

# VALLEY CLEAN ENERGY ALLIANCE

## Staff Report – Item 13

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**TO:** VCE Board of Directors

**FROM:** Mitch Sears, Interim General Manager  
George Vaughn, Director of Finance & Internal Operations

**SUBJECT:** Adoption of Three-Year Strategic Plan: 2021-2023

**DATE:** October 8, 2020

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### RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt a three-year VCE Strategic Plan covering the period from January 2021 to December 2023.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report and its attachments are to: 1) brief the Board on amendments and additions to the VCE Strategic Plan since the Board last met in September, and 2) recommend adoption of the Strategic Plan for implementation starting in 2021.

### BACKGROUND

In February 2020, the Board directed staff to move ahead with development of a multi-year strategic plan to establish goals and guide VCE's activities over the next three years commencing in 2021. Notwithstanding a subsequent COVID delay and modified planning approach, staff moved ahead with the guidance of the Board and the CAC. Over the past seven months, along with support from LEAN Energy US, staff have gathered information and feedback and drafted a Plan which has gone through numerous iterations and stages of review. This has included planning process updates and public input opportunities at seven regular meetings of the Board and CAC since March.

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The attached Plan is the result of a great deal of participation, collaboration and input from the Board, CAC, and VCE staff members resulting in what staff believes is a stronger, more focused and ultimately more effective document. Following Board direction during its last meeting on September 10, staff completed another round of edits for the CAC's review at their meeting on September 24. The CAC spent over an hour discussing and providing comment and their consensus statement is included below. Further revisions have been completed in the past week to be responsive to both Board and CAC feedback. Key revisions include the following:

- 1) VCE Vision section was updated with VCE's adopted vision statement;
- 2) Reduced number of topical categories from seven to six, combining organization and workplace and information technology;

- 3) Reduced number of goals from twenty to six, while integrating most/all elements from previous goals into revised goals or objectives;
- 4) Added objectives to support each goal;
- 5) Added section on Timing, Measurement and Plan Updates; and

#### Additional Consideration – Municipalization

As the Board is aware, during the most recent PG&E bankruptcy VCE analyzed and ultimately submitted an offer to acquire PG&E's local distribution assets. The offer was rejected by PG&E and not directly considered by the Court or CPUC during the bankruptcy proceedings. This effort by VCE (and other local public entities) to analyze the financial outcomes and organizational requirements associated with setting up a fully integrated local public power entity laid a foundation for continuing work on this issue. Due to the unique opportunity for municipalization within the context of the PG&E bankruptcy, staff viewed this effort as directly linked with that process. Strong interest in continuing this effort post-bankruptcy was expressed by one Board member during the Strategic Plan development process but it was not a specific priority expressed by others.

Based on the overall priorities expressed by Board members and the likely scope of the effort, the continuing study of municipalization was not specifically included in the draft Strategic Plan. However, given the foundational work completed by VCE and the continuing work of other public agencies to pursue municipalization (e.g. SF, South San Joaquin Irrigation District), staff suggests that the Board address this issue during its discussion of the draft plan at its meeting next week. If there is Board support for this effort, simple language can be added to the Strategic Plan directing this work over the next several years.

#### CAC Action

The following consensus statement was supported by the CAC at their September 24 meeting (10-0):

At its September 24 meeting, the CAC spent over an hour discussing the draft Strategic Plan. Committee members offered observations, made suggestions for changes and engaged in thoughtful exchange about different items. In addition, individual CAC members shared their own observations, suggestions and amendments with staff through emails and conversations. Given the complexity of the task and the multitude of suggested changes, it is not feasible for the CAC to take action tonight on an agreed upon, newly amended version of the Strategic Plan.

Thus, the CAC adopts this "sense of the CAC" statement regarding the Strategic Plan to forward to the VCE board.

The CAC believes the Strategic Plan definitely is moving in the right direction. The current draft reflects the input and comments from the VCE board members and CAC members that were raised at previous meetings. Given the timeframe set by the board for adopting the Strategic Plan, it is not feasible to have the CAC review the next iteration of the Plan at its October meeting. Thus, the CAC encourages VCE staff, as it revises the current draft, to consider all of the items raised by CAC members, either at

this meeting or separately, and to incorporate as many of them into the next draft of the Strategic Plan as possible. The CAC appreciates the opportunity to be engaged in the Strategic Plan process and stands ready to work with the Board and staff to implement it once a Plan is adopted.

