

Vance Pomeroy

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Carl Nadela
Regional Planner
Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning
320 West Temple Street, Room 1356
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Transmitted via Electronic Mail to: tnc@planning.lacounty.gov

Subject: **Los Angeles County Antelope Valley Areawide General Plan Update**
Comment on scope and content of the environmental information and analysis to be contained in the EIR

Mr. Nadela and Regional Planning Staff:

It is with pleasure that I transmit to you my comments on the scope and content of the upcoming environmental impact report for the update of the Antelope Valley Areawide Plan (AVAP).

As a working professional in the land use field for over thirty years with both heritage in the department and extensive experience in both private and public spheres, I have applauded the department's efforts in tackling the update of the comprehensive plans for the county. While it has taken some time longer than originally envisioned, we are now at a juncture at which we can now better review the details of all of our work.

The Environmental Impact Report for the AVAP will be an important document for the Regional Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors – I hope that the document provides a thorough examination of the project and a reasonable range of workable alternatives: These alternatives must include real, public-driven options to the project as presented, and be offered up in a way that presents the balance available between their environmental and human value. The key focus of the EIR needs to be *balance*, especially as the work turns to the study and review of project alternatives and how the EIR treats the environmental issue areas that promote human activity and the livability of the valley for the future.

Director, Association of Rural Town Councils
Past President, Juniper Hills Town Council
Telephone / SMS : (661) 361 - 5619 Electronic Mail : vpomeroy@ravenhillranch.com
29319 121st Street East Juniper Hills, California 93543

The following are the topics and details that I believe will make the AVAP EIR meaningful and constructive in spirit that CEQA originally intended EIR's to be: a useful tool of information to give decision makers a range of choices with the best data possible for all alternative projects:

Density vs. Dispersal:

The project appears to dwell on both density and exclusion as the only measure of human activity in the valley. The normal and organic rural land use forms always also include dispersal and the compatible mix of land uses that would be unacceptable in an urban setting. Please address how the focus on population and activity concentration as an exclusive land use planning tool impacts the environment in all the environmental issue areas as well as how its impacts have potential effects beyond the land on which the concentration is places. Address how the inclusion of a rural dispersal model into a diverse collection of land use planning tools and land use forms impacts the environment in the environmental issue areas, and how it may or may not alleviate potential impacts and provide for a more diverse population across the valley.

Land Use Proscription by Pre-defined Constraint:

The land use patterns, densities and designations shown in the AVAP as proposed for the Project were developed under what has been described as a Hazard, Environmental and Resource Constraints Model (ECM) created by the county. The ECM is described as "a tool to inform stakeholders of potential site constraints and regulations" (General Plan Appendix C, Public Review Draft, 1/2014).

However, the "tool to inform" about regulation has become the regulation itself. No linkage is explained. No methodology is provided to provide a connection between the general ideas of the model and the detailed quantitative conclusions and assignments made in the plan.

The ECM is purported to 'front-load' all the underlying environmental hazards, issues, constraining factors and resources (or lack thereof) that could effect the ability of a particular site to be developed with improvements. However, the model's concept as presented does not provide any quantitative analysis or qualitative set of findings or determinations as to how the constraints identified translate into the development designations and densities imposed let alone the three 'classes' identified in the appendix. Additionally, this 'front-loading' was explained by staff as a way to predict the general outcomes of the development process that would occur even without the proposed designations – that any particular parcel could only make it through the existing planning, permitting and improvement processes to the level of the proposed designations. In other words, that the ECM is predictive in nature. (The suggestion that land use designations be predictive of land use patterns is not credible as the imposition of such a model of prediction in the southerly portion of the county as an academic exercise at any point in the 20th century would have rendered this model as false.)

After a thorough analysis of the ECM itself and the underlying data and assumptions, the EIR should address 'how', 'why' and 'with what data' the links between the ECM and the AVAP land use designations were arrived at. This substantiation is critical to all the land use, population, housing and environmental justice analysis throughout the EIR and will also inform many portions of the other areas of review and analysis.

