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**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS LINDSEY P. HORVATH
AND HOLLY J. MITCHELL**

Establishing a Building Sustainability Advisory Service to Equitably Accelerate Private

Building Retrofits in LA County

LA County is ground zero for the climate crisis, and the impacts are disproportionately felt by low-income communities and communities of color. From unhealthy air to extreme heat to wildfires, the LA County Climate Vulnerability Assessment revealed that without dramatic action to curb greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapt to already changed conditions, those impacts will become even more severe and inequitable.

The second largest source of GHG emissions in LA County (25%) is from buildings, making building decarbonization and energy efficiency projects a key component of addressing the climate crisis and improving local air quality. Buildings are also the largest stationary source of nitrogen oxide and a major source of fine particulate matter which can cause respiratory illness and other serious health impacts, particularly in vulnerable communities. GHG emissions from buildings come from combustion of fuel for space heating, hot water, and cooking, as well as electricity use. Energy-conserving, cost-saving, and comfort-enhancing strategies buildings can take include weatherization, insulating walls and roofs, installing energy efficient LED lighting and smart devices, replacing gas-fueled appliances with energy efficient air source heat pumps, and installing distributed energy resources including solar panels and batteries.

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MITCHELL _____

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HORVATH _____

Given the value to property owners, residents, and our shared climate goals, there is an unprecedented level of federal, state, and local funding available to fund and install energy and water efficiency projects. Grants, rebates, tax credits, and subsidized financing are now available thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, several California State programs, the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the Metropolitan Water District, and local utilities including the Clean Power Alliance, Southern California Edison, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and SoCalGas. These programs are in many cases complementary, can be “layered” to reduce costs, and are now available to non-profits and governments as well.

Despite unprecedented availability of resources, not nearly enough of these financial subsidies for building sustainability are flowing to Los Angeles County, or into communities of need, especially low-income multifamily and single-family homes.

Stakeholder engagement has revealed a critical need for a single point of contact for technical assistance - like a trusted advisor or concierge - to help manage funding, planning, and compliance with building sustainability policies and programs. Successfully layering federal, state, and local grants, tax credits, and loan programs can significantly reduce the costs of retrofitting buildings, and particularly for small landlords, can make these projects financially viable. Financing strategies - with strong consumer protections - are also critical to address upfront cost barriers. Despite the utilities and grantmaking agencies spending tens of millions of dollars in LA County alone just on marketing and “customer acquisition,” many customers still find rebate programs difficult to understand or successfully apply to.

To address this complex landscape, jurisdictions across the country have developed technical assistance programs for building decisionmakers. For instance, the New York City Accelerator provides free advisory services to help guide medium and large building decisionmakers (e.g. owners, property managers, HOA boards) with planning, financing, and completing energy efficiency projects, and has assisted more than 3,500 buildings with retrofits to date, focused mostly on properties that were required to comply with local or state energy laws. The program has different tiers of assistance focused on compliance with local laws, everyday energy efficiency, building electrification, solar, and an outreach strategy for small landlords led by trusted community-based organizations. The Clean Power Alliance recently launched its free Energy Advisor program which will offer similar guidance focused specifically on electrification of single-family homes and small businesses.

Building decisionmakers Los Angeles County are similarly adapting to new state and regional building codes, including pending SCAQMD rules around space and water heating. The Board of Supervisors will soon consider tenant protections from extreme heat that will lead many buildings to invest in active or passive cooling strategies to keep residents safe from extreme heat. The LA County Water Plan has a goal of achieving 80% local water supply by 2045 and will rely on significant uptake of conservation strategies from significantly more Angelenos. The California Air Resources Board will phase out the sale of gas-powered vehicles by 2035, and our LA County Zero-Emissions Vehicle Master Plan tells us that we must dramatically increase the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure to meet those goals. Given this evolving

regulatory and financial landscape, a building sustainability advisory program in LA County could assist building decisionmakers with understanding regulations and promote an equitable distribution of financial subsidies designed to assist with their implementation, while supporting our regional workforce and bringing jobs to neighborhoods across Los Angeles County.

The LA County Internal Services Department's Southern California Regional Energy Network (SoCalREN) currently offers a suite of energy efficiency programs and was just awarded a \$329 million grant from the California Energy Commission's Equitable Building Decarbonization Program. SoCalREN already has a highly successful existing infrastructure, presence in multiple jurisdictions, and robust partnerships with community-based organizations, labor unions, contractors, and all LA County's major power utilities. With additional resources, SoCalREN could also create a building sustainability advisory program to assist building decisionmakers to understand their regulatory requirements, identify energy efficiency, clean energy, heat mitigation, and water conservation projects, and maximize the external resources and financing flowing to LA County, creating additional local jobs and investments. They also could educate contractors, project developers, CBOs, and other stakeholders to become effective partners to accelerate projects. LA County has a clear opportunity to lead our region and help building owners to leverage time-limited financial incentives, reduce their utility costs, improve indoor air quality and public health, and meet the County's climate goals.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Internal Services Department, in collaboration with the Chief Sustainability Office and the Chief Executive Office, to

report back within 6 months with a program proposal and funding plan for a free technical and financial advisory service administered by SoCalREN that would support building decisionmakers with identifying, planning, and funding energy efficiency, clean energy, heat mitigation, electric vehicle, and water conservation projects. The advisory services should:

- a. Educate building decisionmakers on strategies to comply with policies related to buildings, reduce utility bills, reduce emissions, and improve occupant health and comfort;
- b. Identify and layer eligible grants, incentives, tax credits, and financing and assist decisionmakers with realizing projects;
- c. Incorporate best practices from pilot energy efficiency programs;
- d. Offer targeted outreach strategies to assist small, non-profit, and other high-priority building sectors that face greater barriers to project implementation or disproportionate climate risks;
- e. Provide workforce opportunities to promote high quality jobs and support the County's workforce goals;
- f. Coordinate with regional and statewide partners doing similar work, including local governments, utilities, and non-profits;
- g. Provide a pathway for cities, utilities, and other partners to contribute to this initiative to maximize the reach and impact of the program;
- h. Recommend an initial prioritization of services and ramp-up plan.

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