

DOCKETED

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Electrify Menlo Park - Equitable Building Decarbonization Comments

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

January 20, 2023

California Energy Commission
Dockets Office, MS-4
Re: Docket No. 22-DECARB-03
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

Via Electronic Commenting System

To: Jennifer Nelson, CEC Staff and Commissioners

From: Diane Bailey, Menlo Spark ; Angela Evans, Electrify Menlo Park Program Lead ; Roopak Kandasamy, BlocPower

Subject: Comments on CEC 22-DECARB-03: Equitable Building Decarbonization Program
Jennifer Nelson, CEC Staff and Commissioners Hal Nelson, CEO; Hunter Johnson, CTO
January 11, 2023

Dear Ms. Nelson, Staff, and Commissioners,

We write to you as leaders of ***Electrify Menlo Park***, a partnership between BlocPower, the City of Menlo Park, and Menlo Spark, to advance citywide building electrification and workforce development. Although the project began less than a year ago, launching in June 2022, we hope our initiative can serve as a strong model for Equitable Building Decarbonation, and we share a great interest in the success of this statewide program.

The historic public-private partnership for citywide building electrification and workforce development has a goal of decarbonizing 10,000 homes and buildings through 2030. The comments below are reflective of our work over the past 7 months in building this program. Please accept our comments that draw on our experience with ***Electrify Menlo Park*** as well as additional local programs in the Bay Area.

- **1a: What criteria should be weighed more heavily or prioritized when scoring program proposals?**

We encourage the CEC and commissioners to prioritize proposals that target underserved, and Lower and Moderate Income communities, as well as community based approaches.

Ex: The first phase of Electrify Menlo Park focuses on home upgrades in Belle Haven, a disadvantaged community on the Bayfront which has significant numbers of homes with deferred maintenance.

- **3a: What criteria should be weighed more heavily or prioritized when scoring program proposals?**

Community education & engagement: Support for outreach programs to increase awareness and participation would also be a valuable service. Program design will be informed in coordination with the local community. We recommend continued community engagement as well as annual reporting that would inform any necessary improvements or amendments to the program.

Ex: Electrify Menlo Park has already convened a 'Community Advisory Board' of local CBO's, citizens, experts, and leaders to give input into program design, and ensure community needs are being met.

- **5b: What opportunities for workforce development should be considered, encouraged, or leveraged?**

We encourage the CEC to support existing workforce development efforts, supplementing them with electrification initiatives to expand and further their impact.

Ex: The Menlo Park workforce training program is being developed with JobTrain, a local workforce development nonprofit that has an existing Building Maintenance program, and is working on adding HVAC training capabilities in house to provide participants with greater opportunities. As well, we support the developing electrification workforce activities led by Lighthouse.

- **6a: How can the CEC best facilitate awareness for residents and building owners within under-resourced communities to encourage program participation?**

We encourage the CEC to gather feedback and best practices from existing work being done on the ground, in engaging directly with communities and CBO's to understand

their needs. Collaboration with CBOs that are trusted partners in disadvantaged communities is essential.

Ex: Electrify Menlo Park has convened a 'Community Advisory Board' of local CBO's, citizens, experts, and leaders to give input into program design, and ensure community needs are being met, especially of the Belle Haven district. In addition, Peninsula Clean Energy has successfully partnered with El Concillio and Climate Resilient Communities to engage disadvantaged communities, recruit households for participation in PCE's no-cost Low Income home upgrade program, and provide continuing outreach on clean energy and electrifications. Both of these approaches would be valuable for the state program to employ.

- **7a / 7b: Should the CEC fund decarbonization programs that have existing infrastructure in an initial phase to allow for the Program to quickly decarbonize homes and provide benefits to residents?**

We encourage the CEC to allow currently active programs to compete for funding, and to fund programs with existing infrastructure, which may pave a pathway and have positive spillover effects for nearby electrification efforts, and showcase ambitious efforts as we push to meet the targets established by the State of California, as demanded by science to meet the climate crisis. Resourcing shortfalls significantly hamper scaling efforts in both program set-up and scaling. Allowing existing programs to increase service to more households in need is an important way to jumpstart this program and bring benefits to a greater number of Californians faster.

Ex: Electrify Menlo Park has two shovel-ready projects at two multifamily affordable housing properties, which have been unable to move forward due to a lack of funding. These projects are intended to serve as community anchor projects once completed.

- **8a What specific equipment and measures should be prioritized?**

We encourage the CEC to ensure remediation, safety, and deferred maintenance measures are included in incentive and funding considerations. Lack of funding, and inexperience in working with these measures often prohibits projects from moving forward, hindering electrification efforts. These issues disproportionately affect underserved / disadvantaged communities.