As noted above, staff have found the CAC feedback process to be very helpful and have attempted to capture nearly all major CAC input provided.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

Based on Board action, staff will complete any further modifications and have the Plan designed for public presentation and dissemination. Staff will also complete an implementation timeline by December 2020 and identify key performance metrics for each goal against which regular reporting will commence starting in 2021.

#### **ATTACHMENT**

1. Draft VCE Three-Year Strategic Plan: 2021-2023



**Valley Clean Energy**  
**Strategic Plan**  
**DRAFT AS OF 10-01-2020**  
**January 2021 - December 2023**

### **VCE MISSION**

Deliver cost-competitive clean electricity, product choice, price stability, energy efficiency, and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

### **VCE VISION**

Valley Clean Energy Alliance (VCEA) is a joint-powers authority working to implement a state-authorized Community Choice Energy (CCE) program. Participating VCEA governments include the City of Davis, the City of Woodland and County of Yolo. The purpose of the VCEA is to enable the participating jurisdictions to determine the sources, modes of production and costs of the electricity they procure for the residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial users in their areas. PG&E would continue to deliver the electricity procured by VCEA and perform billing, metering, and other electric distribution utility functions and services. Customers within the participating jurisdictions would have the choice not to participate in the VCEA program.

### **Near-Term Vision**

The near-term vision for VCEA is to provide electricity users with greater choice over the sources and prices of the electricity they use, by:

- Offering basic electricity service with higher renewable electricity content, at a rate competitive with PG&E;
- Developing and offering additional low-carbon or local generation options at modest price premiums;
- Establishing an energy planning framework for developing local energy efficiency programs and local energy resources and infrastructure; and
- Accomplishing the goals enumerated above while accumulating reserve funds for future VCEA energy programs and mitigation of future energy costs and risks.

### **Long -Term Vision**

The future vision for VCEA is to continuously improve the electricity choices available to VCEA customers, while expanding local energy-related economic opportunities, by:

- Causing the deployment of new renewable and low carbon energy sources;
- Evaluating and adopting best practices of the electricity service industry for planning and operational management;
- Substantially increasing the renewable electricity content of basic electricity service, with the ultimate goal of achieving zero carbon emissions electricity;
- Developing and managing customized programs for energy efficiency, on-site electricity production and storage;
- Accelerating deployment of local energy resources to increase localized investment, employment, innovation and resilience;
- Working to achieve the climate action goals of participating jurisdictions to shape a sustainable energy future;
- Saving money for ratepayers on their energy bills; and
- Remaining open to the participation of additional jurisdictions.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

This Strategic Plan focuses VCE on achieving better energy outcomes for its customers and communities by guiding the organization’s actions over the next three years. The Plan maps a route to VCE’s goals and allows for course correction as new information and learning occurs. The energy sector in California is in a transformational period and VCE allows local energy priorities and needs to be heard and ultimately acted upon. This plan helps VCE build a strong foundation from which to identify and guide strategic action over the next three years, being mindful of the longer-term aspirations of the Agency. It is anticipated that this Plan will be ready for implementation in 2021 and reviewed annually to ensure that the Agency remains on track and course corrects if necessary.

## **METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION**

VCE’s strategic plan is based on the experience of the Agency’s first two years in operation as well as current energy market conditions, a strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) analysis which was completed in 2019, and detailed feedback from the Board of Directors, Community Advisory Committee (CAC) members and VCE staff. The Plan covers six topical categories which are most relevant to VCE’s operations. Within each category, the Plan specifies a set of aspirational goals and follows with strategies to achieve or make progress toward those goals over the next three years.

## **VCE’s STRATEGIC GOALS**

### **A) FINANCIAL STRENGTH**

A successful CCA program requires disciplined fiscal strategies and financially sound policies. VCE is committed to managing its financial resources responsibly and setting a standard of transparency and accountability, ensuring efficiency and strong stewardship of the agency’s financial resources. At VCE, our commitment to fiscal and operational excellence will ensure that all processes and operations are clearly defined and efficiently designed to align people, systems, and policies to maximize productivity and improve efficiency. Adhering to these policies and actively examining and assessing risk will help earn a high credit rating and a healthy position from which to deliver customer and community value.

**Goal 1: Maintain and grow a strong financial foundation and manage costs to achieve long-term organizational health.**

- 1.1. Objective: Maintain consistently healthy cash reserves to fund VCE’s mission, vision, and goals.
- 1.2. Objective: Achieve an investment grade credit rating by end of 2024.
- 1.3. Objective: Commit to fiscal efficiencies to build a program foundation from which to deliver customer and community value.
- 1.4 Objective: Manage customer rates to optimize VCE’s financial health while maintaining rate competitiveness with PG&E.

