

Meeting Notes: Renewable Energy (Wind and Solar) General Plan Amendment,  
November 18, 2010, 7:00 p.m. at Legion Hall in Independence

11 people participated and 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 and comments included:

There was one written comment: Please change the word "balance" to "discourage" in policy AG-13 (conversion of agriculture land). Agriculture is an important component of Inyo County's economy and agricultural production is a strategic natural resource.

Q) Deep Springs map, what do you mean by there is a wire there?

A) There is a line but it is not that big. It would need upgrades.

Q) It is an electric line but it does not have that much capacity?

A) I'm not sure how much it can carry.

Q) Aren't there spade-footed toads there?

A) Yes, that's why we are avoiding that particular area.

Q) What about the college?

A) We have sent them information about the process, but they have not responded.

Comment) They (the college) have a big cattle operation out there, they should be involved.

*Owens Valley map:*

Comment) don't include the east of Boulder Creek as part of the DWP project. Anything but there, it would look bad.

Q) I thought that wind wasn't good in the valley?

A) We have had some interest in wind – they are testing to see if it is feasible.

*Pearsonville map:*

Comment), we have been hearing along not to worry, wind won't happen in the valley, but now they are looking at it – nothing stays the same.

Q) What if the General Plan overlay conflicts with other management plans, like the DWP land management plan?

A) The objective is to make them as consistent with each other as possible.

Q) Who did the site specific studies on these areas?

A) The site specific studies will not be done until there are development proposals.

Q) How will that happen?

A) We can't tell exactly until the proposals come in. There are different ways to go about it and that will be up to the applicant. Once the process is started many other entities will be involved like BLM, DWP –etc.

Q) Have the areas been determined by site specific studies?

A) No, the site specific studies will be done if someone wants to develop.

*China lake map:*

Q) There are lots of cultural resources out there: will they be taken into consideration during the site specific studies?

A) Yes.

Q) There is Timbisha and Shoshone homeland out there in Centennial Flats: how will you take into consideration areas that can possibly be traditional homelands?

A) We will have to get input from the tribes about that.

*Death Valley Junction map:*

Q) What about the lack of water out there?

A) Yes that will be a huge issue for this area.

Q) Won't water be a pertinent issue throughout the county?

A) Yes, but particularly here.

*Rose Valley map:*

Q) What about the water use in this area, water is being tapped for Coso already: are you going to ask for low water technologies in this area?

A) We could add that, low water technology is recommended for the entire county. Solar thermal technologies are the big water users.

*Panamint Valley map:*

Q) Where are the transmission lines that go through here?

A) There are none, but there are some near by and there are plans for upgrades.

Q) What about photovoltaic on residential units, this is usually very small, but what if they started generating more than they use and start selling it: how would this be dealt with?

A) If they are selling it, it would be affected by this.

Q) Is DWP paying back if the property owner is providing more than is used locally?

A) I don't know.

Comment) I asked DWP about this and they said no.

Q) Would this overlay apply if there was a fee and tariff system?

A) This overlay is really for commercial development, but we may need to think about small private projects some more.

Q) The gravel pits north of Independence are not included on the maps, could BLM go it alone and put some on their land?

A) There would be issues since it will be in the General Plan. We are trying to avoid the west side of 395 because of impacts to the views.

Comment) The pits are considered Brownfields and are below grade. Development in them would not likely be seen from the highway.

Comment) You need at least a square mile for these things. DWP plans to develop four square miles for 200MW.

A) There are smaller companies and investors that do develop smaller sites.

Comment) They all should be limited to 50MW and be split up into small chunks with areas in between them, so they are not all over a large area.

Q) What part of the General Plan do we use for transmission upgrades?

A) Transmission upgrades will be allowed if they go through the proper permitting process. BLM is looking at plans for energy corridors.

Comment) I think it would be a good idea to discuss the size of these and put limits in the General Plan policy. It could be evaluated by whether the energy will be exported or will it be for the community – and it should not be at an industrial scale.

Comment) I am opposed to solar in the Owens Valley and I am disturbed that BLM has a plan for transmission.

Q) We seldom see areas of weapons center (China Lake): do they have problems with transmission lines going through their area?

A) We have heard nothing from them about that yet. They are concerned, in general, about the height of some of the wind power sources and that they affect radar, and some of the technologies generate enough heat to attract heat-seeking missiles.

Q) Since we can't see the transmission structures (China Lake) couldn't they run through there, so we don't have to see them, or would there be issues with that.

A) There maybe issues with that, but we are hoping these issues can be dealt with.

Q) Weren't the transmission corridors established in the 80s?

