

Meeting Notes: Renewable Energy (Wind and Solar) General Plan Amendment, October 21, 2010, 7:00 p.m. at the Bishop City Hall Council Chambers.

About 10 people participated, only 6 signed in.

Josh Hart, Inyo County Planning Director, led the meeting. Josh began with introductions and explained the sign-in sheet, handouts and survey form.

Josh then gave a presentation on the Renewable Energy General Plan Amendment that included a review of the proposed update language; an overview of the transmission issues involving the distribution of power generated by renewable sources; a description of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan and how the County's proposed General Plan updated will work along with it; explained the Planning Department's Renewable Energy webpage (how to find it and what information is there); described the General Plan overlay boundaries and how they have been developed and are continuing to be refined through a public process; and explained that a few of the main criteria in drawing the boundaries were flat areas (they were mainly looking a solar when the planning process began), proximity to transmission lines and wires, and locations where there was known interest in developing renewable energy facilities. Josh then reviewed each of the proposed overlay maps and described the issues that have been brought up, to date, for each. Josh then opened the meeting to questions and comments.

Questions included:

Q) Wind installations are generally found in elevated areas, why are only flat areas being looked at?

A) We started this process with mostly solar in mind, and the wind energy projects that are being proposed are being proposed on flat areas. We will look into expanding our boundaries into ridgelines as well though.

Q) Most of the transmission lines are located along the west side of the valley, how much larger would they need to be if a project went in a place like Trona?

A) A study is being done looking at upgrades to the lines located on the west side and there is also a line that runs along the Nevada border, this is also being looked at for upgrades.

Q) Is there any talk of putting new transmission lines for these areas along the existing ones?

A) Yes, there has been discussion about this. There is a trade off, though. Putting new transmission lines near or with existing ones can make the effects of a disaster, like an earthquake, worse with regard to the loss of power, but it is less expensive. Locating new transmission lines in other locations can be more expensive, but if one area goes off line due to a disaster then there is another source.

Q) Are the currently proposed wind projects with BLM being processed without data about the wind resources in the areas that they are proposed for?

A) The currently proposed wind projects are for meteorological towers to test the wind resources.

Q) Do the companies with the current applications have experience with wind energy development?

A) Yes.

Q) Flat ground is part of your criteria in developing these areas, does this mean that if someone wants to do a wind project on higher ground they would have to apply for a General Plan Amendment?

A) Yes, we will probably need to take a look at expanding our areas to include some higher elevations.

Q) Does Great Basin have wind data you could use?

A) That is something we should look into, also Jim Stroh had some information on this.

Q) In the Rose Valley area BLM has a 25,000-acre geothermal operation, will there be a problem with a wind or solar project overlapping it?

A) They would not exclude each other; they should be able to have both there.

Q) Why is geothermal not included in the update?

A) The county already regulates geothermal and geothermal is site dependent we cannot determine where they will go.

Q) I heard someone is putting a 200mw solar ranch on a dolomite structure, is this true?

A) I have not heard about that.

Comment) The dolomite structure could be a mining issue. They find sliver in dolomite.

Q) Does the Panamint area have mines?

A) We will have to look into that, but I think we can work around that.

Q) I heard someone is trying to put a 49mw solar in there; have you heard that?

A) No.

Q) If all this new power is generated here will it be transmitted elsewhere and then we have to buy it back here?

A) Not necessarily, there has been talk about making a local first provision.

Q) If someone wants to develop in one of these boundaries does that mean they do not have to do an environmental review?

A) No, environmental review will still have to be done. These are just areas where renewable energy 'may' be developed. A full environmental review will have to be done and the project will be subject to the County's renewable energies ordinance.

Q) What does the economic development element mitigation and offsets mean for economic impacts?

A) There have been discussions about hiring local contractors and workers, and the costs incurred by the county for infrastructure and services being mitigated –etc.

Q) Wouldn't local workers be just for the short term?

A) There can be some long term, more for solar than wind. There are tradeoffs for each type and each has to be looked at case by case.

Q) Can they try to coincide these areas with reclaimed water (water treatment plants) sources?

A) We will look at moving the boundaries to include the Lone Pine and Independence facilities.

There were no more questions or comments and the meeting was adjourned.