**B) PROCUREMENT AND POWER SUPPLY**

Navigating the world of wholesale power markets and state-mandated power mix and reliability requirements while fulfilling our commitment to sourcing low/no-carbon electricity requires a constant search for the right resources to meet sustainability and value proposition goals. The threat of losing load to Direct Access presents new challenges and opportunities to enhance product offerings to meet VCE’s decarbonization goals and our customers’ own environmental goals while considering financial and risk impacts. VCE is committed to providing carbon free electricity through a balanced approach that considers cost, risk, long-term value and best fit in meeting community goals while exceeding California’s RPS mandates.

**Goal 2: Manage power supply resources to consistently exceed California’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) while working toward a resource portfolio that is 100% carbon neutral by 2030.**

- 2.1 Objective: Continue to identify and pursue cost effective local renewable energy resources.
- 2.2 Objective: Acquire sufficient bundled energy and renewable resources to achieve VCE’s greenhouse gas reduction targets.
- 2.3 Objective: Deploy storage and other strategies to achieve renewable, carbon neutral, resource adequacy, and resiliency objectives.
- 2.4 Objective: Identify and pursue cost effective, local distributed energy (e.g., behind the meter rooftop solar+storage) resources to help meet reliability needs.
- 2.5 Objective: Study and present options for achieving a 100% carbon neutral resource portfolio as well as 100% carbon free resource portfolio (carbon free hour by hour) by 2030.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.6 Objective: Optimize the hedging strategy to mitigate risk in accordance with the energy risk guidelines and procurement plan.

**C) CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY**

VCE is a customer and community focused organization. We will use all available channels and platforms to cultivate relationships with and bring customer value to all segments of the communities we serve – including those that have been historically underserved/under resourced. These channels include leveraging existing outlets established by our member agencies, partnering with commercial customers to enhance their community presence, and re-engaging with those who have opted out. Partnerships with commercial and agricultural customers are particularly important to building VCE’s brand in a region rooted in food production and innovation. Communicating our competitive rates and product and service benefits in clear and accessible ways will strengthen customer loyalty and enhance our financial standing, enabling us to better serve our communities.

**Goal 3: Prioritize VCE’s community benefits and increase customer satisfaction and retention.**

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<sup>1</sup> Carbon neutral electricity is net zero carbon electricity that may include the use of carbon credits and/or higher production of carbon free electricity that averages out to provide a carbon free portfolio over a period of time whereas carbon free hour-by-hour means all electricity consumed by VCE customers will be from carbon free and/or renewable resources.

- 3.1 Objective: Develop engagement strategies to increase awareness of, and participation in, local control of VCE's energy supply and programs with a particular focus on engaging disadvantaged and historically marginalized communities.
- 3.2 Objective: Develop programs and initiatives to better support community goals, including supporting member agency achievement of energy-sector emissions reduction targets.
- 3.3 Objective: Design and implement a strategy to more effectively engage local business and agricultural customers.
- 3.4 Objective: Build awareness and trust of the VCE brand through direct engagement with customers, communities and organizations in VCE's service territory.
- 3.5 Objective: Develop customer programs and initiatives that prioritize decarbonization, community resiliency and customer savings.
- 3.6 Objective: Measure and increase customer satisfaction, using tools such as surveys and focus groups, while maintaining an overall participation rate of no less than 90%.

#### **D) DECARBONIZATION & GRID INNOVATION**

One of the key factors driving the formation of VCE was to address climate change and improve local resiliency. We will play a vital role in this decades-long endeavor, with the ongoing support of our community and our Board. In addition to providing carbon-free electricity, we are reinvesting in our region and expanding our toolset for furthering emissions reductions and energy resiliency by launching decarbonization and grid innovation programs. These programs represent the next stage in VCE's maturity and are the mechanism by which VCE will further engage our communities to achieve our mission. We will leverage partnerships, prioritize innovation and use data science to manage and influence carbon-free energy use. We will embody the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of the community in which we live and work, the spirit of Yolo County, to bend the carbon curve downwards and improve the lives of our community members.

#### **Goal 4. Promote and deploy local decarbonization and grid innovation programs to improve grid stability, reliability, community energy resilience, and safety.**

- 4.1 Objective: Working with a variety of local, regional and state partners, develop a grid innovation roadmap for VCE's service territory that supports community energy resilience and reliability.
- 4.2 Objective: Develop a VCE decarbonization roadmap to guide near and long-term program decisions and offerings.
- 4.3 Objective: Increase participation in VCE's UltraGreen 100% renewable product.
- 4.4. Objective: Identify external funding sources to support decarbonization and grid-related programs and initiatives.

