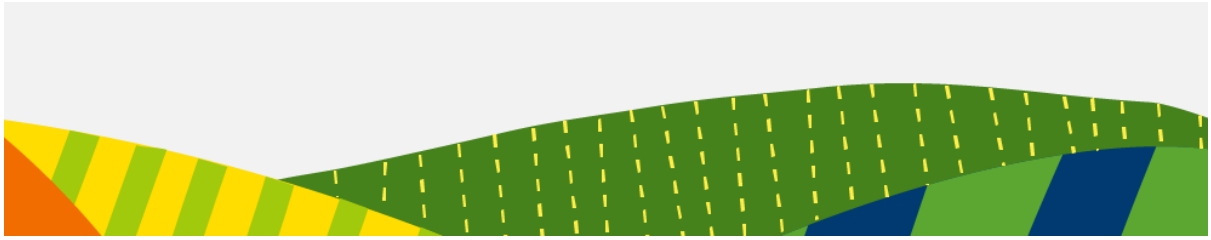

The Brookings Institution
Reimagine Rural podcast

"Will offshore wind be good for Humboldt County, California?"

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NATALIE ARROYO, 4th District Supervisor, Humboldt County, California
REX BOHN, 1st District Supervisor, Humboldt County, California
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LONYX LANDRY, Native Coordinator/STEM Advisor, Indian Natural Resources, Science and Engineering Program, Cal Poly Humboldt
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Episode Summary:

In late 2022, the federal government auctioned off ocean access near the coast of Humboldt County, California to develop an offshore wind installation. This major industrial project could produce 6% of the state's current energy needs just in its initial stage. In this episode, Tony visits Humboldt County to understand the scale and ambition of the project and learn how key stakeholders, including leaders of local Tribes, are coming together to ensure the benefits are shared and avoid the exploitation that occurred with past economic development.

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[ocean and wind sounds, music]

ADAIR: I hope this is a project that happens with us and not necessarily to us.

ARROYO: These projects are happening at us and hopefully with us, and I'm going to do my darndest to make sure they happen with us.

LOYX LANDRY: I don't want to see another raw deal. I don't want to see this next manifestation of Manifest Destiny happen to us again. If this is to happen, this needs to happen with us.

PIPA: Those are the voices of three local leaders in Humboldt County, California, all referring to plans to install one of the most ambitious offshore wind energy installations in the world, 21 miles off the Pacific coast. The sentiment shared across all three is that this large industrial project should happen *with* them, not *to* them.

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I'm Tony Pipa, senior fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. Welcome back to *Reimagine Rural*, the podcast that visits rural towns and collects the stories of local leaders as they experience significant opportunity and change.

Yes, today I am once again in Humboldt, but this is a vastly different Humboldt than the town in Kansas that I visited in our last episode. This Humboldt is also a destination in its own right, a rural county in California that's about 270 miles north of San Francisco. It's a place that combines the beauty of the Pacific coastline with the majestic redwood forests in the Redwood National and State Parks and the stunning Klamath River cutting through lush green hills. It's home to 9 federally recognized tribes and covers roughly the size of Rhode Island and Delaware with about a sixteenth of the population.

And Humboldt County, California's abundance of wind will be critical for renewable energy. Here is Natalie Arroyo, a county supervisor elected from the county's 4th District.

[02:25]

ARROYO: We have incredible wind resources here and we recognize as a community, I think, that that's an asset. I will tell you that in May when the wind is blowing nonstop for days at a time, it doesn't always feel like an asset. This last year I was reminded, we have very, very windy springs and have wind all year round, but there's periods of time where I'm like, for the love of God, will it stop being windy? And then I remember, oh, yeah, that's that's what we've got. That's something we have to work with.

PIPA: In December 2022, the federal government auctioned nearly 600 square miles of ocean access off Humboldt Bay and Morro Bay, which is much further south in California, to five energy companies. The plan near Humboldt is to build giant, 900-

foot-tall wind turbines in deep waters more than 20 miles off the coast to harness the wind and send its energy back to shore as electricity. These massive windmills will be three times larger than ones you see on land; think the size of the Eiffel Tower in Paris floating in the ocean.

One estimate is that offshore wind farms like the one proposed here could power 25 million homes by 2045 and provide 13 percent of the power supply needed by the state of California, which is the fifth largest economy in the world right now. Some estimates put that proportion of energy even higher. Any way you look at it, that's a lot more power than Humboldt County needs for itself. It's also a significant economic opportunity.

