

Fairfax Town Council Minutes
Special Meeting re Smart Meters
Fairfax Women's Club
Wednesday, September 29, 2010

Call to Order/Roll Call:

COUNCILMEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Bragman (7:35 p.m.)
Pam Hartwell-Herrero
John Reed
Lew Tremaine
David Weinssoff

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Michael Rock, Town Manager
Judy Anderson, Town Clerk

Mayor Tremaine called the meeting to order at 7:20 p.m.

Mayor Tremaine described the format of the meeting and introduced Janet Corey, Director of Policy Planning for PG&E, who introduced the members of the panel: Ms. Marzia deFarr, CPUC representative; Leeka Kheiferts, UCLA epidemiologist; Robert Cleveland, Biophysicist and Retired FCC employee; Bill Devereaux, Smart Meter Program, Senior Director.

Bill Devereaux provided an overview of the Smart Meter (SM) Program which included the origins and history of the Smart Meter program, why the program was started, what types of technologies were evaluated and considered, why the devices needed to be at individual residences, and how they worked. He explained that the SM device allowed for automated meter reading for all gas and electric customers and was the cornerstone of the move toward the Smart Grid. He stated that SM's provided more frequent energy use information, provided a two-way communication between the meter and the user, was CPUC approved, provided convenient meter reading, faster power restoration during outages, faster startup of service after moving, faster problem resolution and better billing. He further stated that SM's provided customers with greater choice and more control over their energy bills by showing people how to track their energy use to reduce it while also reducing their bills.

Mayor Tremaine asked for the audience to be respectful and entertained questions on the information provided by PG&E.

Mark Bell, Dominga Ave., questioned the initial premise that the reason for the entire program came out of the energy crisis in 2000 and 2001 which he alleged was actually caused by deregulation and was a large scam.

Ms. deFarr, CPUC, responded to Mr. Bell by saying that one aspect of the reason for the SM program was from the energy crisis, but that mainly the Smart Grid needed to be upgraded because it was old and inadequate; that the system was 50 to 80 years old, a time when there was a smaller population and less demand for energy; that either the demand had to be reduced or more power plants had to be built; and that upgrading the grid and using SM's enabled them to control and/or lower the demand.

Janet (no surname given), stated that she appreciated the background information and accepted that the grid needed to be modernized and the power managed, but asked why it needed to be wireless technology.

Mayor Tremaine apologized for the long narration on the background of Smart Meters and took responsibility for the presentation because he had advised PG&E that they needed to educate the

people about the Smart Grid and how it functioned because that hadn't been done previously.

Bill Devereaux, PG&E, in response to the question about wireless, stated that there were three possible ways to communicate with meters: Power line carrier communication, wireless or through wired infrastructure to meters (i.e., fiber optic). The last option was extremely expensive and impractical; the first option had been tried and had been proven unreliable; and the wireless option was preferred because of its accuracy and reliability.

Leeka Kheiferts, UCLA Epidemiologist, stated that she was being paid by PG&E to be at the meeting; that her career included 20 years in RF and EF research; that she had published articles on the subject; and had been a government advisor. She provided a broad history of RF Research that included human and animal studies and the effects on the brain, on cancer incidence and on fetal development. She stated that the SM's had very low exposure levels and that it was wise to use a balanced weight of evidence approach on the subject and to remember the benefits of the technology for use in emergencies, community, and Smart Grid energy supplies.

Dr. Robert Cleveland, former FCC employee who advised the FCC about RF exposure and helped develop their safety standards explained how SM's complied with FCC standards. He explained that the FCC consulted with the Federal Government's health and safety agencies regarding RF exposure issues; that the FCC held hearings about the safe level of exposure to RF and had sought information from many sources in adopting its guidelines; and that PG&E had contracted to have tests done on the SM's and that they tested way below the FCC standards.

Sierra Salin, Cascade Drive, stated that there could be a smart grid without wireless; that PG&E hadn't answered the questions that were posed at the last meeting; that it wasn't known what was being done environmentally to the earth and to humans; that he had a personal problem with more EF's; asked if Dr. Cleveland could say with certainty that SM's wouldn't harm humans or animals; stated that he appreciated the science but that the studies were too new; and that PG&E was dictating to him and he didn't have any freedom in the matter.

