

Adopt RECE Policy 4.10

By Pat Flanagan

On Tuesday, November 6, the San Bernardino County Supervisors will decide whether to protect rural residents' quality of life and our environment or lay out the welcome mat for big solar and wind developers that have no stake in the welfare of the California desert and its communities.

Policy 4.10 is being considered for adoption into the Renewable Energy and Conservation Element (RECE) of the Countywide Plan, the document guiding economic growth and development for years to come.

Policy 4.10 would prohibit utility-scale renewable energy projects in or next to our Hi-Desert communities. The RECE, adopted by the board in August 2017, currently permits large wind and solar projects in rural areas adjacent to communities if they meet certain criteria. The adoption of policy 4.10 will protect rural residents' quality of life, wildlife, and human health while guiding utility-scale projects into appropriate areas.

The adoption of Policy 4.10 is supported by the countywide vision of our existing 2007 San Bernardino County General Plan. The vision describes the importance of community identity, clean air, a reliable clean water supply, development consistent with the maintenance of environmental quality, our tourist economy, and the protection of dark skies. This existing framework should make the adoption of Policy 4.10 a no-brainer.

Additionally, in May 2018, the county Planning Commission voted unanimously in favor of adopting Policy 4.10 and sent their recommendations on to the Board of Supervisors. During that hearing, the Planning Commission heard 53 speakers and approximately 7 1/2 hours of public comment from San Bernardino County residents, the overwhelming majority of whom supported the adoption of Policy 4.10.

At the same time, powerful, well-funded forces have targeted our rural communities for utility-scale renewable energy development. NextEra and other worldwide energy developers have applied to develop utility-scale solar projects on more than 10,000 acres in Lucerne Valley and the Mojave River Valley, jeopardizing air quality, disrupting critical wildlife corridors, harming the fabric of the community and marring scenic vistas. The passage of Policy 4.10 would prevent poorly conceived projects like these in the future.

Finally, the passage of SB 100, which sets California's goal of 100 percent renewable energy by 2045, underscores the importance of a new era of responsible renewable energy development. The adoption of Policy 4.10 would be a giant step forward for renewable energy policy at a time when we are likely to see a spike in the development of wind and solar projects in the California desert.

The bottom line is that more needs to be done to protect California desert communities and ecosystems. I call on citizens of San Bernardino County to attend the Nov. 6 meeting remotely or in

person (10 a.m. at 385 N. Arrowhead Ave., San Bernardino) and for the BOS to adopt Policy 4.10 to protect rural residents and our environment.

Pat Flanagan has more than 20 years-experience working on natural resources issues and is the recipient of the 2018 Minerva Hoyt Conservation Award, and a board member of MBCA.