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And it's not just a project to erect wind turbines. As Bryna Lipper, executive director of the Humboldt Area Foundation, says, this will require a whole set of related investments.

[04:22]

LIPPER: What we began to realize was the offshore wind development itself, the wind farms, were only one of a series of many cascading activities that we call the offshore wind cluster. That includes a massive port development. That includes transmission systems and the grid systems in the state of California and the state of Oregon. All of a sudden, when you're crossing state boundaries, you're actually talking about FERC with the federal government.

And thinking about the local infrastructure that would need be needed to support all of that: housing, transportation and roadways, workforce systems, and the such. And you began looking at this massive industrial, really industrial complex that needed to be developed here in order to enable offshore wind.

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PIPA: Together, these activities will require billions in investment, maybe tens of billions. The Department of Transportation recently approved a $462 million investment to upgrade the local port, for example.

Here's how Scott Adair, the county's director of economic development and executive director of the Humboldt County Workforce Development Program, describes it.

[05:47]

ADAIR: The project has often been contrasted to construction of the Golden Gate Bridge or the Hoover Dam. This is a massive construction project. It's a multi-billion-dollar construction project. And for a rural community the size of ours, that's incredibly life changing. Even if this project were to occur in one of the major U.S. cities along the West Coast, such as San Francisco or Oakland or down in Los Angeles, it would be a massive undertaking for a population or a community of that size with all the resources and the capacity that they have.

And so, for Humboldt County to see an opportunity like this, it is for most of our residents and in the public outreach and the community engagement that we've done, it's something that is both thrilling and terrifying to people all at the same time.

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PIPA: That's breathtaking when you think about it. On the scale of the Golden Gate Bridge or the Hoover Dam. Those are not just pieces of infrastructure; they are icons of the American identity.

An installation of this size would define this area's future in many ways. Rex Bohn, the county's longest-serving elected supervisor, represents the 1st District, an area still dominated by dairy farms, timberlands, and other agriculture. Rex grew up here, helping out at his dad's corner grocery store. He's watched the county's varied economic development through the years.

[07:37]

BOHN: We were built on fisheries, and it's not a dead industry. People say fisheries are dead. They're not dead. We still have, we still have an active fisheries. They say timber here is dead. We've got to do something because timber is dead. They spent over $80 million on processing timber infrastructure, making lumber in Humboldt County in the last six years. That's a good chunk of change. We don't have as many mills, but we're still doing a lot of timber. You look at our ag report—timber is still a big part of our industry.

Now offshore wind is going to be a big part. And I think it's going to create the trickle-down effect of whatever else it creates. We're going to have an industrial harbor now, an extreme industrial harbor that isn't just going to be for wind. We can do other things. But with that people have to realize we may need to look at rail someday. We may need to look at upgrading our highways. We may, to get these things out of here, maybe it's just fixing our highways a little bit more so we can take containers, something, to the Bay Area, which is only a one-day trip.

PIPA: So, *a lot* of stuff needs to be built, not just the wind turbines. And this would mean significant changes not just for the port of Humboldt. It means building roadways, upgrading transmission lines, and maintaining a wide range of different types of infrastructure.

As Scott Adair says, all of this is ...

[08:59]

ADAIR: Multigenerational. It is definitely an opportunity which will impact and could affect both positively and, in some ways, adversely multiple generations in Humboldt County.

PIPA: Humboldt County's history is littered with repeated experiences of how the latest economic development opportunity did not fulfill its promise. And as Bryna Lipper describes it, they did not always work out to the county's benefit. In some instances, there was active harm.

LIPPER: So, you're talking about the fourth largest economy in the world very soon, as the state predicts. So, in terms of climate mitigation, it could be enormous. However, in terms of the implications to local communities in those places, it could also be enormous, and potentially even be harmful.

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The history here in this region for the last 200 years has been one of deep scar and extraction. From the gold rush to the timber rush, to the water rushes, and then cannabis, industrial economies have come into this region, taken out and left the wounds of genocide to our tribes, deep environmental harms. We remember the timber wars, for example. And the Klamath Dam River project, which will soon be the largest dam removal project in the world, almost killed off a species.

PIPA: As Connie Stewart, who's a former mayor of Arcata, one of the area's largest towns, and who now leads workforce initiatives for Cal Poly Humboldt, describes it, the challenge is to evolve decisionmaking and governance so it's different this time.