Rural town centers/Rural Town Areas vs. Rural preservation areas:

The AVAP has created hard-line boundaries for existing activity nodes without providing any substantiation for their existence. While a "town center" concept can help focus a balance between housing and jobs, the manner does not provide for the diversity of housing and population that is always found in rural areas of the country and in the existing land use patterns of the Antelope Valley. The areas identified as Rural Town Centers and Rural Town Areas need to include softer edges that allow for reasonable opportunities for the addition of a more diverse set of housing and commercial activities. The other area identified is the Economic Opportunity Areas whose creation is the provision of new locations for reasonable growth within the rural milieu of the valley. However, the down-zoning of the rural preservation areas, which include all remaining unincorporated areas, has the potential to create substantial environmental impacts across the Antelope Valley. The AVAP EIR must address those potential impacts, including, but not limited to, agriculture, biota, geology, hydrology, land use planning, mineral resources, population and housing, delivery of public services, recreation and transportation.

The AVAP Project postulates a near vacancy of a substantial amount of the valley. At least one of the Project Alternatives must address a more open, organic (rather than proscribed) maturity of those open portions of the valley so a more diverse pattern of development closer to the existing pattern may continue. In addition, the rural preservation concept may not be consistent with the adopted or proposed with Community Standards Districts. The EIR should include an alternative with the Community Standards Districts zoning. Additionally, the EIR must address the balance of development patterns and development diversity with environmental justice concerns for the existing and potential future human populations and constituencies that will rely on this valley to provide both habitation and sustenance.

Community Standards Districts:

The EIR of the AVAP will analyze impacts associated with land use changes and zoning changes proposed by the County. The Land Use portion proposes to down-zone much of the land within currently adopted and proposed Community Standards Districts. The AVAP EIR should address these changes and provide research-based substantiation for those changes. The activities that have lead to the existing and the proposed Community Standards Districts have been vetted by the various communities and any changes via the AVAP to the underlying densities and land use designations have the potential for substantial alterations to housing, population and other human activity-related environmental activities.

No environmental analysis will be considered complete unless the existing district land use patterns are included in most, if not all, project alternatives, including the No Project Alternative.

Significant Ecological Areas:

The AVAP has included portions* of the proposed SEA Ordinance and a significant expansion of over 250,000 acres of SEA designated property in its Land Use Plan. This ordinance has not been approved by the Regional Planning Commission and is still being vetted through public comment. The AVAP should only analyze adopted ordinances and its EIR should not have to study an un-adopted ordinance. With the November, 2014 deadline given by the BOS, the AVAP EIR should not exhaust DRP's consultant's time with the examination of ordinance that may not even be adopted in the future.

Therefore, we ask that the AVAP EIR include an analysis of the approved SEA ordinance only as include it only in Project Alternatives and not the Project as proposed. In that analysis, include detailed scientific, research-based justification for the extent of the proposed designation areas including, but not limited to primary research on the potential impacts on agriculture, biota, geology, hydrology, land use planning, mineral resources, population and housing, delivery of public services, recreation and transportation. Especially because of the extent of the potential degradation of population, housing and other human activity-related environmental activities, justification of the boundaries and the incumbent regulation of that land needs a substantial basis to give the lead agency an opportunity to weigh the impacts. Additionally, the EIR must address the balance of the SEA's to environmental justice concerns for the existing and potential future human populations and constituencies that will rely on this valley to provide both habitation and sustenance.

* - The SEA Ordinance has seen more proposed revisions since the publication of the current draft AVAP maps (see SEA Connectivity and Constriction Map, April – June, 2014).

Economic Opportunity Areas:

Identified within the AVAP are three Economic Opportunity Areas (EOAs) centered around major transit corridors that "would bring tremendous opportunities for growth and economic development in the vicinity of these projects". These EOAs would bring stable economic growth for the future generations of the Antelope Valley.

In the AVAP, DRP staff has indicated that further studies and a more detailed planning effort will need to be done for each EOA by way of a Community Plan. The EIR will be inaccurate if some future Community Plan is postulated now with changes to the currently projected AVAP analysis and data. Any discussion of a future Community Plan to re-visit the EOA's must be only part of a Project Alternative and not part of the Project.