Kelly, a generalist who had done studies in the field, asked if there was an "opt-out" program for people with sensitivities and if not, why not.

Mr. Devereaux responded that some of the questions would be answered at the next meeting; that PG&E had a universal obligation to serve all of their customers, and that if customers had issues, they were moved to the end of their deployment schedule.

Ms. deFarr, CPUC representative, stated that the CPUC was not sanctioning any opt outs, and that they were trying to upgrade the whole system. In response to a question from Mayor Tremaine, she explained the CPUC appeal process.

David Glick, Cascade Drive, stated that PG&E's alleged environmental concern would seem more sincere if they hadn't supported Proposition 16; that PG&E was considering the people's health concerns as collateral damage to their program; that PG&E would realize enormous profits from the program; that there was disagreement about the health effects; and that PG&E was putting the welfare of the corporation ahead of the adverse health effects to the public.

Ms. deFarr responded to the comment about profits, and stated that we were moving toward a smart grid system as a nation and were asking PG&E to do that too.

Peter Lacques, asked about the interplay between PG&E and MMWD re Smart Meters and for clarification of the relationship.

Janet Cory, PG&E, stated that they had explored whether their grid could be used for water usage;

that they had shared their technology with MMWD about 2 years previous; and that MMWD wanted to know how the technologies worked.

Judy Hitchcock, Chester Ave., quoted a 2002 EPA letter about the FCC's guidelines not being thermally based and that they didn't apply to chronic, non-thermal exposure situations and that Federal health and safety agencies hadn't yet developed policies concerning possible risks from long-term non-thermal exposures. She questioned how the SM's could meet standards that didn't apply and hadn't yet been developed. She asked if she would be getting answers to the questions she had submitted in writing.

Dr. Cleveland stated that he was familiar with the letter quoted and that it was the author's opinion only; that the FCC was the enforcer and that international standard organizations did thousands of studies; that the guidelines were based on the thermal effects, and that there wasn't enough data to base the standards on non-thermal effects.

Mark Bell, Dominga Ave., stated that, based on the answers provided at the current meeting, it would take 20 years to get the answers to the questions from PG&E; that since the Marin Energy Authority was the energy provider for most Fairfax residents, PG&E didn't have a right to install SM's; and that some of the nefarious dealings of PG&E didn't promote trust.

Elizabeth Bell, Dominga Ave., asked if it was possible to have a smart meter for a whole neighborhood instead of on individual homes to reduce the impact.

Mr. Devereaux, in response to a question about electric vehicles, explained that it would take about 3 hours to recharge an electric vehicle, which would create an incredible demand on the power system, especially at the peak times, if electric vehicles were widely in use. He noted that pricing might be different for electric vehicle charging and that incentives could be created for various power uses.

Deborah Hubsmith, Forrest Ave., described her negative experience with PG&E after being notified that a Smart Meter would be installed at her home; that the FCC limits had been established in 1996 before the prevalence of cell phones; that the intensity of the signal of a SM was stronger than that of a cell phone; that a recourse for the Town was to file a petition with the CPUC that would take 18 months to process; and she also suggested that the Town ask the Obama administration to change the standards.

Ms. Kheiferts stated that the radiation from cell phones was vastly greater than SM's.

Barbara Winches, stated that she had been emf sensitive since 1998; that she had moved from San Anselmo to Woodacre to get away from the density of electromagnetic fields; that she knew dozens of people who were emf sensitive; and asked why PG&E wouldn't install a fiber optic system like Italy's even if it was more expensive?

Frank Egger, Meadow Way, stated that PG&E was installing SMs on Meadow Way; that the employees were told that management of PG&E had directed them to install SMs in spite of the Town Council for opposing SM's; thanked the Town Council; that the citizens had rights; that PGE was lowering property values and doing reverse condemnation; and that they had no right to enter private property.

Larry Bragman asked about the time of use billing and what it would look like and when would it start. He cited examples of cities like Ontario and other deployment areas where claims of consumer savings had proven to be false.

Ms. Kheiferts stated that consumers could opt in to time of use billing but that it would not be mandatory.

Ms. Cory stated that their testing had indicated a 15 and 16 % decline in consumer bills.

Rafael Mendel, Live Oak, challenged the study results given; stated that more studies were needed; that he had heard that some studies had been suppressed and that some exposures hadn't been measured, especially long term exposures; that instead of corporate power as a priority it should be people's rights and people's health; and that he anticipated a major uproar in reaction to forced installation of SM's in Fairfax.

