ADVANCED ENERGY COMMUNITY SYMPOSIUM PRESS KIT

Introduction

The Advanced Energy Communities (AEC) Symposium marks a pivotal moment in California's clean energy transition. As four major pilot projects in Oakland, Richmond, Lancaster, and Los Angeles County reach completion, this invite-only event brings together policymakers, community leaders, and energy innovators to chart a roadmap for scaling these models statewide. The Symposium will highlight how community-led and community-scale decarbonization projects can make our energy system more reliable, equitable, and affordable. The event is co-hosted by the AEC pilot project awardees and The Climate Center, along with the Zero Net Energy Alliance, Community Energy & Equity Resources, MCE, The Energy Coalition, and the California Institute for Energy and Environment at UC Berkeley, with support from the California Energy Commission.

Event Basics

- Event Title: The Advanced Energy Communities Symposium
- Date: Thursday, February 19, 2026
- Time: 10:00 AM – 4:30 PM (PST)
- Location: The California Endowment, Oakland Regional Office | 2000 Franklin St, Oakland, CA

Key Themes

- Equitable access to distributed energy resources (DERs), including energy storage and community-scale microgrids, building efficiency and electrification, EV deployment, and Virtual Power Plant (VPP) programs.
- AEC project benefits and outcomes, including energy affordability, local climate protection, economic and job growth, and public health, particularly within disadvantaged communities.
- Key insights, lessons learned, and policy recommendations to scale advanced energy communities statewide.

Schedule

- 9:00 AM - Registration & Media Availability
- 10:00 AM – Welcome & Overview
- 10:10 AM – Opening Address
- 10:30 AM – AEC Project Highlights and Lessons Learned
- 12:00 PM – Networking Lunch & Media Availability
- 12:45 PM – AEC Strategies and the Affordability Challenge
- 2:00 PM - Pathways to AEC Deployment Breakout Sessions
- 3:45 PM - AEC Policy & Program Deployment Strategies – The Road Ahead
- 4:30 PM - Adjourn for Networking and Media Availability

Media Contact:

- Kurt Johnson, Community Energy Resilience Director, The Climate Center
- 970-729-5051
- kurt@theclimatecenter.org

Media Resources

Reference the photos and videos linked in each individual project highlight below. Use the project's associated contact to request additional details and/or photo credits.

Project Highlight: Bassett-Avocado Heights Advanced Energy Community (BAAEC)

Lead Organization: The Energy Coalition (TEC). The Energy Coalition (TEC) is a California-based 501(c)3 nonprofit with over 50 years of experience in transforming energy use and empowering communities to create their clean energy future. We believe that when communities take control of their energy future, we all benefit. That's why we work with local governments, school districts, businesses, policymakers, and more to turn their big energy goals into results. Together, we're creating a future where clean energy is affordable and accessible for all.

Contact: Genaro Bugarin, Director of Energy Innovation, The Energy Coalition
gbugarin@energycoalition.org - (323-712-1193) | LinkedIn

Project Summary:

The Bassett Avocado Heights Advanced Energy Community (BAAEC) is a low-income community in eastern Los Angeles County, surrounded by freeways, warehouses, and a lead battery recycling facility. A team of local nonprofits, community organizations, and energy technology leaders worked to develop local community-scale renewable energy, decarbonize low-income households, improve electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, and introduce zero-emissions EV mobility options. With replication and scale in mind, BAAEC focused on household energy bill savings, reducing local pollution, and demonstrating a just and equitable energy transition for all.

Select highlights of BAAEC's accomplishments through its over five years of implementation include:

- The first two-site aggregation resource to enter CAISO under the Distributed Energy Resource Aggregation construct. In partnership with Clean Power Alliance (CPA), the 670 KW of rooftop solar across two sites serves approximately 360 low-income households at a 20% discount on their electric bill.
- Single-family rooftop solar, battery storage, and electrification for low-income households were done at 46 homes (46 solar installations, 45 homes with battery storage) and 78 home end-use electrification upgrades on 40 homes, in partnership with the SCE Building Electrification pilot. To complete this work, the project invested in necessary home remediation: 57% (26) of participating low-income homeowners received full or partial reroofs, and 76% (35) required new electrical panels, driven in part by safety issues. The M&V analysis showed a 35% reduction in total monthly energy costs, despite the implementation of electrification measures.
- A 12-month zero-emissions CarShare program generated 175 individual sign-ups and 36 enrollments, with 11 individuals using the program. To support the community's limited EV infrastructure and promote EV ownership, the program provided six participants with no-cost Level-2 home EV chargers that are publicly accessible and allow homeowners to earn money when neighbors charge their cars.

