

UkiahDailyJournal.com

Arcata asks PG&E to stall SmartMeter installations for unwilling customers

Allison White/The Times-Standard

Updated: 12/16/2010 01:13:58 AM PST

The Arcata City Council requested at its Wednesday meeting that Pacific Gas and Electric respect the requests of residents who don't want SmartMeters installed on their homes.

SmartMeters are PG&E's new digital meters designed to transmit power and gas use data wirelessly instead of having a meter reader physically come by each home or business. The plan is to eventually allow customers to see how and when they are using power, if they choose, so they can find ways to use less and save money, according to PG&E.

About 20 people came before the Arcata City Council, with all but one person against the installation of the meters. Many of the commenters said they are sensitive to the radio frequencies emitted by some electronic devices and that they go to great lengths to eliminate the sources of those in their home. But with the SmartMeters, they currently cannot opt out and it causes them distress. Others were concerned about the privacy and security of customer information and the accuracy of the new meters.

An independent study initiated by the California Public Utilities Commission earlier this year tested the meters and determined they were accurate but that PG&E failed to communicate the changes and had frustrated customers with the lack of information.

PG&E representatives at the meeting stated that the SmartMeters meet standards provided by the Federal Communications Commission and the state utilities commission and that the meters transmit only

for a total of about 45 seconds every day.

City Attorney Nancy Diamond said it appears that the city has no legal authority to prevent PG&E from installing the meters because the utility is regulated by the state utilities commission. That is also PG&E's legal position, but PG&E has honored most local moratoriums in the state to prevent the installation of meters for a temporary period.

Mayor Susan Ornelas said she has been frustrated by PG&E's implementation of the SmartMeters, as the company should have better researched the meters and better educated its customers to what was coming. Many people are not opposed to the smart grid concept, which is designed to help better use renewable energy, she said.

By having the discussions and inviting PG&E personnel to respond to citizen questions, Ornelas said, "I feel like we're doing the work PG&E should have done."

Individual council members were supportive of the smart grid concept but were also concerned about the implications for those sensitive to the system. A motion that included directing staff to draft a moratorium failed, as Councilwoman Alex Stillman stated that there are many people who are waiting for SmartMeters with bated breath to help them self-regulate their energy usage.

The council unanimously decided to ask PG&E to respect the wishes of those who post notices on their meters to not have the new wireless ones installed, which essentially means those customers are put on the end of the installation schedule list.

Advertisement



DIRECTV has more of what you want to watch!

Switch today! 1-888-778-0985



Offer ends 2/9/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

UkiahDailyJournal.com

The council also moved to direct the Arcata Energy Committee to give a recommendation to the council on Assembly Bill 37, which, if passed, would require the state utilities commission to come up with alternate options by 2012 for electricity customers who do not want wireless meters installed.

At the Wednesday meeting, the council also adopted a five-year capital improvement projects plan, which is required by state law. Council members first discussed a draft of the plan in May and approved the final version. Public Works Director Doby Class said city staff put together the list of projects and set up the process for the council to review the plan annually, allowing the council to look at the city's priorities and take advantage of opportunities that may come available.

Council members thanked city staff for working diligently to put it together. Councilman Mark Wheatley said that the list will help the city leverage funding for the projects, as it provides a clear plan and purpose.

A few of the major projects staff identified in the report are the U.S. Highway 255-Samoa Gateway Project, the Foster Avenue roadway extension, moving forward with the Rails with Trails project, working on projects in the Arcata Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan and rehabilitating the sewer mains.

In other matters, the council authorized the submission for a state Community Development Block Grant to provide local business Wing Inflatables with a \$500,000 low-interest loan. According to city staff, Wing Inflatables plans to hire 40 new living wage jobs with the help of the funds, although with the loan agreement they are only required to create 14.

The council also voted 4-1 to recommend Humboldt

County Supervisor Mark Lovelace to the City Selection Committee for the California Coastal Commission position. Wheatley did not support the motion, because he felt there were many qualified candidates and they should not support just one.

Staff writer Allison White can be reached at 441-0506 or awhite@times-standard.com.

Advertisement

HEARTLAND QUALITY
OMAHA STEAKS
SINCE 1917

SAVE up to **64%**
Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts

Special Code: 45069ZWN

To Order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71 or call 1-877-605-0496

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™