



Santa Barbara County Taxpayer Advocacy Center

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"The SBCTAC...Fighting for the Taxpayer and Helping our Business Members Succeed!"

4/10/25 Net Zero Energy & the North County Jail before the SB County Board of Supervisors

Dear Chairwoman Capps and Honorable Members of the Board:

On behalf of the over 300 members of the Santa Barbara County Taxpayer Advocacy Center (SBCTAC) we strongly urge the Board to reconsider in the upcoming budget workshop your decision to pursue a 'Net Zero Energy' option for the North County Jail expansion.

The decision to build a North County jail dates back to the early 1990s, when Supervisor Staffel and I, in conjunction with Sheriff Jim Thomas, put it on the Board of Supervisors' agenda to approve the concept of building a North County jail. The matter was confirmed unanimously, starting a process that, by 2021, finally saw the opening of the jail. When it opened it was built with the best available energy technology to reduce energy consumption. A major component of that technology was natural gas.

Several weeks ago your board debated the size of the jail going forward. SBCTAC, along with almost all public safety proponents supported the expansion to 2 pods, which was

supported by Supervisors Lavagnino and Nelson. Supervisors Hartman and Capps supported 1 pod. Trying to reach a compromise, Supervisor Lee proposed 1.5 pods with the understanding that the Board would commit to a 'Net Zero Energy' buildout. While the SBCTAC was disappointed in the Board not supporting 2 pods, we commend Supervisor Lee for working out a compromise that at least will commit the county to expanding the jail with 1.5 pods.

With that in mind, we strongly urge the Board to reconsider the conditioning of that expansion with a commitment to a Net Zero Energy build-out. The staff made it clear that such a condition requires the installation of additional solar panels and, more significantly, the acquisition of a significant number of batteries. While the presentation regarding the costs was somewhat ambiguous, it appears from their presentation and from follow-up inquiries, that the cost would be 15 million dollars if paid upfront or 30 million dollars if financed. The financing would be for a period of 30 years.

Many people often say 'government should be run more like a business.' I mention that because the most committed green businesses would never pursue the option your board have elected. The current jail with the existing solar and natural gas capacity has a very low energy footprint.

If you are really committed to accomplishing net zero energy outcomes, the SBCTAC would strongly urge the Board to do the following: 1) With the 15 million dollars that would be spent over the next 15 years if not financed through the COP, allocate up to a million dollars a year for 15 years to go into a County 'Net Zero Energy' Bank, and, 2) Make the funds in that account available for the Board to allocate toward future county projects AND make the funds available to the private sector to apply for grants and/or low interest loans to install energy infrastructure to help their private sector operations achieve zero net energy outcomes.

The Board should keep in mind that technology is quickly evolving in this sector. What you install today may not even be utilized in 2-3 years. To allocate all these funds to the jail will accomplish very little energy reduction gains. To create an energy reduction bank available to the county for county projects and the private sector for private sector projects, will realize a much greater 'Net' gain from the cumulative net gain of all these projects vs. the very nominal net gain of just one project. And the county and the private sector will always be using the most current technologies over the next years as the funds from the bank are used.

Additionally, by making these funds available to the private sector, you can better accomplish your goals in the Climate Action Plan that your Board adopted last September.

As the Board knows very little funding was provided to accomplish the CAP's Net Zero Energy goals. Adoption of a County Net Zero Energy Bank with the funding I have recommended would have a real substantive impact in helping your board accomplish your CAP goals.

There are many things that don't make sense for government to do what the private sector would do. How you spend these dollars for energy reduction is an exercise, on point, for doing what the private sector would do. The private sector spends the dollars they have to get the most bang for the buck and to get the greatest return back for their investment. The SBCTAC strongly urges the Board to do the same thing with the North County Jail and the dollars you have tentatively committed to spending for additional energy savings as you build out the 1.5 pods. Use the funds that would be allocated for the jail to create a SB County Net Zero Energy Bank.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike Stoker

President & CEO, SBCTAC