A) No, the one we are talking about were finalized 2008-09.

Comment) the 80s plan had them coming through Benton.

A) This study was about transmission and transmission upgrades for the Western US.

Q) If we can support upgrades to transmission and we support companies to do this energy stuff can we make them run the transmission lines outside of the Owens Valley?

A) The transmission plan is for the western US. There is a corridor planned for western Nevada and there is a lot of energy facilities planned for over there, as well.

Q) What happens if BLM or DWP want to build on their land outside of the General Plan areas, what happens then?

A) Hopefully they will come to us for a General Plan Amendment. We do not have much authority over federal land, which is why we are trying to do good planning. If they want to develop outside of these areas we really hope they come to us.

Comment) So, this kind of means it's anything goes. There are those that will have to go through the General Plan review, but if they are outside of these General Plan areas they might not have to.

A) BLM and the other agencies want to work with us and hopefully they will discourage that.

Q) What about tribal country, the county has no authority over them. What can we do if they want to develop?

A) We have no land use authority of tribal land at all.

Q) Why was the Owens Valley designated at all and why only south?

A) We started the overlays with areas where there is interest and DWP has interest there. It's flat and has lots of solar potential.

Q) Aren't there water limitations?

A) Yes, there are water limitations here as well as everywhere in the county. Photovoltaic does not have the water demands that some of the other technologies have and we may need to restrict some places to that.

Q) All of these places on these maps for renewable energy, what will this do to the average citizens in the Owens Valley? Will it bring in enough money for the average person to notice it? Why would we want it at all if it doesn't?

A) It can help us. Why do we want alternative energy to begin with? To end our reliance on foreign oil and these larger policy issues.

Q) Yes, but how much money will it bring into the county?

A) Quite a bit, 1% of the value of these developments in taxes; also the General Plan update will look at economic impact/benefit to the county.

Q) Yes that's a lot of technical stuff, but what does it really mean; how can we be assured that there will be a benefit?

A) There will be a benefit from property taxes and also in short-term jobs as well as some long-term jobs.

Comment) Please make sure that you keep these things in mind as you move forward with this.

Q) It is my understanding that if these facilities are built on BLM land they are taxed at a different base rate?

A) DWP land would not be taxed, BLM land would.

Comment) Get rid of the DWP land and just include BLM then.

Q) I've been around long enough to remember them wanting to do solar before. Now there's incentive, so now it looks good to mine this area for its resources. You need to have a reclamation plan for mining will there be something like that for this? When the boon is over will we be left with a bunch of broken solar panels?

A) Yes, there will need to be reclamation plans and bonds.

Comment) There are very few abandoned power plants that still have a source for generating power. Solar energy does not deplete, these things will be around for a long time. It is truly a renewable resource. We have a lot of renewable resources here in Inyo county: scenery, water, agriculture and finally the new one energy. If you try to sweep back the sea, you'll end up under water.

Q) Could you detail a timeline for CEQA?

A) We are hoping to be through by the end of December with either a negative declaration or a mitigated negative declaration, or maybe an EIR.

Q) If it's a negative declaration or a mitigated negative declaration how long will there be for public review and will you have a public meeting.

A) 20-30 days, probably 30 days for this. We could also hold a public meeting, we haven't really thought about a public meeting yet.

Comment) I recommend that you do an EIR – this is huge. Before you channel development into particular areas there are many things you should look at. This has been going on all over California and it has been controversial. Seems like we need that kind of thorough review to see what's best for the county. For the next public meetings the maps should be as finalized as much as possible. Show what land is federal, what is private, where the transmission lines are, provide an analysis of wilderness and BLM ACECs to see what's really going on.

Q) I agree with him. Has the estimated time of completion for this been finalized?

A) It's a planning process without an end date. There are many other efforts going on.

Q) DWP is pushing to get their project started: are you trying to get this done before they really get into it; is that part of why you're trying to do this; Would DWP still be able to do these kinds of projects if they are located outside of these areas?

A) I would hope they would avoid the areas outside of our designated ones.

Q) What would they do?

A) They would have to address it. It will be in the General Plan.

Q) This is part of a larger environmental process: they will have to do an environmental review?

A) Yes, we have to comply with CEQA and have to identify the process.

Comment) This allows the ability to use the Owens Valley for growth inducement in LA by creating more power. I think that is a good argument for doing an EIR.

A) I don't think we making things easier for growth. We are trying to do good planning. We are restricting where these things can go.

Comment) If you do an EIR we could read your analysis and it would be really helpful.

Comment) All of this is going to end up being used to support growth.

There were no additional questions or comments. The meeting was adjourned.