The EOA's are an important concrete part of the AVAP and must not have an open-ended reviewing/studying component; They need to be addressed directly in the EIR as the activity nodes that they are. The AVAP EIR must accurately

address any impacts associated with the allotted residential units and projected commercial acreage that will bring jobs/housing to those areas. We ask that the EIR include the EOA's in its analysis as is and that Community Plans not be a part of the AVAP. Future land owners will still have to submit a project level EIR for any development plans they want the County to approve and the EOA concept is already sufficient for programmatic determinations at the AVAP EIR level. This will ensure Los Angeles County's ability to review proposed development within these EOAs in more detailed without adding the unnecessary Community Plan that will alter the EIR currently being drafted. Additionally, the EIR must address how the EOA's balance environmental justice concerns for the existing and potential future human populations and constituencies that will rely on this valley to provide both habitation and sustenance.

Use of all the most recent information and studies:

The AVAP is shaping the Antelope Valley for future generations. The EIR must include with its analysis current and proposed transit projects, including NW 138, High Speed Rail and High Desert Corridor. And population growth associated with Southern California Association of Governments RTP/SCS projections. With these projections included in the AVAP EIR, it will give a unified planning effort that will allow the community's future housing and jobs to be pro-active and bring economic growth to that region.

Health Concerns:

The RL-10 and RL-20 will allow one unit per 10 or 20 acres. While the AVAP is trying to create larger lots outside of the rural town centers, this could have a negative effect on both air quality and health impacts. Many lower density lots are graded and cleared of vegetation to allow the full use of the property. This can cause a significant increase in wind and borne dust. The AVAP EIR should address how such low density zones will affect the inherent health problems associated with Valley Fever and other wind-borne health hazards that are directly related to large vacant lots with no or little vegetation or development to break up prevailing winds. Additionally, the EIR must address environmental justice concerns for the existing and potential future human populations and constituencies that will rely on this valley to provide both habitation and sustenance.

School District and Education Issues:

The AVAP EIR must address the potential impacts on the several school districts in the valley (Eastside, Wilsona, Keppel, Gorman, Westside, Acton-Agua Dulce, Antelope Valley Union High School and Antelope Valley College). Each of these sovereign jurisdictions regularly reviews its demographic and growth parameters. The AVAP EIR must address how the activities of the plan effect those plans and policies, and, in so far as is possible, provide how there is a conflict or consistency between the AVAP and the work of each district including but not limited to the areas of land use planning (over which the district hold certain levels of sovereignty), population and housing, delivery of public services, recreation

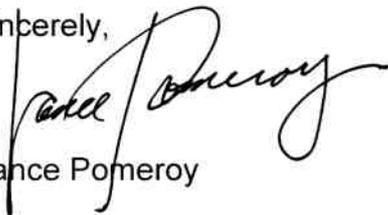
*Antelope Valley Areawide General Plan Update
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and transportation. Additionally, the EIR must address environmental justice concerns for the existing and potential future school and residential populations and constituencies that will rely on this valley to provide habitation, sustenance and education. Consideration must also be given to the long term impact that any change in land use has on the delivery of educational services. Decreasing rural density has a profound impact on delivery of instruction, length and cost of transportation, limitations on services to students, loss of revenue to school districts and thus reductions in staff. These may be unintended consequences of the proposed EIR.

I would also like the department to address why the consultant hired to assist the department in the preparation of the EIR was not on hand at any of the scoping sessions and why no scoping notes appear to have been taken by staff at those sessions. Additionally, please comment on how the public was to be sufficiently informed of the full breadth and depth of the proposed draft AVAP Project prior to the July 11, 2014 closure date for scoping comments when portions of the draft AVAP have not yet been finalized and published prior to that date let alone prior to the beginning of the comment period.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have or clarifications you may need. I appreciate your attention and look forward to working with you and staff to keep the Antelope Valley a great place to live.

Sincerely,



Vance Pomeroy

Director, Association of Rural Town Councils
vpomeroy@ravenhillranch.com
Voice / Text : (661) 361-5619

Cc: Susie Tae
Supervisor Antonovich
Edel Vizcarra
Norm Hickling