[10:50]

STEWART: Our region is blessed with having the most tribes of any region in the state, and we have the largest tribes and some of the smallest tribes in our region. There's about 14 tribes throughout the region. And so, and each tribe is its own government, and needs to be heard and respected. And all of those tribes have seen boom and bust economies going back to the gold rush here. The last rush was the cannabis rush, right? Where everybody thought there was great opportunities, and people came and changed the landscape, and they extracted, and then they went bust.

And so, the question on everyone's mind, but especially on some of our tribal leaders' minds, is is this an economy that is really going to be community changing or is this just another boom-and-bust community?

This is really about getting power to San Francisco. Our water flows south to urban areas. So, now our power will flow south to urban areas. So, at this time, how do we bring everybody together to say, Okay, but it has to be a transition for our region as well? And that's the challenge. And it's not just, how do we bring you together to talk about our community benefit? How do we bring you together to make sure we have work; we can have the workforce? How do we bring you together to make sure that procurement works so we get power? Because 25 minutes from here, literally, our utility company is telling people you can't open your business for seven years because we cannot give you power locally. So, businesses are not being built in our community because there's no power. And yet we're talking about providing power that San Francisco needs.

The daunting task is how do you save the planet but not kill your own community at the same time?

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I don’t know that we have really handled that well across the country. It seems like we’ve let communities win and lose.

PIPA: For all the good that this mega project could do, Bryna and Connie point us to the heart of the matter, the tensions that are at the intersection of history, trust, and public decisionmaking that sit alongside the energy, environmental, and economic development considerations. Who will benefit, and who gets to participate in those decisions? How will it be different from who’s been left behind in the past? And since there’s a great deal of public investment that will be part of this cluster of projects, what are the policy implications?

Certainly, this project offers significant potential for addressing climate change and making progress on major commitments by the California state government and the federal government to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2045 and 2050, respectively. And as the economic development experts in the county outlined for me, there’s also the potential for thousands of jobs, new or expanded businesses, even new business sectors.

But as Natalie Arroyo acknowledges, this is also cutting-edge technology that brings its own unknowns.

[14:28]

ARROYO: So, we think the imperative we’re facing as a nation, and certainly we’re going to do our part, our big part as a community here, is around climate change. So, we need to develop as quickly as possible these energy alternatives for folks. And, you know, I’m excited and I think our community is excited and optimistic and also concerned about the some of the impacts associated with offshore wind. The technology is pretty new. It’s going to be deployed in a different way than it has anywhere else in the world. But I think we all recognize that we’re contributing to a greater cause by being a test case for some of this new technology.

PIPA: Scott Adair told me that Humboldt Bay is the largest producer of oyster seed on the entire west coast, and both he and Natalie Arroyo pointed out that this installation will affect the area's fisheries and the related economy. It will also produce its own industrial waste. No project of this size happens without these types of impacts. Here's Bryna Lipper:

[15:30]

LIPPER: So, whenever industry comes in into this area, it has been deeply harmful. And this time around, I think we need to see some substantial mitigations, extraordinary care of what local community needs and wants, and real benefits accrue to those who have been marginalized historically, including the tribes, communities of color, migrant communities who fish in those waters.

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So, we’re really trying to figure out a way If something can be done better so that we can balance climate needs with the needs of a community.

PIPA: For locals, the trick will be to mitigate the negative consequences to the greatest extent possible while getting the most out of the opportunities. And given the region's history, that means elevating the participation and concerns of the local tribes. Lonyx Landry explains.

[16:35]

LANDRY: I feel it's short sighted to think this is all good and roll over and just let it happen to you. We didn't do so well, at least indigenous people, when it comes to the gold rush, when it comes to the timber rush, when it comes to the damming rivers rush, when it comes to before that, the taking the bark of our tan oaks, our food source, of our acorn trees, and killing them by girdling them to have tanning industry. It was a short spell where that was happening here as well. So, all these rushes, we haven't fared very well. So, I'm very leery that this next best thing, all of a sudden, we're going to fare well?

PIPA: Lonyx is at Cal Poly Humboldt, where he's the native coordinator in the Indian Natural Resource Science and Engineering Program, and a council member of the Northern California Indian Development Council.

LANDRY: I am a Nor Rel Muk Wintu Nation citizen, and that is a tribe east of the project. And likely, if transmission were to happen across land, it is high probability that it will cross Nor Rel Muk Wintu aboriginal territory.

