

Advancing the Scenic 247 Campaign

Members of the HVCC Scenic 247 Committee met with representatives from the County Land Use Services Department. *The primary purpose: Where do we go from here?*

Some history: Since HVCC first asked for Caltrans and County help in 2009 and formed the Scenic 247 Committee in 2010, the campaign for Scenic Highway status for Hwy 247 met with much enthusiasm. Community organizations, tourist attractions and businesses signed on as sponsors. *All recognize that this "disadvantaged" rural area had one significant advantage: miles of undeveloped open desert, with a historic highway linking renowned mountain and desert destinations and Route 66.*

For all the positive responses, the campaign progressed in fits and starts. Always encouraged by Caltrans, somehow it shifted into neutral and idled in the halls of County government, despite the support of the Supervisor.

The ultimate question was, how does the County fulfill the Caltrans requirements, to make their proposal for Scenic Highway 247? The Committee had followed the Caltrans guidelines, but County officials remained undecided as to their next step.

Yet another threat of destruction of

a good portion of the scenic corridor, this one by an application to install almost 500 acres of solar fields and a large substation, got us back in gear.

Supervisor Ramos urged a face-to-face meeting with Scenic 247 Committee members and County Land Use officials.

Chuck Bell in Lucerne Valley and Committee member Sarah Kennington, president of the Morongo Basin Conservation Association, updated planners on the long history of the campaign. They emphasized the urgency of a meeting to get things moving again. Sarah's patient effort to zero in a meeting date suitable for everyone succeeded and we were set for Thursday, April 20, at the Lucerne Valley Community Center.

The Scenic 247 Committee: Chair Betty Munson, Joanna Wright, Jim Harvey, Sarah Kennington, and Ken Brock, HVCC delegate from Flamingo Heights. Chuck Bell represented the Lucerne Valley Economic Development Association (LVEDA), Jean Magee, LVEDA Board and Lucerne Valley-Johnson Valley MAC.

From County Land Use Services: Planning Director Terry Rahhal, Planning Manager Karen Watkins, and Associate Planner Evan

Evangelopoulos. They brought documentation of recent successful Scenic Highway proposals and printouts of the Caltrans scenic process chart. They arranged that Caltrans Landscape Architect John Stanton participate and answer questions by phone.

Also at the table were Supervisor Ramos' Chief of Staff Molly Wiltshire, Legislative Analyst Tony Mejia, and Ramos' Field Representative Mark Lundquist. Also sitting in was State Senator Jean Fuller's Field Representative Jim Schooler.

Nominating the highway for State Scenic Highway status requires a visual assessment. The Committee began this years ago but held up awaiting further action.

We learned for the first time that a licensed Landscape Architect has to certify our report – with no County budget for the assessment or the architect. However, the Committee will resume the assessment process as soon as possible, and begin fundraising later if necessary.

We are grateful to all who traveled to the meeting, to James Ramos for recommending it in the first place, to Sarah Kennington for getting everyone together, and to Chuck Bell for arranging our use of the Lucerne Valley Community Center as a convenience for those of us attending the MAC meeting later.

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