



Stop Yucca Mesa Annexation Coalition

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May 8, 2009

**Kathleen Rollings-McDonald, Executive Officer
Local Agency Formation Commission
215 N. "D" Street, Suite 204
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0490**

**Subject: LAFCO 3134 - Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence Amendment
(Update) for the Town of Yucca Valley**

Dear Ms. Rollings-McDonald:

As indicated in your letter, dated April 15, 2009, our review and comments regarding the materials submitted to you from the Town of Yucca Valley for LAFCO 3134 are attached.

Very truly yours,

STOP YUCCA MESA ANNEXATION COALITION

**Robert N. Karman, Ph.D.
Co-Founder**

**Elizabeth Karman
Co-Founder**

**LAFCO 3134 - Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence Amendment
(Update) for the Town of Yucca Valley
Comments and Review of Town of Yucca Valley Records by
Stop Yucca Mesa Annexation Coalition**

Resolution

This Resolution states the reason for the proposed SOI is for a means of providing municipal services to anticipated development within the proposed SOI area.

The Town of Yucca Valley has no experience or expertise providing municipal services. Services for Yucca Mesa are presently provided by the County and Hi-Desert Water District. The residents are happy with their present services and sees no reason to change.

Justification and Proposal

The Town of Yucca Valley requests this SOI amendment to better define the Town of Yucca Valley community. The residents of Yucca Mesa, as expressed in their 2200+ SOI protest petition signatures, do not want to be redefined as part of the Town of Yucca Valley Community. Yucca Mesa is already a part of the Homestead Valley Community, and it is their desire to remain in the Homestead Valley Community. Yucca Mesa's established lifestyle is more compatible with Homestead Valley.

The Town of Yucca Valley indicates their desire to provide a mechanism to better manage the pace and quality of development taking place in the Town of Yucca Valley. Yucca Valley has overbuilt which has created a problem with excessive nitrates entering their groundwater. As a result, a waste water treatment plant is now required to control the contaminants caused by the Town's encouraging overgrowth and overbuilding. By contrast, Yucca Mesa is a slow growth, low density community which will never require a waste water treatment plant. Based on the Town's history, the residents of Yucca Mesa do not want the Town of Yucca Valley to impose their poor planning and poor building practices upon them thereby destroying their peaceful, rural community. Nor do the people of Yucca Mesa want the Town to manage the pace and quality of development in their community. It is obvious to Yucca Mesa Residents that Yucca Valley is merely trying to spread their urbanization and blight.

The Town of Yucca Valley further states it wants to encourage well-planned development by providing a level of certainty as to the provision of municipal services in the future. The Town of Yucca Valley lacks the expertise and experience to manage or administer municipal services. Town road services are currently

almost non-existent nor are there any substantive plans we know of to pave their own dirt roads. Their roads are poorly maintained. Paved roads promised to residents along the north border of Yucca Valley/Yucca Mesa were never built. Yucca Valley's response to these residents was that they don't have the funding for such roads.

The Town's take over of the Hi-Desert Water District would be disastrous. The Hi-Desert Water District has a 47-year history of experience in delivering and supplying quality water to customers. Hi-Desert Water District was originally formed in 1962 under the name of Yucca Valley County Water District. In 1964, the District purchased the Joshua Forest Water Company and subsequently the Rancho Ramon and Mountain Mutual Water companies the following year. In 1971 the District changed its name to Hi-Desert County Water District, and in 1980 to Hi-Desert Water District in order to avoid confusion with the County. As the years went by, the District grew as a result of the formation of many assessment districts, including the Mesa. In 1990, Hi-Desert Water District acquired the assets of Yucca Water Company, Ltd., adding an additional 3,000 service connections.

The Town of Yucca Valley has no experience delivering water to customers. The residents of Yucca Mesa do not want the Town of Yucca Valley to take over the Hi-Desert Water District as their take over would cause severe uncertainty as to the Town's ability to deliver water to them. The residents of Yucca Mesa see this attempt by the Town as a means for the Town to continue its history of urbanization. Further, the Hi-Desert Water District Board Members and employees do not want to be taken over by the Town of Yucca Valley.

While the Town has indicated that they propose to adopt the County's current General Plan designations, including zoning, for the sphere as is, the present Town Council can not speak for future Town Councils. The Town has traditionally favored high density development exceptions to their original General Plan vision. The residents of Yucca Mesa have a long history with the County, and it is their desire to continue the relationship. Yucca Mesa is part of four communities (Yucca Mesa, Flamingo Heights, Landers, and Johnson Valley) comprising the Homestead Valley Community Council (HVCC). HVCC's General Plan has been adopted by the County. Allowing Yucca Mesa to become part of the Town of Yucca Valley would take the "heart" from the Homestead Valley and would destroy the Homestead Valley Community.

