for the County.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the County’s General Plan update. I look forward to working together with the County and others in our community to help secure a sustainable energy future for Humboldt County.

Sincerely,

James I. Zoellick