

1) Receive report on use of the term “clean” in the final draft of the CAPE/RePower Humboldt document.

Executive Director Matthew Marshall presented a staff report on the latest Comprehensive Action Plan for Energy strategic plan draft reflecting Board suggestions from their November meeting. The draft uses state definitions of “renewable” and “clean” from SB 100 and state 2045 goals, which RCEA is accelerating. The benefits of determining overall goals, then supplying specific project screening criteria and specific conditions to include in agreements, were described.

The Committee discussed the following:

- The difficulty for biomass plants to invest in technology with short-term contracts.
- Possible inclusion of biomass contract language stating that longer-terms would be considered if best available emission lowering technology is used.
- The likelihood of continued local biomass plant operation without RCEA contracts.
- The common public health interest in improving biomass plants.
- The offshore wind project’s potential impact on the need for biomass energy, project constraints and new technology implementation risks.
- Humboldt County’s relationship as a resource-rich area to populated, low-resource areas.
- The need for a diversified energy portfolio and the challenges of maintaining high living standards with lowered dependence on instantly-accessible but polluting energy.
- The need to quantify targets without specifying program mechanisms due to evolving technology.
- The need to refer back to the overall plan when describing different strategies.
- The tension between community members requesting no biomass energy and proposing non-energy biomass uses; people who would like the biomass electricity production status quo to continue; and pursuing gasification and less-polluting biomass energy technologies.
- The need to include the following in the strategic plan: quantitative CO2 emissions and health harming emissions language, a cost-benefit analysis of different energy technologies, and information on cradle to grave greenhouse gas impacts of different resources

Chair Tittman invited public comment.

Member of public Walt Paniak stated his opposition to ratepayers paying higher prices for biomass to pay for forest industry waste removal, and that biomass plant owners may claim tax benefits for plant improvements paid for by ratepayers.

Member of the public Wendy Ring asked the Committee to prioritize power procurement based on climate, resilience and local sources, in that order, and not to commit to expensive gasification. Ms. Ring added that further emissions and exposure studies are not needed, but that an air quality and energy consultant should be hired to advise on necessary public health measures.

UC Cooperative Extension County Director and Forest Advisor Yana Valachovic stated that the overall goal is to stop using fossil fuel and that a biomass technical advisory committee would provide an opportunity to discuss and educate the public about biomass and forest management for long-term carbon capture and storage.

Member of the public Ellen Golla stated that ratepayers and RCEA are not responsible for forest management and that the forest products industry may inappropriately use the technical advisory committee to promote their interests.

Chair Tittman closed public comment.

2) Determine an appropriate definition of the term “clean.”

The Committee discussed the following:

- Community member requests for a clear definition of “clean.”
- Public concerns about whether biomass energy use fits RCEA’s mission.
- RCEA Climate and Forests Consultant Michael Furniss’ advice to avoid use of “clean” because of the term’s many definitions.
- The CAPE revision’s working definition of “clean” as 100% net zero carbon renewable energy.
- Inclusion of tons of CO2 emitted and health and climate impacts as part of a “clean” definition.
- Extension of health impact considerations to include solar panel manufacture, mining and impacts of other energy technologies.
- The RCEA joint powers agreement use of the term “clean,” the agency’s lack of a formal definition and working use of the state definition of renewable, non-fossil fuel sources.
- The Board decision to defer air quality and emissions determinations to the Air Quality Management District when originally approving the biomass power agreements, and how contracts may be cancelled if emissions requirements are not met.
- Separation of the Air Quality District “clean” definition and carbon emissions issues.
- How determining energy source focus in the agency’s overall goals, then giving specific direction on a project-by-project basis, is constructive for policy implementation.

Chair Tittman asked for public comment on the definition of “clean.”

Member of the public Martha Walden stated that “clean” is hard to define but that burning wood emits carbon which pollutes the air, and biomass does not belong in the same category as solar and wind.

Member of the public Wendy Ring recalled that hundreds of community members signed a petition submitted to RCEA that biomass is not clean, and requested that local biomass plants be required to meet the same Clean Air Act requirements as coal-fired power plants.

Ellen Golla stated that Title V major polluters emitting more methane than the local PG&E power plant are not clean.

Walt Paniak distributed data on natural gas and diesel fuel used by the DG Fairhaven and Humboldt Sawmill Company plants to burn biomass and asked RCEA to consider supplemental fuel when determining whether energy is clean.

Mike Richardson, Humboldt Redwood Company Director of Operations stated that HRC’s power plant operates below emission limits, that the company has invested millions of dollars in the plant’s emissions control system and combustion efficiency which lowers emissions, and that RCEA’s contracts allow HRC enough certainty to invest in these improvements. He stated that Humboldt Redwood Company intends to operate the plant as efficiently as possible and compliantly per HRC’s permit and to invest in the plant as long as they have contract certainty.

UC Cooperative Extension County Director and Forest Advisor Yana Valachovic stated that all energy sources have impacts, that a good lifecycle analysis of all energy sources is needed, and that broader policy language is needed in order to have energy.

Member of the public Margaret Towser requested a table of carbon emissions for different types of energy from manufacture through power production.

Chair Tittman closed public comment.

3) Provide guidance to staff on incorporating revisions in the final CAPE/RePower Humboldt document for Board approval at December 19 meeting.

The Committee agreed that the meaning of the term “clean” remains ambiguous and requested inclusion of the following in the CAPE revision:

- Language on public health and environmental impacts in the overall goals section
- Sidebar discussion of use of the term “clean” in the introduction section
- Combine the “Pursue Funding for Biomass Best Practices” and “Plan for a Long-Term Transition Away from Direct Combustion of Forest-Derived Biomass and Toward Lower-Impact Uses of this Material” paragraphs to articulate different pathways (investigation of non-energy wood waste uses, status quo biomass energy production, and investigation of less-polluting energy from wood waste), stating that the different approaches may be used in combination or in phases.
- Broaden membership of the technical advisory committee to include local government agency partners as well as forest product industry members.

Board communication items, next steps

An agenda item request was made for a report on the Board Public Safety Power Shutoff Subcommittee’s work with PG&E to determine whether Humboldt County can be islanded in the event of another regional electric grid shutdown.

Chair Tittman adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Lori Taketa
Clerk of the Board