The Year of the Comments

Deadlines for public comments on County actions during 2017 conflicted with regular daily life to the point of exhaustion. Homestead Valley residents and property owners teamed up with other concerned citizens in the high desert.

Organizations and individuals from 29 Palms to Apple Valley took advantage of the dedication and expertise of Steve Mills, attorney and volunteer with the Mojave Communities Conservation Collaborative (MC3). He scanned the obscure wording in renewable energy project applications, environmental impact reports and the County’s Renewable Energy and Conservation Element (RECE) for the County General Plan. Then he wrote closely-reasoned comments on legal and environmental issues that MC3 distributed far and wide. Many community and environmental organizations voted to add their names as signatories.

The Homestead Valley Community Council signed on to every one of Mills’ letters.

Also, HVCC voted to send a resolution to the County to renew the Solar Moratorium, as developers filed more applications for solar projects appeared before the RECE could be finalized and adopted by the Supervisors.

In June, HVCC submitted a letter to County Land Use Services during scoping for the Environmental Impact Report on the Ord Mountain Solar Project and the attendant SCE Calcite Substation. This enormous project, planned to share property lines with residents of northern Lucerne Valley, would negatively impact the Scenic 247, have cumulative effects devastating to desert soils, air quality, water usage, vegetation and wildlife habitat, and destroy property values all over the area. HVCC also stated stakeholders had little advance notice of this industrial land use within or near Rural Living Zones.

The Scenic 247 Committee of HVCC made their own comment on the Draft RECE Element, and submitted it at the Board of Supervisors hearing in August. We pointed out that Caltrans states, “If a highway is listed as eligible for official designation, it is also part of the Scenic Highway System and care must be taken to preserve its eligible status.” None of the solar projects planned in the scenic corridor of Hwy 247 take any such care.

Last but not least, much time has been devoted to the Countywide Plan “updating” the plans adopted in 2007 by unincorporated communities in San Bernardino County. Meetings conducted in each locale last year by consultants and Land Use personnel asked for and got residents’ input on problems and goals within their communities.

What came out of this? The County presented each community with “action” plans, detailed lists of the problems we told them about, with detailed lists of how we must address them ourselves. Many committees and “champions” must be formed from our scant population, and funds raised to study and confer with county officials and others to achieve any real policy on any subject. Most of these we have already brought to the County, with little result.

The consensus across the high desert: keep our 2007 plans, update them to fix problems that appeared after 2007.

We’ll see how that works. Will 2018 be yet another year of comments?

See the 2007 Homestead Valley Plan at www hvccsite org