The residents of Yucca Mesa, Flamingo Heights, Landers, Johnson Valley hereby protest the Town of Yucca Valley's application for a Sphere of Influence and request that the Town's request be denied.

Sphere Supplement

Services: It is clear that the Town of Yucca Valley intends to take over all services provided to Yucca Mesa. The residents of Yucca Mesa are happy with the delivery

of services by the County of San Bernardino, County Fire District, County Sheriff, County Animal Control, and County Service Areas 70, R-26, R-29, and TV-5, and the Hi-Desert Water District. Residents do not want the inexperienced and mismanaged Town of Yucca Valley to take over their services.

Further, Yucca Mesa Residents see no need for the Town of Yucca Valley Public Works Department to take over Storm Water Management and Flood Control. Should this control be required in the future, Residents believe the County can provide that service as an assessment district.

Since County policy restricts the provision of services through CSA-70 for unincorporated areas and expanding the Town's SOI would not change this service, and removal would result in a decrease in CSA-70's operating fund, Yucca Mesa residents would like CSA-70 to remain as it presently is.

Yucca Valley Finances

In statements by Town Manager Andy Takata, published in the April 11, 2009, edition of the Hi-Desert Star newspaper, he advises the Town of Yucca Valley will not have the funds to extend its municipal services to Yucca Mesa for another 20 years. Mr. Takata's statement alone should cause LAFCO to deny Yucca Valley's application for a Sphere of Influence. More importantly, the residents of Yucca Mesa have expressed their approval of the current County services and have no desire for the town of Yucca Valley to provide services to Yucca Mesa.

General Government

The Residents of Yucca Mesa DO NOT want to become residents of Yucca Valley nor do they want to be governed by Yucca Valley. The Residents of Yucca Mesa and the Coalition believe that in all levels of society it is the *fundamental right of the people to choose and affirm the government they want*. The United States of America sends our military all over the world to implement that principle for foreign societies. Residents of Yucca Mesa simply want what is locally right for them: No change.

A number of historical and standing issues with the Town of Yucca Valley's government support the Residents of Yucca Mesa's and the Coalition's position.

The Town's government is not transparent. Documentation in Town Council minutes and agendas reveal their intention to apply for a Sphere of Influence and then annex Yucca Mesa goes back as far as February 22, 2007. At no time did the Town Council or any other member of the Yucca Valley government ever contact anyone in Yucca Mesa about their intentions nor did they ever ask if Yucca Mesa Residents wanted to be governed by Yucca Valley. No survey of Yucca Mesa Residents was ever taken. Yet, the Town, at great expense, surveyed its own people regarding parks and recreation activities. Yucca Mesa Residents had no reason to monitor a town's activities or attend another town's meetings. The Town Council's intentions were clearly to hide their activities from Yucca Mesa Residents. A newspaper article in 2008 finally revealed their intentions, nor has the Town followed

LAFCO guidelines to reach out to the residents of a proposed SOI area. This is NOT the type of government Yucca Mesans want.

The Town has the lowest Developer Impact Fees in the Inland Empire, charging only \$5,000 per developed parcel. The Town's consultant's report makes a determination of \$15,000 per house for new infrastructure cost. Under this scheme, on Yucca Mesa build-out, it would leave Yucca Mesa taxpayers with an \$80 million infrastructure projected public debt. Yucca Mesa Residents do not want that debt coming back to them as fees, assessments, etc. to subsidize large developers' subdivisions raving the vast open spaces of Yucca Mesa to line their wallets with excessive profits. This is NOT the type of government Yucca Mesans want.

Taxpayers in Yucca Mesa would be expected to pay for a waste water treatment plant and sewers a problem created by the Yucca Valley government by over-building. Yucca Mesa does not have the water problem Yucca Valley has, but if Yucca Valley were to implement their building practices upon Yucca Valley, those practices would inevitably create a similar sewage problem. This is NOT the type of government Yucca Mesans want.

The Town changes their zoning requirements towards higher density at will. This is NOT the type of government Yucca Mesans want.

Yucca Mesa is the recipient of tens of thousands of Joshua trees and native plant life and wildlife. Yucca Valley's building practices would destroy the plants and the wildlife. This is NOT the type of government Yucca Mesans want.

