

Midcoast Community Council



An elected Municipal Advisory Council to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

Serving the residents of El Granada, Miramar, Montara, Moss Beach and Princeton.

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DATE: August 9, 2006
TO: San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
CC: Midcoast Community Council, Marcia Raines, Lisa Grote

RE: Permit fees for installation of photovoltaic (Solar Panels)

Dear Honorable supervisors:

The Midcoast Community Council supports and applauds your recent action to reduce planning fees for installation of rooftop solar power. Given the state of the budget, the Midcoast Community Council feels that the County should consider going further in supporting alternative energy consumption. California's population is growing faster than its power generation capacity, and wherever possible, it is incumbent upon our leaders to support and advance renewable energy sources.

With computer and internet use being the fastest growing component of increased electricity use, San Mateo County should be a leader in encouraging clean, renewable energy. (A Sierra Club report states "In terms of power produced in the United States, Internet consumption increased from essentially 0% in 1993 to 8% in 2001. As a whole, computers consumed 13% of nationally produced power in 2001.")

While some argue that setting fees too low would result in other taxpayers subsidizing the installation of solar power, such policy initiatives will in fact benefit commercial and private interests alike by reducing total grid demand (and hence risk of recurring brown-outs), air pollution, and the rate of increase for the price of energy.

In light of excellent local precedence for this kind of initiative (San Carlos has recently set their fees to \$0. San Jose's fee is \$220 and approves permits "over the counter". Palo Alto and Saratoga also approve permits "over the counter"), the Midcoast Community Council would like to make the following recommendations to your board:

1. Mitigate the processing cost to the County by approving permits "over the counter". Solar installations are very standardized and problems with installation will be caught at inspection time.
2. Reduce the planning and building fees for solar installation to no more than \$250, and consider setting the fee to \$0 in the public interest.

It should also be noted that the County may not see much increased activity during the pilot period for even the most recent fee reduction because of the fact that it takes a homeowner significant time to locate a contractor, receive approval from the State for the rebate, and acquire the panels. We would ask that a fee reduction be made permanent to yield the full policy benefit.

Let us work together to ensure that "Climate Best by Government Test" means something to the entire San Mateo County. On behalf of the Midcoast Community Council your consideration is appreciated.

Sincerely,

- Geoffrey

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