PIPA: Lonyx spoke in terms of sacrifice when describing the impact that the earlier gold, timber, and even cannabis rushes had on the native tribes in this area.

LANDRY: I don't want to see my beautiful community degraded. I also understand that if we can't do it here, which I very much feel is as good as it gets for progressive thinking, for sustainable thinking, doing something different—I feel like we are one of those places in our nation where it's as good as it gets here. I still feel like it needs to be better than that.

And it needs to be better for our grassroots local, historically marginalized people, and our tribes. We've sacrificed a ton already. If we're asked to sacrifice yet again, well, this time it's kind of feeling a little bit more ask, but kinda, because I feel like there are forces that are, it's coming.

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Some of the challenges that I've had are feeling like our community, local leaders feel like they got a fish on the hook, and they don't want to lose it because this is going to save our economy. This is going to save our all kinds of things. This is going to take care of so many problems. They got a fish on the line. Well, I think they're errantly mistaken. You got a megalodon on the line that's coming to eat you.

PIPA: During my visit, I had the good fortune to travel about 55 miles from the coast and Humboldt Bay up to Hoopa, situated along the Trinity River, not too far from where it meets the Klamath River. There I spoke to Linnea Jackson, who is a member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe and the general manager of the tribe's public

utilities district. She explained to me how past energy projects never fulfilled their promise.

[20:01]

JACKSON: So, there's been dams placed not only on the Klamath River, but the Trinity River as well. I believe that although that does generate some energy, I think the long-term environmental impacts have been detrimental to this area and the environment and the earth and tribal people. It has had issues with salmon populations and ecosystems. We have a lot of our water that's diverted down to Southern California and Central California that obviously affects our water quality. And then with climate change and drought conditions, that really does have an impact, to how we provide safe drinking water, recreational as well as cultural uses.

So, I think largely the large investment into dams and those types of infrastructure have had a long-term effect. And I think we're seeing that now and trying to kind of remediate some of those things that were built 50 to 70 years ago.

PIPA: In the early to mid-twentieth century, dams were built along the Klamath river without tribal consent in the name of providing power. They blocked salmon runs, degraded the water quality, and negatively impacted the ecosystem of wildlife and habitats that the tribes depended upon.

Yet the promise of abundant and dependable power was never met. Linnea explained to me that the state recently rated Hoopa's power as among the most undependable in the state. After years of advocacy, the dams are coming down now. Tribal communities and other groups here have a long memory of how energy and economic development projects promised a great deal but ultimately delivered few benefits.

JACKSON: I think that people are very apprehensive of harnessing a different kind of resource, because of the history of extractive processes.

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I think that they're very skeptical about that because the long-term studies aren't there to show, for a fact, this is going to be the impact in 10 to 20 years on, you know, our oceans, on our salmon population, the marine, and the ocean as a whole, because the Trinity River and the Klamath River both run into the Pacific Ocean. And those species migrate back. And it's hard for me to believe that there will be no environmental impacts from that.

PIPA: The more I learn about the experiences of the tribes in the area, the more I understand their hesitation. Natalie Arroyo explains that the site itself in the ocean has particular cultural and historical significance to the Wiyot Tribe.

[22:44]

ARROYO: So, right in the middle of Humboldt Bay, we have Tulawat, which is an island that is sacred to the Wiyot people. Not only was it the site of a terrible massacre in the 1860s, but more importantly, it's the Wiyot center of their spiritual

world. And so, we're talking about erecting turbines, assembling and towing out turbines from Humboldt Bay at a site that's visible to Tulawat.

PIPA: So, while tribal and community leaders recognize the urgency and the opportunity represented by this installation, there's also plenty to give them pause. Similar skepticism contributed to the rejection of an earlier proposed project to build a wind farm on land by a company called Terra-Gen. Rex Bohn was one of two county supervisors who voted to allow the project to go through, but three others voted against it.

[23:39]

BOHN: Now five years ago, we had an onshore wind project: 48 windmills, everything else, all on private land, all with private monies. And it would have made basically 88 percent carbon neutral. They had an agreement with PG&E, and it was all gonna stay here.

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Those were exciting times. That failed for various reasons. Not all of them factual, but there was a hysteria. And it failed on the last day.

PIPA: When I talked about the Terra-Gen project to different people, I got the sense that the project failed because they didn't feel as if the community had been in the driver's seat. The company had hosted dozens and dozens of community meetings, but agreements about how certain groups might benefit were left to the last minute.