- A prosumer network simulation explored the potential for transactive energy to align supply and demand within the community for system-wide grid savings, with enrolled participants generating, actively managing, and selling energy. With an average of 9% savings on utility bills, our simulation confirmed that this type of load management improves affordability for customers and creates efficiency opportunities across the grid.

These important milestones, and the solutions BAAEC worked through to achieve them, inform key strategies for replication.

Key Partners:

A total of twenty partners, and many more 2nd-tier subcontractors, made BAAEC possible. Key partners included Day One, Active SGV, Grid Alternatives, Haven Energy, Community Electricity, Mobility Development Partners, Pivot Energy, Quality Conservation Services, Perl Street, and UCLA

Project Media: BAAEC (LA County)

Earned Media/Testimonials/Quotes:

- A small distributed energy resources project that could have a big impact
- LA's first 'community solar' project of its kind is online. What it means for clean energy
- LA's 1st community solar project continues to grow
- Induction stoves help the planet stay cooler. You may qualify for help to get one
- Delivering on Equity by Decarbonizing Low-Income Homes as part of a Multi-project Approach for Resilient and Healthy Communities: Stories from the Field

Impact Metrics:

- 670 KW of front-of-the-meter community solar across two sites serving approximately 360 low-income households with clean electricity at a 20% discount on their electric bill. These installations achieve GHG savings of 264 metric tons of avoided CO2 equivalent emissions annually over the project lifetime.
- An average 35% reduction in total monthly energy costs for 46 single-family homeowners participating in solar (total 192 KW), battery storage (total 1.0 MWh), and 78 home electrification upgrades. BAAEC estimates annual GHG savings of 829 kg of avoided CO2 eq per household over the project lifetime.
- Increased electric vehicle charging infrastructure with 6 home chargers and 30 chargers across three local schools.

Learn More: https://advancedenergycommunity.org/

Project Highlight: Oakland EcoBlock

Lead Organization: California Institute for Energy and Environment (CIEE). CIEE is a dedicated group of experts who define, conduct, and manage public-interest energy research. Based in the University of California at Berkeley, within the Center for Information Technology Research in the Interest of Society (CITRIS) and the Banatao Institute, CIEE puts its experts and other leading researchers from universities, government, industry, and nonprofits, to work on energy challenges, yielding new ideas and technologies to meet California's pace-setting energy goals. CIEE has been conducting, leading, and managing energy research for thirty years in the areas of the electric grid, energy use in buildings, and enabling technologies for the clean energy transition.

Contact: Therese Peffer, EcoBlock Principal Investigator and CIEE Associate Director, tpeffer@berkeley.edu, (510) 289-4278. LinkedIn.
Backup Contact: Richard Brown, EcoBlock Senior Advisor, richbrown@berkeley.edu, (510) 502-5968. LinkedIn.

Project Summary:

The Oakland EcoBlock pilot research project aims to demonstrate the technical, social, legal, and financial strategies for radically decarbonizing cities through neighborhood block-scale retrofitting. The project has several key goals: providing affordable access to solar, energy, and water-efficient upgrades; improving indoor air quality, thermal comfort, and energy resilience; rapidly reducing greenhouse gases; strengthening community; and developing a scalable template for block-scale retrofits.

To achieve these goals, a block in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood was selected through a competitive process, after which the project team conducted extensive engagement with the block to educate the residents on energy and climate issues, and ultimately to secure their participation in the retrofit project. 25 households in 15 residential buildings are participating in the pilot.

Several technical strategies were implemented during the pilot, including: electrification and energy efficiency retrofits of older, 1-4-unit urban housing units; shared rooftop solar with community ownership through a non-profit association; stormwater mitigation and street tree planting; design of a shared curbside electric vehicle (EV) charger; and design of a shared solar microgrid governed by California's utility regulations. The pilot project is finishing construction now and the project team will monitor the performance of the block, with final reporting expected at the end of 2026.

Key Partners:

City of Oakland, Association for Energy Affordability, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Siegel and Strain Architects, Introba, Sherwood Design Engineers, EcoPerformance Builders, Sun Light and Power, Tuttle Law, Morgan Lewis, Civic Design Lab, Transportation Sustainability Research Center, Oakland Neighborhoods for Equity, Center for Law, Energy, and the Environment, Kiran Jain, Kate Ringness, Sandy Robertson, Christine Thomson.

Project Media: Oakland EcoBlock

Earned Media/Testimonials/Quotes:
EcoBlock has earned about 40 media mentions to date, spanning local and national print and online news, podcasts, and radio, as well as outlets specific to the architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) and energy industries (e.g., Microgrid Knowledge and Archinect).