It is important to fully electrify households going through this program, since the overhead costs of recruiting and onboarding households into the program can be high. Further, while health and safety repairs will be essential to the program, it will be important to cap those costs to ensure that the program can serve as many Californians as possible. We recommend proactive partnerships with other service providers such as Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together, so that important repairs that are too extensive and outside of the scope of this program can be addressed by partner organizations.

Additional Input

We are submitting our program brief below to showcase our planning and efforts for a scaled electrification program in Menlo Park, CA, as well as to convey the full extent and vision of Electrify Menlo Park.

Electrify Menlo Park: Create green jobs, and climate-safe, resilient homes in Bayside communities

In June 2022, the City of Menlo Park and BlocPower announced a **historic public-private partnership for citywide building electrification and workforce development, with a goal of decarbonizing 10,000 homes and buildings through 2030.**

Program Summary: Menlo Park is an innovative Silicon Valley community committed to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Switching from polluting gas to clean electric appliances will provide cleaner and healthier living environments, as buildings contribute 40% of Menlo Park's greenhouse gas emissions, blazing a pathway for other municipalities to follow in the process.

This **program will reduce emissions** by installing heat pumps (for electric air cooling, heating, and filtration), heat pump water heaters (for electric water heating), electric vehicle charging stations, solar panels, battery storage, and other efficiency measures. We anticipate the following Building Electrification retrofit goals for the next few years:

- 2023: 115 building / home electrification projects retrofits
- 2024: 300 building / home electrification projects retrofits
- 2025: 700 building / home electrification projects retrofits

Problem: It is currently challenging to replace gas heaters and appliances with electric models because there are not enough trained installers locally, and a limited supply of electric options available locally has elevated costs. Further, many low-income households still lack air conditioning, and would benefit greatly from an electric heat pump replacing a gas furnace, as that would provide both heating and cooling.

Solution: The City of Menlo Park has partnered with [BlocPower](#), a “B” corporation, to complete a citywide electrification project to meet its [Climate Action Plan](#) and help all residents transition off methane gas use for safer and healthier homes.

Objectives: The project has the following objectives:

1. Provide tangible benefits in health, comfort, safety, and energy savings to two low-income households;
2. Leverage funding from other programs and bridge funding gaps to deliver substantial home improvements, including energy efficiency, electrification, non-energy health and comfort, and home infrastructure upgrades if needed;
3. Provide support to residents by connecting them with local nonprofits that will help them navigate the various programs for which they could be eligible and ensure satisfaction within each household; and
4. Demonstrate an efficient and practical method for assisting homeowners in phasing out methane gas use to improve their health and indoor air quality, and achieve progress towards local climate goals.

Current Areas of focus: The program aims to sign and complete 115 building / home electrification projects in 2023. The first phase of the program focuses on home upgrades in Belle Haven, a disadvantaged community on the Bayfront which has significant numbers of homes with deferred maintenance.

- **Community anchor affordable housing projects:** We have two exciting shovel-ready projects that are ready to go forward as soon as funding is available, at two affordable housing properties within Menlo Park.
- **Community education & engagement:** Support for marketing programs to increase awareness and participation would also be a valuable service. Program design will be informed in coordination with the local community
 - Electrify Menlo Park has convened a ‘Community Advisory Board’ of local CBO’s, citizens, experts, and leaders to give input into program design, and ensure community needs are being met, especially of the Belle Haven district
 - A community outreach organizer is needed to maintain continuous and trustworthy connections with community members. In order to staff such an effort, \$500,000 will be required to staff communications and outreach.

- **Contractor outreach & equipment sourcing:**
 - The program is in process of employing innovative strategies to outreach to contractors, in the hopes of securing the services of local contractors, in a manner that ensure quality and cost efficient project completion, by gaining insight into project pipeline generated by community outreach efforts
 - BlocPower will outreach to equipment manufacturers to secure favorable pricing and lead times for equipment, by gaining insight into project pipeline generated by community outreach efforts
- **Data & technology:** The program intends to use data and technology to inform approaches in building / home outreach, in program scaling, and to measure outcomes / lessons learned, with an eventual goal of reducing the amount of time required from initial customer engagement to final construction completion
- **Workforce training:** a workforce training program is being developed with the local workforce development agency, which has an existing Building Maintenance program, and is looking to add HVAC training capabilities in house

Conclusion

We sincerely appreciate your due consideration, and for providing the opportunity for input into this important program. We look forward to future collaboration, in our joint efforts to scale building electrification as a climate solution, with the State of California leading the way.

Warm regards,

Diane Bailey
Executive Director
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Angela Evans
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