Taking a lesson from that experience, as conversations about other renewable energy opportunities surfaced, including offshore wind, community leaders saw it as a chance to do things differently. Um, actually, scratch that—not just a chance, but an *imperative* to do things differently, as Bryna Lipper describes it.

[24:54]

LIPPER: I think history tells us a lot about what to expect. And I think for the question about offshore wind mega development, it tells us that when we become euphoric about one technological solution that is before us to solve the economy, to solve climate change, to solve all of our job woes, that that is a red herring.

Given all of that, given the lesson of history, I think we have to be more contemplative of the choices before us. I feel like we are using the same toolkit for this renewable energy work that we used in the industrial revolution. And if that toolkit doesn't change, despite the fact we're using it for the good cause of climate change, we will have the same outcomes. We will have extraction from communities, we will have communities that are ill-equipped and ill-prepared and even harmed by industry coming in. Negotiating away its power. Demanding of it things that it cannot do or does not want to do without its consent. And then when the resource ends, leaving us with the harms.

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I've been working on climate change for most of my career. I've been dedicated to helping communities adapt to these threats. This is yet another threat, unless we do it differently.

PIPA: That impulse, that commitment to do things differently this time, led to the creation of what Bryna and other local and tribal leaders call CORE Hub.

[26:49]

LIPPER: About two years ago a group of folks formed the Climate and Community, or CORE, Hub of the Redwood Region. That group of people was myself based here at a community foundation, one of our county supervisors in Humboldt, our energy research center at the Cal Poly University here, a tribal climate leader, and began to think about the energy vulnerability here that we were experiencing with wildfires and Pacific Gas and Electric—PG&E—power shutoffs because of fire risk. And also, just the severity of climate change and the impacts in the region. We are some of the fastest rates of sea level rise here in this entire country due to subsidence effects.

And we thought that if we could figure out a different way of approaching climate change, industrial development, self-empowerment, and do that in a way that assured tribal voices in particular, with their expertise around environment and ecosystems, had a strong voice at the table to describe what it was that they wanted, what they envisioned, and had the space to talk about risks and tradeoffs and opportunities.

And could be in partnership to draw down some of the resources that might be available, for example, with the IRA and the federal government investments in climate. If we could build that kind of network and coalition to self-empower, create local policies, and ensure of mitigations, then we might have a chance.

And being able as a community to actively respond to those needs began with a group of people trying to describe what its desires were. I think many communities consider those kinds of visioning exercises really important to be ongoing,

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but the question of who has the power at the table is often a set of players that that is usually at the table and very active and describing that in terms of traditional economic development.

PIPA: Lonyx Landry from Cal Poly Humboldt participates in CORE Hub, but he was wary at first. Was this just about making sure offshore wind got done? Was it just another way to convince the tribes to come on board?

[29:35]

LANDRY: I initially was thinking and wanting to pay attention to and keep an eye on, you just want to make sure this project happens. And for a lot of people, and I'm not arguing their rationale on getting there to that place, they feel like it happening is the most important thing possible. And so, the creation of CORE Hub, or so I thought initially, was to assure this happens.

But what I learned as I got more involved with CORE Hub was, yeah, people want to see us addressing this existential crisis. And this group, this CORE Hub group, for the most part absolutely wants to see it happen a certain way. A responsible way. A just, an equitable way, where lots of different people get to play and be part of. If it's going to happen, then it needs to be like that.

So, when I felt that sincerity and authenticity coming from my colleagues that I work with that CORE Hub, I realized that this is a circle, and this is a group of people, broad group of people, that I want to work with to assure this happens the right way.

PIPA: Linnea Jackson expresses similar sentiments. She points out that CORE Hub is not just about coordination, but also about providing capacity, expertise, and information to members so that they can collectively protect and advance their interests.

[31:18]

JACKSON: So, CORE Hub, I believe, approached each tribe collectively and, you know, with being a smaller kind of environment here, we do know who's working in the fields. And so, what I appreciate about them is not the changing how it's governed, it's changing the platform so that we can all be at the table to lend our perspective, because it's just not tribes. It's local elected leadership. It's some state entities that are involved. It's tribes as well. It's the labor unions. And so, thinking collectively about the holistic approach on what it's going to take for this industry, has really been eye opening.

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They also provide services for looking at different legislations that are being passed and being able to take a technical, large document and giving you a high-level overview and allowing that to happen and resources to be able to spend your time to attend these meetings, travel, and have a seat at the table. So, I do really appreciate that.

