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Still flawed

City delays power program after activists note it favors downtown without guaranteeing Hunters Point plant closure

By Matthew Hirsch

The Community First Coalition, representing residents of Bayview-Hunters Point, has stalled a joint Pacific Gas and Electric Co.-city of San Francisco energy-efficiency program after a last-minute meeting May 27 revealed the program guarantees millions of dollars for downtown businesses and nothing for southeast San Francisco.

Coalition members had hoped the \$16.3 million program would help PG&E close the Hunters Point power plant, but some participants came away from the meeting convinced the grant actually makes it less likely the plant will close.

This latest setback for the program follows delays in March and April when the California Public Utilities Commission withheld half of the funding because the proposal lacked specificity (see "[Questioning PG&E](#)," 4/09/03).

Community representatives have long felt shut out of the planning process for this new program. So when the San Francisco Department of the Environment sent out the program's implementation plan and invited Bayview-Hunters Point residents to discuss it only two days before Memorial Day weekend, several of the invitees – including Barbara George of Women's Energy Matters – considered a boycott. But the meeting was finally held, just hours before the city and PG&E were to submit their final plans to the CPUC.

The plan is designed to reduce electricity demand by 2005, in time to offset the risk of a power shortage once the Hunters Point power plant closes. But many are beginning to doubt the utility's goal of shutting down the plant, because it benefits so much from programs such as energy efficiency and last month's \$15 million request to retrofit the Hunters Point plant (see "[Is PG&E Lying about Hunters Point Plant?](#)," 5/28/03).

"I believe they have no intention of closing Hunters Point, because they can hang every project they want on the need to close Hunters Point," George said. "They are certainly not serious about doing energy efficiency out here."

At the community meeting, Holly Welles, PG&E's senior program manager for environmental policy, reaffirmed PG&E's commitment to shutting down the plant, although she left doubts about whether all units at the site would be closed.

"We only have a window of time during the rate case where we can apply for that funding [for the \$15 million retrofit]," Welles said. So the company will prepare to continue operating the plant if the state Independent System Operator, which must authorize the plant closure, requires it to stay open past 2005.

After the May 27 meeting, neighborhood representatives who learned that the energy-efficiency funds will be directed to the downtown business sector deemed the program "another instance of illegal discrimination and environmental injustice against the [Bayview-Hunters Point] community," according to a letter Community First Coalition members sent to the city.

The coalition said the plan overlooked the community as a target for energy efficiency, favored the downtown business sector, and ignored renewable energy sources. Coalition member Don Paul said residents in Bayview-Hunters Point should benefit most from energy efficiency because they have suffered most from PG&E's operations there and because they bear some of the city's highest energy costs relative to income.

"What we heard [on May 27] was that many residents are paying astronomically large utility bills," Paul said. Hundreds of families in public housing have spent upward of \$400 a month on PG&E bills, he said, while corporations in the Financial District leave their lights on all night. "Basically they are going to be paid for reducing already exorbitant uses of energy," Paul said.

After a lengthy and sometimes heated exchange with community representatives, Department of the Environment director Jared Blumenfeld agreed the plan was once again lacking critical details. Blumenfeld requested and secured a two-week extension to address two changes before submitting the plan to the CPUC. He said the plan must clearly demonstrate a link between energy efficiency and the closure of the Hunters Point power plant, and it must target Bayview-Hunters Point residents for energy efficiency funding ahead of the downtown business sector, as long as the energy savings are the same.

Blumenfeld asked members of the Community First Coalition to work with his department to address the revisions, but they have begun sending comments directly to the CPUC. According to Julie Fitch, adviser to CPUC president Michael Peevey, there may be an opportunity for public comment once the plan is formally submitted, if necessary. "Our hope is that everybody works together and something comes out that everybody is happy with," Fitch said. She said the new deadline to submit a proposal is June 14.

'Shut Down Hunters Point Power Plant!' protest Thurs/11, noon, front gates of the plant, 1000 Evans, S.F. For more information call (415) 248-5010, ext. 107.

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