

# Derry: Bureaucracy may slow energy projects

## ■ Supervisor meets with Homestead delegates

By Rebecca Unger  
Hi-Desert Star

YUCCA VALLEY — Third District County Supervisor Neil Derry had a working lunch Wednesday with delegates from the Homestead Valley Community Council.

Amid the hubbub of the busy Roadhouse Cafe, Derry shared his thoughts on a variety of concerns from his rural constituents.

As the plates were being cleared, Johnson Valley delegate Betty Munson tapped into his expertise in power grid politics when she asked him about the possibility of Old Woman Springs Road's becoming an energy transmission corridor.

About 200 applications for energy projects have been filed with the Bureau of Land Management by solar, wind and other energy companies, some of them eyeing the Hi-Desert's ready-made service road.

"Knowing how the federal government works, including the BLM, I'd be very surprised if these 'expedited permits' were actually expedited," Derry reasoned. "They're going to get bogged down in federal bureaucracy, and I don't think the current admin-



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County Supervisor Neil Derry did lunch at Yucca Valley's Roadhouse Cafe this week with delegates from the Homestead Valley Community Council. Front row from left: Rick Sayers, Barbara Renton, Ken Stermetz, Maryan Barkley, Judy Kemp, Betty Munson and Elizabeth Karmann. Back row from left: Jim Hanley, Nancy Sammons, Phyllis Burns, Derry, HVCC President Jim Harvey and Alan Rasmussen.

istration is going to be able to change that."

The supervisor compared the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's plans to string high-voltage towers across the desert with the dilemma of Texan T. Boone Pickens. The would-be windmill magnate was ready to put the wind to work but ran into a big problem. "He bought all of these 400-foot generators to put out in the desert, then figured out it was going to cost too much to get the transmission towers out there to take the energy where it was going to be used."

Derry has opposed LADWP's Green Path North going through the Morongo Basin up to Hesperia. But even the towers' alternative route using Interstate 10 as the transmission corridor creates some problems for him. "That path goes through Redlands and Loma Linda, and those are in my district, too," he said.

Environmentalists and desert advocates have urged the use of locally-based energy generation, using equipment like rooftop solar panels. Derry said the idea that local generators could sell electricity to utilities is reasonable, and he supports it.



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Third District Supervisor Neil Derry answered a lot of energy-related questions at a recent lunch with the Homestead Valley Community Council.

"I have 40 solar panels on the roof of my house," said the supervisor. "It takes care of my entire bill, and in fact puts about 2,000 kilowatts back on the grid every year."

He sees the existing power providers as the biggest hurdles to making this home improvement widespread, easily affordable and competitive.

"You've got San Diego Gas and Electric, Pacific Gas and Electric, those kind of folks fighting it tooth and nail. You have to remember these companies have shareholders,"

he said.

"And Southern California Edison doesn't get paid based on the electricity they sell. It's based on the facilities they put in, which over time, they get a percentage of. Every time they put in a new tower, they get more money, and they get paid in perpetuity as long as that tower is there. So there's no incentive to them for the homeowner to distribute electricity because it diminishes the need for their grid."

Derry gave those present a heads-up on the future of rooftop projects: "The California rebate program for residential rooftop solar panels will disappear in five to six years," he warned. "And the cost for rooftop solar has not gone down and is not going down."

Along with all of the modern electrical must-haves in the average home, more consumers are adding hybrid cars to their households. Derry isn't a fan. "Having to plug in a hybrid defeats the purpose," he said.

"Their main problem is storage capacity," he added. "You have to have big batteries, but the idea behind hybrids is that you limit your battery size. So you have a little battery to power the whole car. Hydrogen would be perfect, but the process is very expensive. These are some of the reasons we're going to be using gasoline for some time to come."

Derry was a public affairs manager for Southern California Edison in Ontario, a planning commissioner and a councilman for the City of San Bernardino, and he has a Bachelor of Arts in political science.