PIPA: Scott Adair, the economic development director at the county, praises the value of CORE Hub. He also points out that, given the county's responsibilities across all its constituents, the county is complementing CORE Hub's efforts by engaging other stakeholders as well.

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ADAIR: We work with CORE Hub regularly. They are considered a partner to our agency in this process. And I think what they've been doing in the community has been vital. They've brought a great deal of value already. And it's because of the efforts of CORE Hub that we have seen changes to and modifications to some of those lease processes that have been administered by Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, so that the community captures more benefit out of the project.

They've been very active with state and federal officials, and very active within the community, representing different interest groups and representing different title holders and shareholders.

We as staff are actually under guidance from our elected officials via a resolution that they adopted last year to support and work with this CORE Hub initiative.

The flip side of that, conversely, there are groups that are not represented in that CORE Hub process. And because we as an agency are governmental, and there's an expectation that we should be supporting and aiding all stakeholder and shareholder groups in this process, whether they're positively or adversely impacted, whether they're a privileged group or a historically disadvantaged group, that we should be treating all of those groups, at least from a service perspective, equally.

CORE Hub by design is not necessarily, they're not excluding, but they're also not necessarily focused on supporting the business community at this point in the process.

But we also want to know what does the clerk at the grocery store think about economic and workforce development in the community, and this project, and the crossroads between the two? And what these community benefit agreements should be doing to support our community? What does the soccer mom think about it? What is the agricultural worker who's working 12-hour days outside in a field spending most of that time bent over, how do they feel about this conversation?

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PIPA: Now, you've heard a couple of people refer to something called a community benefits agreement. This is a legal agreement between developers and local groups that lays out the benefits a developer will provide in exchange for the community's support. Such agreements could include everything from charitable-type investments for local activities to commitments to hiring local people; standards around pay and benefits for the jobs that get created; support for training, education, or protections for the workers; support for new housing; local infrastructure; lots of other considerations. So, there's an opportunity here for creating mutually beneficial partnerships.

But it also has a bit of a David versus Goliath feel. You have these well-capitalized billion-dollar global companies alongside the federal and state governments that are going to build, deploy, and operate these installations, and they're focused on turning a profit while achieving expansive energy and environmental ambitious.

And then you have Humboldt County, the Sovereign tribal governments, CORE Hub, and local institutions such as Cal Poly Humboldt, which together don't quite have the same level of capacity.

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And like many rural places, the people and leaders in Humboldt County may not feel that they have great alternatives, given the scale of opportunity that this cluster of investments in offshore wind represents. Their knowledge and ingenuity are as much an asset as the wind. The trick is whether the decision-making processes will leverage those so that the wind is harvested, rather than extracted.

And just to be clear: neither the state nor federal government has made it a requirement that a community benefits agreement gets executed, though. Scott Adair acknowledges that it's a lot coming all at once, and a rural county such as theirs is having to move quickly with limited resources.

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ADAIR: We're inventing the wheel and building the plane as we fly it when it comes to how we as a community, how we as an agency, respond to and react to the challenges and the opportunities with regards to this massive development, multi-billion-dollar investment, which is going to be occurring in our port and 21 miles off of our coastline. And we don't have a set of blueprints for how to do that.

Moreover, because we are a rural community, which already has somewhat of a dependency on federal and state grants just for operation and for implementation of the programs that we already do manage, we don't necessarily have the team members or the staff or the bench, if you will, is not deep enough, and we weren't prepared to have the size of personnel that we now realize we need in order to properly, at least, address all of the nuances associated with this project.

PIPA: The Humboldt Area Foundation has been entrepreneurial in raising money from charitable foundations to establish CORE Hub, provide funds for groups to participate, and hire the legal, policy, and technical expertise they'll need to agree upon their collective interests.

The county and other local institutions are underway on efforts to grow their resources and bring on staff and additional expertise as well. Local government will need additional sustained capacity if the region is to maximize the potential

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This is a need where investment and attention from the state, or even philanthropy or the federal government, could be helpful. The scale of the opportunity has local stakeholders thinking together about what this means for future generations. Connie Stewart describes the mindset.

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STEWART: More and more, people are talking about community benefits—why should people come into the community and not help the community become a better place. And community benefit agreements are becoming more and more common. More targeted. In the past industries have come in and they've chosen, oh, we're going to support baseball teams or we're going to support the food bank or we're going to make the decisions about where we put our investment. And there's this new movement of no, no, no, we're the community. We have knowledge. We want to help you as you enter our community direct your benefits to things we think we need and value that will help you be a better partner with us and help advance our community.