- KQED Public Radio, "This Oakland Block Tried to Quit Fossil Fuels. Here's What They Learned," June 2025. This story also ran on NPR All Things Considered, June 2025.
- Sierra Magazine, "Getting Off Gas, Block by Block," Fall 2024
- KALW, "This is your house on electrons: Heat pumps electrify the Bay Area," May 2024

Impact Metrics (targets):
- 65% reduction in block-wide CO2 emissions
- 10% reduction in household energy use
- 75% of post-retrofit electricity consumption met by on-site solar generation

Learn More:
https://ecoblock.berkeley.edu/

Project Highlight: Lancaster Advanced Energy Community

Lead Organization: Zero Net Energy Alliance (ZNEA). ZNEA is a nonprofit organization that partners with communities and organizations to advance a zero net emissions future at city and regional scales. In addition to leading two Advanced Energy Communities (AEC) projects in the Cities of Richmond and Lancaster, their work includes scaling best practices in transportation electrification, working to accelerate electric school buses and associated infrastructure, accelerating energy efficiency and DER solutions among institutional buyers, and promoting Zero Net Energy building innovations.

Contact: Richard Schorske, Executive Director, Zero Net Energy Alliance, RichardS@znealliance.net.

Richard Schorske has founded and directed several public and nongovernmental organizations to drive large-scale GHG reduction impact and accelerate emerging clean energy technologies. https://www.linkedin.com/in/richard-schorske-1a41686

Project Summary:

The Lancaster AEC pilot pursued a host of initiatives in the service area of Lancaster Energy (LE) to enhance community resilience through community microgrids and virtual power plants (VPP). The project team successfully established a CCA-operated, community-focused VPP and enrolled Distributed Energy Resources (DER) at three major customer sites, transforming these customers into community resilience hubs.

A key innovation of the Lancaster AEC was the development of a purpose-built enterprise-level Distributed Energy Resource Management System (eDERMS) created by Serious Controls. This eDERMS is designed to allow the CCA to pursue a range of CAISO market integrated and non-market integrated use cases to generate value and avoid costs by offering the CCA full visibility and control and unmatched situational awareness. While off-the-shelf DERMS come with expensive licensing fees and hidden escalators, Serious Control's eDERMS is secured through a perpetual user license that grants LE access to the code and future enhancements in perpetuity for a small upfront licensing fee that is able to be recouped as other CCAs adopt the software. Already, MCE has embraced this eDERMS and has begun interfacing with CAISO systems. The project also supported the measurement and verification team, comprised of TRC and GPT, in developing a novel performance evaluation metric designed to properly value daily load shaping use cases made possible by the VPP.

To support robust DER deployment and VPP participation, the project team developed an innovative value-sharing tariff, disbursed through bill credits, that helps establish VPP programs as bankable revenue streams that will increase lender confidence and help customers access lower cost capital to finance DER installations. LE was able to enroll three major commercial and municipal customers in its Green District program, including 1) the Lancaster Police Department,

whose participation in the VPP enhances community safety in the event of power outages; 2) the Lancaster Baptist Church, a key community hub that serves over 5,000 area residents, operates a large K-12 school and residential college, and can function as one of the largest community resilience centers in the region; and 3) the Toyota of Lancaster Dealership, a strategic ally with significant near-term dispatchable load and potential to host bi-directional Vehicle-to-Grid enabled vehicles as soon as the 2026 model year.

While the team originally planned to construct master metered community microgrids at several affordable housing developments, these efforts encountered insurmountable regulatory barriers. In response, the project team was able to engage in important advocacy work and author a white paper to advance policy solutions aimed at facilitating master metered microgrid deployment. The project team is hopeful that these efforts, coupled with their successful deployment of a community-focused VPP, will help other communities achieve resilience in years to come.

Key Partners: City of Lancaster, Lancaster Energy, Community Energy & Equity Resources (CEER), Serious Controls, Mynt Systems, TRC, GPT, Tierra Resource Consultants, The Climate Center, Outfront Solutions, NRG/Direct Energy, Energy Solutions, and GridScape

Project Media: Lancaster AEC

Earned Media/Testimonials/Quotes:

- "EPIC Approach to Deploying Advanced Energy Communities: Part II." *Civic Well*, February 27, 2018.
- "Lancaster AEC Phase 2." *Empower Innovation.*
- "Lancaster, CA: A Choice Location." *Business View Magazine*, September 12, 2019.
- "[The Green District] provides battery storage for our commercial customers at no cost to them. In fact, they'll get incentive payments to be a site host...The draw for the business customer is savings on their energy, savings on their use from the grid, and reliability to the energy grid." – Kathy Wells, Energy Programs Manager at California Choice Energy Authority

Impact Metrics:

- 311.62 MWh Projected Annual Import Reduction + 12.82 MW Projected Peak Demand Reduction
- $92,252 Projected Annual Energy Cost Savings
- 97 MtC02e Projected Emissions Reductions

Learn More:
https://www.cityoflancasterca.org/our-city/about-us/advanced-energy-community

Project Highlight: Richmond Advanced Energy Community

Lead Organization: Zero Net Energy Alliance (ZNEA). ZNEA is a nonprofit organization that partners with communities and organizations to advance a zero net emissions future at city and regional scales. In addition to leading two Advanced Energy Communities (AEC) projects in the Cities of Richmond and Lancaster, their work includes scaling best practices in transportation electrification, working to accelerate electric school buses and associated infrastructure, accelerating energy efficiency and DER solutions among institutional buyers, and promoting Zero Net Energy building innovations.

