CEC comments on 2022 Renewable Energy Plan for Columbia Water & Light, Water & Light Advisory Board and the Columbia City Council

To: Columbia City Council
CC: Columbia Water & Light, Water & Light Advisory Board
From: Climate and Environment Commission (CEC)
Date: April 26, 2022

Subject: 2022 Renewable Energy Plan

CEC was disappointed that Columbia Water & Light (CWL) fell short of the 15% renewable energy goal by 5,193 MWh. CEC recognizes that this was due to two suppliers not producing what was expected because of construction problems at both Truman Solar and Crystal Lake. However, this is also due to lack of planning for additional renewable energy capacity to deal with unanticipated problems, something the utility routinely does in capacity planning in general.

The CEC commends CWL for planning an over achievement of the 2028 goal. However, it appears from the plans that CWL will also miss the target of 25% in calendar year 2023 with only 23-24% renewable energy. Given the renewable energy ordinance was revised in 2014 allowing ten years to achieve the 2023 goal, this is a very disappointing outcome.

We agree with CWL not purchasing renewable energy credits (RECs) to address the shortfall. However, we feel this short fall in 2021 must be addressed.

To compensate for the 2021 shortfall, we recommend the CWL spend $112,273 building a solar generation system(s) in Columbia. This value is what the impact on energy was for the costs of our renewable energy contracts for Crystal Lake 2 in 2021, $21.62 per MWH and the short fall of 5193 MWh.

Investing in local solar generation in Columbia is a step in the right direction to ensure the resiliency of our community in the face of future significant climate impacts both from the perspective of local generating capacity and from the perspective of disaster preparedness. Whether the solar is added as a utility scale solar site, as part of a distributed micro grid or is placed as rooftop solar with battery backup on specific city buildings such as City Hall, fire stations, 911 operations, or community resilience centers, it can contribute to providing increased resilience for our community during a local disaster. The project should be visible to the community and will serve as the sign of the city's commitment to renewable energy.

Related Climate Action and Adaptation Plan Actions:
E-1.1.1 Offer community solar program through Water & Light
E-1.1.3 Install solar panels on all City buildings and sites, where feasible
E-1.2.3 Invest in local renewable energy generation
E-2.2.2 Ensure equitable implementation of grid resilience actions by partnering with high-risk neighborhoods and non-governmental organizations to develop resilience hubs-community facilities that offer power and other services during times of need. Establish criteria to screen and select locations for community microgrids to support grid and community resilience.
E-2.1.3 Maintain current rate of reliability due to weather related power outages. Investigate energy storage possibilities, such as batteries, to increase reliability.