

The Mojave Desert Land Trust

6393 Sunset Road, Suite 211

Joshua Tree, CA 92252

April 25, 2008

Planning Commission
6136 Adobe Road
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277

Subject: Santisteven Project

Sent by email

Dear Commissions:

I was asked, as a representative of the Mojave Desert Land Trust, to walk with other interested citizens through the 200 acres where Mr. Santisteven plans to construct 77 homes. The area is located on the upper slopes of the alluvial fan at the base of Joshua Tree National Park. There is a wide smoke tree wash running downstream through the property from south to north. The uplands support a rich diversity of flora and fauna. As well, it is an area known to contain the threatened desert tortoise. The Land Trust was grateful for the chance to speak with the developer about the possibility of clustering his homes to minimize the development footprint and maximize the open space and natural drainage that buffers the rich biological values in the national park from encroaching development.

The current zoning allows for 1 house per 2.5 acres which, if built out, would reduce to zero the natural system that supports tortoise, coyotes, bob cat, small burrowing mammals and the wide variety of reptiles that live on the land. It would eliminate the natural erosion control provided by the vegetation and natural surface crust. It would also eliminate the surface water which maintains the vegetation. It would be a typical sprawl development that changed rather than adapted to the natural environment. (Reference the GP Mission Statement two principles: (1) sustainability, and (2) adaptability.)

Mr. Santisteven has modified his original plan to reflect the Vision of the General Plan's Conservation element: to consider long term impacts to natural resources while not unnecessarily damaging or reducing the City's resources. This plan "adapts": it strikes a "balance between environmental protection and development of the City" (Purpose Sec. II, V-1). The new map shows 112 acres of open space with 77 homes. Each house is on a generous acre of land.

The developer proposes no lighting which protects our dark sky (especially critical since this development is due north of the planned observatory.) And, this plan is congruent with the city's conditions which specify no mass grading with grading limited to structures, necessary driveways, and permitted uses. The native vegetation will continue as habitat while controlling runoff and dust.

I would suggest two additional conditions: the paving should be permeable (sand colored to match surroundings) to capture runoff rather than increase its exit speed; and all pets should be contained to minimize contact with wild animals. New homeowners should be provided with educational material which helps them to understand the privilege they enjoy living adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I also thank Mr. Santisteven for his efforts to preserve our natural heritage.

Sincerely,

Pat Flanagan
Program Coordinator

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is a 501(c)(3) public charity