I don't say agreement. I say agreements. Because there're multiple agreements. It is a partnership. It's a partnership that should benefit all parties.

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And it's how do we collectively work hard to make sure that whatever the project is is a benefit.

PIPA: And yet, here's the kicker: it has not yet been decided that one of the biggest benefits of this installation—the access to clean, dependable, and abundant energy—will even land in Humboldt County.

Even though, as Linnea Jackson described earlier, local tribes have such undependable power today; even though, as Connie Stewart said earlier, the limited electrical capacity constrains business development today, there is a distinct possibility that the electricity gets routed directly to San Francisco without serving Humboldt County. Here's Scott Adair on what that means.

[41:00]

ADAIR: We as a community need power independence and energy resiliency, and yet it's not even certain if we will get one kilowatt of power off of this project. Although we may have 130 wind turbines 21 miles off of our coastline, creating 30 plus megawatts of energy per turbine in a 24-hour period, it all may be channeled into an undersea cable that goes down to the Bay Area. Or it may tap into the grid, but not branch off into our community, and be used elsewhere.

And so, psychologically, our community has a real difficult time with this concept of a massive, tremendous, scaled energy project for … I mean, this is of national scale, this project. And we may not benefit from it from at least an energy perspective, and that's a real difficult pill to swallow. And we're still trying to figure out what that may or may not look like.

PIPA: Connie Stewart shares the same worry about who will benefit.

[42:15]

STEWART: So, who's going to pay to get power to San Francisco? Our rural region is going to produce the power that's going to get to San Francisco? How is it going to benefit our region? Well, we don't want that kind of growth in our rural region. So, how do we electrify our community as you go along even though we're tiny, on your way to San Francisco? And how are you going to pay for all the transmission and infrastructure that's needed in this rural community in order to get the power there?

And what is the benefit? What is the community benefit for providing green power to an urban area that has a history from day one of stealing from our region? San Francisco was built on redwood trees that were cut down in our region and transferred to there.

[music]

So, it's a redwood city. There's even a city called Redwood City on the way to San Francisco that was built out of big trees from our area.

PIPA: Now, as you can imagine, CORE Hub, the county, and many other local leaders see access to the energy from this offshore wind as a central issue. One scenario could have the electricity routed directly to the San Francisco Bay Area via underwater cables; the other would route the electricity to the county and disperse it from there.

Each option means dealing with multiple jurisdictional and permitting issues, investing in new physical infrastructure, and dealing with significant unknowns. But the decision suggests our processes need an upgrade too. The decision will rest with several California state agencies that are mostly technical in nature and do limited community outreach or engagements with tribal members.

For Lonyx Landry, the historical overtones, especially as they relate to the tribes, are ominous. But he also sees this as the perfect chance to turn that history on its head.

[44:25]

LANDRY: The energy generated 20 miles off of our shore, unceded indigenous lands I would also add, are not necessarily for this community. So, we are to do the sacrificing for it, but it's not necessarily for us.

If it's gonna happen here, then it still needs to be beneficial to our local people. So, what does that mean? That means transmission making landfall here is one of those ways that local can maximize the sacrifices that we will be doing for the state of California. It allows other spinoff opportunities and industries to develop around it.

I still want to see a better deal than for the betterment of the rest of California. Yeah, that's important. And yeah, that does some good for humanity, for California. But I don't want to see it at as we only sacrifice to provide that better good for humanity and that better good for the state of California.

[music]

I want to see us here model for the state of California, model for our nation, how to flip that script, how to start making system changes in how we exist in this new world order and start doing something different.

PIPA: From Rex Bohn's perspective, most folks in the area—from the more conservative residents of his district to the tribes, to local businesses, to the more progressive voices—agree on one thing: they need to come together to advance their collective interests even if no one gets everything that they want.

[46:20]

BOHN: This is an old Joe DiMaggio line. You got 40 percent want it, 40 percent don't want it, and there's 20 percent undecided. So, what do you do? Well, you keep those 20 percent undecided away from the 40 that do or want, so you do want to keep them away from the side that is the opposite of yours.

This is the point where I'm proud to have served as long as I have, but I'm proud of the people I've served with. Basically, our former CAO and our current CAO, who was the assistant CAO back then, we started an economic development department.

And they have been instrumental in being that conduit between the windmills, between the companies, between the federal government, and everything else.

