REACH CODE NEWS BRIEF: NOVEMBER 2020

CITY OF SANTA CRUZ FRONTRUNNER: ADVANCING CLIMATE AND HEALTH & SAFETY GOALS VIA ELECTRIFICATION

Santa Cruz, a city of 65,000 residents nestled between the redwood forests of the Coast range and the Pacific Ocean, boasts a strong commitment to sustainability and climate action.

Following adoption of a Climate Emergency Resolution by City Council in 2018, city staff began to explore options for building electrification policies. After extensive research, community outreach, and cost-effectiveness analysis, staff recommended a health and safety ordinance prohibiting natural gas infrastructure in all newly constructed buildings, which was adopted by City Council in March 2020.

Read the complete Frontrunner here.

UPCOMING EVENTS

December

December 2: Energy Code Ace & BayREN training: 2019 Title 24, Part 6 Residential Standards: HERS-Verified Quality Insulation Installation (QII)

December 3: New Buildings Institute webinar: Getting to Zero in Affordable Multifamily Buildings

December 9: Energy Commission: Monthly Business Meeting

December 9: California Climate Investments Audience-Focused Webinar: Funding for Local Governments

December 10: Energy Commission Clean Energy Hall of Fame Awards

Be sure to follow us on Twitter for the latest news and information!

NEW THIS MONTH!

BAY AREA ENERGY ATLAS NOW AVAILABLE

In late October, BayREN debuted its new Bay Area Energy Atlas, a counterpart to the existing Energy Atlas in operation at UCLA for the past several years. This tool, developed for BayREN by the California Center for Sustainable Communities at UCLA, offers a resource to assist local governments with climate action planning and to delve into how energy is being used in their jurisdictions.

The Atlas aggregates annual PG&E electricity and natural gas data from the nine Bay Area counties that make up BayREN from both residential and non-residential accounts. Covering the years 2013-2017, the database links this energy consumption spatially to socio-demographic data and building characteristics organized by these building use categories:

- Single-family residential
- Multi-family residential
- Total residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Other (agricultural, vacant areas, etc)
- TCU (transportation, communications, & utility infrastructures)
- Streetlighting

Users can search according to four different geographic scales: counties; cities; zip codes; and Census tracts.

This publicly available dataset is aggregated in order to protect customer privacy following CPUC guidelines. To develop this public facing website, researchers collected, processed, and analyzed energy and related data from a variety of sources.

The BayREN Energy Atlas features interactive energy maps, comparative graphs, and tabular views of community energy profile data. The aggregated information presented on this public front-end website is made possible through a separate, confidential, back-end geospatial relational database.

The Southern California Energy Atlas, created first for the City of Los Angeles in 2013, has expanded in subsequent years to encompass Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura and Imperial counties.

While there are some distinctions between the two tools, they are robust data engines that furnish rich information for county or city staff policy teams that want to delve into how their jurisdictions are using energy. In many cases, policymakers will explore the data in order to refine their thinking on specific energy targets and develop new programs, such as incentive programs to upgrade appliances or educational programs to raise awareness. In other cases, policymakers have used the tool to help develop complete climate action plans (CAPs). In addition to local government users, stakeholders such as community advocates, academic researchers, and community choice energy providers are finding the Energy Atlas a valuable tool.

“The Energy Atlas is an evolving resource that uses new methods to bring more transparency to how energy is being used in order to inform more effective policy development,” says Hannah Gustafson, Research and Data Analyst, California Center for Sustainable Communities. “It will continue to evolve based on user feedback, and more effective data collection methods.”

“We’re very excited to offer this tool,” notes Jenny Berg, BayREN Program Manager. “We encourage all stakeholders to explore the tool and provide feedback.”

Interested individuals can access the Bay Area Energy Atlas here. The Southern California version continues to be available here.

BayREN also provides an excellent training video that offers a detailed view of the tool, its development methodology and how to tips, as well as a look at how the City of Thousand Oaks utilized the Southern California Energy Atlas.

OJAI LEADS SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WITH FIRST ALL-ELECTRIC REACH CODE

The Ojai City Council voted unanimously to pursue an all-electric reach code for all new residential and commercial buildings on Tuesday, November 10, 2020 making it the first city in Southern California to embrace an all-electric future.

Ojai will now send its reach code ordinance to the California Energy Commission for formal approval. Ojai is a small city in Ventura County, northwest of Los Angeles bordered on the north by the Los Padres National Forest. Recent fires in the region and strong community concern about climate change helped propel the reach code.

Ojai had passed a Climate Emergency Declaration Resolution in July 2019, calling for immediate actions to slow down climate change. The resolution created a Climate Emergency Mobilization Committee charged with finding high-impact mitigation measures. The Committee is chaired by Michelle Ellison, who serves as an unpaid community advocate. Ms. Ellison spearheaded the reach code development and adoption process.

Ms. Ellison became interested in reach codes before assuming her Committee leadership position and began sharing information such as formal cost effectiveness studies, model ordinances, and other materials with city staff and Council members.

After assuming the Committee Chair, she researched the issue further with the help of a broad-based coalition of regional environmental leaders, non-profit groups, utility experts, clean energy consultants, and her committee members. “Reach codes save money and greenhouse gases (GHGs), and they are one important policy of the many that we promote.”

Ellison gives special thanks to outgoing Mayor Johnny Johnston, Council Member Suza Francina and acknowledges the support for the ordinance from other Council Members and City Manager James Vega.

In addition to providing an appeals process, the ordinance provides a number of exceptions related to accessory dwelling units (ADUs), temporary buildings, restaurants, the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program, and other areas. The City also allowed a six-month vetting period where many of these issues can be tweaked and reconsidered. Ellison's Committee hopes at that time to strengthen the ordinance and have the exceptions removed.

Ellison notes, "reach codes help keep housing affordable, which is a concern in Ojai. When you combine reach codes with 100-percent renewable energy it is a great story. I am glad that we have utilities supporting a transition to clean energy."

As an acknowledged change agent in the region, Ellison has her eyes on other cities that she believes could pursue reach codes. She commented, "We have 8,000 citizens, and more than 800,000 visitors every year. People watch what we do, and it matters. We are the 'little town that could.' When it comes to climate change a reach code is a great mitigation measure for Southern California cities."

Photo courtesy of City of Ojai.

OTHER REACH CODE NEWS BRIEFS

October 2026 September 2026 August 2026
Archives