Contact: Richard Schorske, Executive Director, Zero Net Energy Alliance, RichardS@znealliance.net.

Richard Schorske has founded and directed several public and nongovernmental organizations to drive large-scale GHG reduction impact and accelerate emerging clean energy technologies. https://www.linkedin.com/in/richard-schorske-1a41686

Project Summary:

The Richmond AEC pilot project leverages a community-focused Virtual Power Plant (VPP) owned and operated by MCE to enhance grid reliability and resilience, support decarbonization, and meet emerging regulatory requirements – all while demonstrating that it is possible for CCAs to integrate directly with CAISO markets and use VPPs to lower their costs through active load shaping. The pilot was also successful in showing that there is broad and diverse interest in VPP participation, even in low-income and Disadvantaged Communities like Richmond. MCE is proud to scale-up this VPP concept to cover its entire service area in its subsequent pilot, VPP FLEX.

The Richmond VPP is innovative in showing that it is possible for a CCA to operate its own VPP without outsourcing this role to a third-party aggregator. By operating their own VPP through an enterprise-level Distributed Energy Resource Management System (eDERMS) designed for use by CCAs in CAISO markets, MCE can begin pursuing new revenue streams and cost-avoidance strategies that support the CCA's ability to offer affordable energy to all customers. The eDERMS and the overarching program are designed to be technology- and vendor-agnostic, which fosters a fair and open market for VPP partners while guarding against vendor lock-in and stranded assets.

The project team pursued a host of strategies designed to make VPP participation accessible to all community members. They designed a first-of-its-kind, value-sharing VPP tariff codified through an innovative long-term agreement that establishes a mutually beneficial relationship between customers and the CCA. MCE minimized out-of-pocket expenses for system upgrades by stacking incentives and collaborating with the National Energy Improvement Fund (NEIF) to offer low- and no-interest loans to residential customers. They also worked with RCF Connects to outfit blighted properties with advanced energy assets automatically enrolled in the VPP and make them available to first-time homebuyers at below-market rates. In addition to these residential

customers, the VPP was able to attract high-profile commercial customers, including a multifamily property owner with developments across the City of Richmond.

Key Partners: City of Richmond, MCE, Community Energy & Equity Resources (CEER), Serious Controls, Energy Solutions, RCF Connects, TRC, GPT, ZGlobal, and Grid Alternatives

Project Media: Richmond AEC

Earned Media/Testimonials/Quotes:

Earned Media

- Meet the Power Plant Tucked into Garages and Basements - KQED
- Virtual Power Plants Do More Than Aggregate: They Empower - Clean Technica
- Inside Clean Energy: This Virtual Power Plant Is Trying to Tackle a Housing Crisis and an Energy Crisis All at Once - Inside Climate News
- California's patchwork push to scale up virtual power plants - Canary Media
- Can 'Virtual Power Plant' Technology Help Our Power Grid?
- The plan to turn blighted houses into a new source of green power for the grid - Grist
- San Francisco startup wants to help you electrify your home - Axios
- These California programs steer solar+batteries to low-income households - Canary Media
- Net zero homes tackle Bay Area's grid woes - San Francisco Business Times

Quotes

- "Most VPPs only exist on paper. But this is a dynamic, two-way system that draws affordable energy from the grid and delivers renewable energy back to it, when it's needed most." – Vicken Kasarjian, Chief Operating Officer at MCE
- "When a CCA runs a VPP, it's a neighbors-helping-neighbors approach because participants save money, and the CCA can keep rates low for everyone while supplying clean power to the entire community." – Chris Sentieri, Principal at CEER
- "VPPs help us address challenges facing the grid by offering decentralized, decarbonized, and digital solutions. What makes MCE's VPP unique is the power of democratizing energy." – Alexandra McGee, Director of Strategic Initiatives at MCE

Impact Metrics:

- $242,149 total incentives for residential upgrades + $30,300 total bill credits over five years
- 26 Residential Customers & 3 Commercial and Municipal Customers Enrolled
- 4 abandoned homes upgraded with advanced energy technologies through the ZNCR Homes Program

Learn More:

- MCE's Virtual Power Plant Video Explainer
- https://mcecleanenergy.org/virtual-power-plant/
- https://rcfconnects.org/richmond-housing-renovation-program/
- https://www.neifund.org/