Because you got to understand, all the experts, all the experts, the windmill companies, or the corporations that run that, the federal government, and everything else, they're going to do this, they're going to go look what I did, they're going to put it on their campaign slogans, they're going to put it on their business things, saying we did this off Humboldt and everything else. They're not going to show any pictures of the negative stuff that we get out of it. The stuff that didn't work, the fallout, the tailings. They're going to forget all about that. They're just going to show the big shiny parts.

We've got good local people dead centered in the middle of this that will stay on top of it, so we don't suffer bad consequences.

[music]

We know there's going to be consequences. It's not all going to be, it's just not all going to be pixie dust. There's going to be some problems. But the thing is, that's where the biggest thing is, it's not to jump on the things that are good—the good things will keep on going. It's defining what's bad and limiting the impacts it has on our community and the people that live here. And the people that are going to stay here.

PIPA: As Rex says, good local people are dead center in the middle of this, and in rural places there is often a limit to the capacity they have to respond to the juggernauts of major industrial projects in their communities.

I hear this theme a lot when I talk with rural officials and community leaders, and you'll hear it repeated throughout this season of the podcast. And in Humboldt County, California, even as Bryna Lipper recognizes these constraints, she's also run headlong into innovation, creativity, and deep care for the community among its residents.

[48:45]

LIPPER: When I moved here five years ago, coming from big global places like New York and London and D.C., and high-level policy environments, I didn't quite know what to expect, quite candidly, coming into a rural environment.

I have met some of the smartest, most resourceful, enterprising, brilliant, and bold people of anywhere in my entire career here. And so, one of the myths that I think is really important to dispel in rural places is this myth of intellectual capacity. It is all here. There're extraordinary people doing extraordinary work. And they tend to have innovative ideas about how to go about what is best for their community and their region. If we can create a holding space to allow them to solve their problems together, that's where the real ingenuity comes from. That's the engine of rural places.

And so, while there might not have been a template exactly to do this work, because this work has never happened in the Pacific Ocean of what we're talking about, there

certainly is a lot of understanding about how development happens and what people don't want. There's a lot of experience about imagining what they do want and fostering an environment to see that happen. We have so many examples here of that. And people have to invariably figure it out.

[music]

And so, it's with those brilliant people who want to see wonderful things happen in their place and have historically had to figure out how to do it for themselves, that is the recipe, actually, for getting some, extraordinary things done.

PIPA: It's that sense of optimism, that sense of possibility, that sense of producing a different future for Humboldt County, and frankly for the rest of us, that's what stayed with me from my visit to this beautiful place despite all the complicated dimensions of this massive industrial installation.

At the start of this episode, Scott Adair, Humboldt County's director of economic development, likened the offshore wind cluster to something on the scale of the Golden Gate Bridge down in San Francisco. Here's his vision of what that might ultimately mean for all of us.

[51:35]

ADAIR: There were over 2,000 lawsuits that were filed to halt the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge. And different interest groups were in complete opposition to that project. It was thought that the Golden Gate Bridge was going to be an ecological, environmental, and economic disaster.

It's now the icon of the state of California and probably the most photographed bridge in the world.

[music]

And it connects so many communities to critical resources, medical services, education. It really has become a mainstay of our culture and our economy. I think potentially offshore wind could be that in the future for the state of California and for the United States.

PIPA: The story unfolding in Humboldt County reminds us that much of our country's power gets generated in rural places. That's true now, and it will also be true in a clean energy economy. The challenge is to avoid the old rural economy that extracts and exploits as the country shifts to renewable energy in the 21st century.

The situation in Humboldt County highlights that local civic capacity, governance, and economic structures must also evolve if these transformational technologies are to result in transformational outcomes for the residents of their home communities.

I see Humboldt's local and tribal leaders as pioneers, taking on the hard work of innovating new ways for the different interests in their community to relate to each other, and then to relate to these large outside interests. It means creating a model that puts the full diversity of their community's interests at the table. That's the way

they’re going to maximize the public benefits as billions in public and private investment are deployed, while minimizing the harm.

Their story has just begun. By the end of it, we may owe them a huge debt of gratitude, not just for providing cleaner energy, but for doing it in a way that shows us how to enable shared prosperity and sustainability in rural and tribal communities.

Theirs is a story that will bear watching for years to come. Thanks for listening and joining on that journey with them today.

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I’m Tony Pipa, and this is *Reimagine Rural*.