Alexander Binik, Meadow Way, read a statement that stated that PG&E had withheld critical data; that one independent study had found that 60% would opt out of the SM program if given the choice; that the percentage would climb; to state that PG&E has no choice because the CPUC mandated the installation of SM's was not a true statement; that the Smart Grid could be put in place without wireless; that Toronto Hydro had conducted a study and had determined that 18% of customers had higher bills after the deployment of SM's; that more energy could be saved with green programs; that the recent San Bruno disaster was evidence of PG&E's emphasis on profits; and that PG&E couldn't let people opt out because too many would opt out;

Sarah Reilly stated that she had electro hyper sensitivity herself; that she had asked 22 questions of PG&E and that none of her questions had been answered; quoted studies that had been done; stated that the studies had been based on thermal readings and SM were not thermal based and so hadn't been studied; and that the levels in the home hadn't been measured. She asked why PG&E hadn't measured inside the homes and how people with sensitivities were being handled.

Mr. Devereaux stated that they had measured in homes and the measurements were well within the FCC guidelines; that emissions were directional with walls serving as a barrier to emissions; and that information about the emissions was available on the PG&E Web site.

Richard Sell asked how PG&E was handling people with sensitivities.

Mr. Devereaux stated that they were being addressed on an individual basis, that their numbers were in the hundreds, and that people with health complaints were placed at the bottom of the list for installation.

Matt Hartwell-Herrero, Westbrae Drive, stated that he wished that PG&E was concentrating on clean energy, read from WHO's health study on RF exposures, stated that recent studies had shown that lower frequencies came from Bay stations; and that the information from an impartial source, the World Health Organization, indicated that there were no direct links to health effects.

Diane Hoffman, Porteous Ave., stated that PG&E had come to Fairfax two weeks previous and asked that the community trust them and yet the previous week a smart gas meter had been installed on her friend's home against her objections; and that PG&E's actions in San Bruno had left them with blood on their hands.

Mallory Geithem, Willow Ave., asked if the power point presentations given were prepared before or after the last meeting when the questions were asked of PG&E; that very specific questions had been asked and the information provided by PG&E was general and didn't directly answer the questions; that it seemed like smoke and mirrors; that the long term effects of SM's weren't known; and that people should be educated to reduce their energy use instead of having SM's.

Hannah Doress, Porteous Ave., asked the CPUC representative if they would impose a moratorium until after the hearing on their petition and ascertained that Fairfax had joined the petition to get CPUC to impose a moratorium.

Ms. Kheiferts said that they could not stop the installation of SM's until and unless the five Commissioners changed their position.

Hannah Doress, stated that it had become a huge issue in Fairfax across political boundaries and asked that the CPUC allow for a temporary moratorium to avoid the disruption in the community.

Ms. Kheiferts, stated that State Assemblymember Huffman had asked for a report on the health effects of SM's from an independent agency, and asked if those results would convince the community that SM's were safe.

There was a uniform "No" response from the audience.

Mayor Tremaine stated that it was what we didn't know that scared us and we didn't know the health effects long term and shouldn't have to have them put on our homes.

Andy Peri, Cypress Drive, stated that the implication that TURN helped with the process is misleading, that the precautionary principle needed to be used; that the Town saw PG&E pushing a technology on us that we didn't want, and asked that we be left alone.

Valeri Hood, Dominga Ave., stated that she had weather-proof "no smart meters" signs available; that Matt Workman of PG&E had been telling workers to ignore the signs; reported that Pat Eklund, a Council Member from Novato who had worked for the EPA, stated that EMFs were going to prove harmful in the future like tobacco; and that the CPUC was not an independent organization based on her experience with the way they conducted their meetings.

Ms. Kheiferts stated that the 18 month petition process was shorter for the SM issue, that the CPUC had an exhaustive process, and that the moratorium issue was underway and wouldn't take 18 months to resolve.

Dr. Cleveland read from an FCC letter that stated that SM's would comply with SAR ratings.

The Town Council discussed the scheduling of the next meeting with PG&E to receive more answers and there was a consensus to conduct the meeting later than the 13th of October.

Mayor Tremaine adjourned the meeting at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Anderson, Town Clerk