The Town's consultants reason that the Yucca Mesa community would be better off under the Town's governance is because the ratio of representative to populace is better with the Town than currently with County. The consultants ignore the fact that Yucca Mesa is part of the Homestead Valley Community Council (HVCC), and as such have direct contact with Supervisor Derry and his Administrator, Alan Rasmussen, who attends all monthly HVCC meetings. Based on the Town Council's recent treatment of Yucca Mesans, this is NOT the type of government Yucca Mesans want.

Public Recreation Facilities

The community of Yucca Mesa is not in need of public recreation facilities. A number of recreational activities are available to the residents within Yucca Mesa. First and foremost, most property owners live on minimum 2-1/2 acre parcels which permits them to house animals and conduct other recreational activities on site. Yucca Mesa does not need the Town to build a dog park. Let the Town do that for themselves within their current town limits. The Yucca Mesa Improvement Association (YMIA) provides numerous and sufficient recreational and community activities, including a horse arena. Morongo Basin Horseman's Association (MBHA) home is also at YMIA which includes many equestrian activities. The Yucca Mesa Elementary School also provides numerous activities for children. Johnson Valley, an HVCC community, is nearby and provides recreation for OHV's, camping, hiking, and stargazing.

A review of Yucca Valley's Park Master Plan indicates Yucca Valley's plans pursue the development of a minimum 20-acre urbanized Community Park in Yucca Mesa, consisting of family and group picnic facilities, tot lots, splash/water play facility, soccer fields, dog park, informal open play area, basketball courts, and tennis. The proposed location is vacant property along Aberdeen Drive near State Route 247, and it is expected that the park would serve both the current town and Residents of Yucca Mesa. The land would need to be eminent domained. The Residents of Yucca Mesa do not want a park run by the Town of Yucca Valley on the Mesa. The proposed location is a busy intersection, would cause traffic congestion, pollution, and safety hazards to children. In addition, the nearby neighbors oppose this park. This is another example of the Town of Yucca Valley not "fitting in" with the lifestyle of the Residents of Yucca Mesa but trying to impose its own without consulting the Mesa.

In addition, the Town of Yucca Valley's Master Park Plan includes an Event Center consisting of an Equestrian Center, an amphitheater, show grounds, and a new San Bernardino County Regional Park to be located at the corner of Aberdeen Drive and State Route 247. This complex, along with plans for a Community Park would clearly cause traffic, noise, safety, pollution, and policing problems. The Residents of Yucca Mesa strongly object to the Town's recreation plans. The Residents of Yucca Mesa do not want Yucca Mesa to become Yucca Valley's playground. Further, the Master Park Plan outlines very elaborate and extravagant park and recreation facilities in the Town of Yucca Valley. Yucca Valley's plans in the Yucca Mesa area merely duplicates of the Town, which is exactly what the Residents of Yucca Mesa do not want and why Yucca Valley's urbanized lifestyle does not fit with Yucca Mesa. Yucca Valley is not planning to be a good neighbor.

Community Survey

This survey for the Town of Yucca Valley to determine residents' satisfaction with the Town is dated July 16, 2002, which is seven years old and obsolete. No survey of Yucca Mesa was ever taken to determine if they wanted to become part of the Town.

On Saturday, Jan. 24, and Sunday, Jan. 25, the Stop Yucca Mesa Annexation Coalition collected approximately 500 petition signatures at Wal-Mart over a period of 10 hours from residents in the Town of Yucca Valley who do not want Yucca Valley to apply for a Sphere of Influence or annex Yucca Mesa.

The fact the Coalition could obtain 500 signatures in such a short amount of time is a clear signal to the Town Council that they are going in the wrong direction and need to stop pursuing their land and money grab.

Verbal discussions with Petitioners revealed that:

- Most of the Petitioners believe that Yucca Valley is a poor to fair place to live. They cited the Town's over-building, population growth, poor road maintenance, and poor governance to support their views.**

- **They perceived crime, crime-related problems due to urbanization, the Town Council's poor decisions, and over-building policies as being a threat to their values and quality of life. Yucca Mesa presently enjoys a very low crime rate.**
- **All Petitioners were not willing to increased taxes to solve the Town's problems.**
- **They did not see a Sphere of Influence or Annexation of Yucca Mesa to be in the Town's best interests, citing extravagant expense and intrusion upon the people of Yucca Mesa.**
- **Most Petitioners believed that Yucca Valley needed to take care of their own problems and had no business trying to provide services to or annex Yucca Mesa.**
- **Most Petitioners believed that Yucca Valley's move on Yucca Mesa is a land grab to expand building and to collect taxes from Yucca Mesa residents to pay for the Town's \$250 million waste water treatment plant and sewers.**