#### **E) STATEWIDE ISSUES: REGULATORY & LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS**

The regulatory and legislative processes wield critical influence over VCE's ability to serve our customers and fulfill our core goals and mission. Working with CalCCA and other operating CCAs, VCE will actively engage with the regulatory and legislative communities in order to advance a positive narrative on the value of CCA, manage operational risk, protect the interests of our customers, enhance our ability to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, and help build a regulatory framework that supports innovation and customer choice in an equitable and cost-effective manner while preserving reliability and universal access.

#### **Goal 5. Strongly advocate for public policies that support VCE's Vision/Mission.**

- 5.1 Objective: Work with CalCCA and other partners to proactively engage State regulators, legislators, and other State authorities in developing policy that furthers VCE's mission and facilitates our contributions to decarbonization, grid reliability, energy resiliency, affordability, local programs and social equity.

- 5.2 Objective: Develop relationships with community stakeholder organizations that foster support for VCE's mission and vision.
- 5.3 Objective: Optimize regulatory compliance activities.

## **F) ORGANIZATION, WORKPLACE & TECHNOLOGY**

Human capital is a successful organization's greatest asset, and at VCE we've built a highly talented and dedicated team that will ensure the success and prosperity of our organization. Contracting with Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) to deliver high quality services and personnel support during launch and early operations has allowed VCE to realize these objectives from the outset. Over the period of this strategic plan, VCE will explore transition from a contract dependent organization to one that balances the values and efficiencies of development and retention of high-quality in-house staff supported by high-quality outside services. Building, valuing, and nurturing this team's talent will require a start-up culture that supports creativity, open communication, and the free flow of ideas to spur innovation. We will provide an infrastructure within VCE that supports and cultivates our employees through professional and personal development, recognizes and rewards their contributions to achieving our mission, and offers opportunities that position our people, as well as VCE, for success. In attracting and maintaining skilled employees, VCE will continue to provide a rewarding workplace experience.

VCE will develop a decision support system that will enable it to nimbly assess and react to expansion opportunities as they arise. In addition, VCE will assess opportunities for shared services with other CCAs to optimize function and efficiency of service.

We also take customer information, privacy, and security seriously. Our systems and processes follow best practices and industry standards. Performance metrics are in place to ensure resiliency and high system availability on standard and mobile platforms. Periodic upgrades to IT resources will ensure continued adherence to these high standards. This strategic plan provides the approach that VCE is taking to address the challenges of delivering IT services in a dynamic environment with new regulations and continuous advancements in science and technology.

### **Goal 6: Analyze and implement optimal long-term organizational, management, and information technology structure at VCE.**

- 6.1 Objective: Evaluate and pursue opportunities for shared services with other CCAs for certain functions.
- 6.2 Objective: Develop an evaluation framework to guide future expansion opportunities beyond the existing service territory.
- 6.3 Objective: Identify optimal management, staffing and contracting structure of VCE in the near and long term; factors include balance of internal staff vs. consultant support services, transition of leadership positions to permanent internal employees.
- 6.4 Objective: Promote diversity, equity and inclusion in leadership, hiring, promotion, and contracting policies.
- 6.5 Objective: Support health, wellness and a productive workplace.
- 6.6 Objective: Create an innovation-focused culture that rewards proactive participation, problem solving, new ideas, and creative use of partnerships.
- 6.7 Objective: Deploy a modernized IT infrastructure that enables knowledge management, analytics and collaboration through robust use of data and information resources.

## **TIMING, MEASUREMENT AND UPDATES**

VCE's Strategic Plan is a living document that will be revisited and updated regularly. At a minimum, staff will review and update the Plan on an annual basis, including goals, objectives and metrics. In addition, staff will



establish an implementation timeline and appropriate reporting format to use in reporting performance against the Plan's goals and objectives to VCE leadership and Board. The reports, commencing in 2021, will show metrics, status and mitigations where appropriate. Consolidated summary reporting on the status of all high-priority enterprise goals and objectives will be reported out as follows:

- **Quarterly Report to VCE Management**

Staff will report quarterly to the Interim General Manager on the status of goals, objectives and metrics for which they are responsible.

- **Annual Report to Board**

Staff will report annually to the Board on the status of goals, objectives and metrics, and will recommend any mitigations or amendments as may be necessary for Board approval.

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