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# RON SMITH

**Lancaster City Council**

## CITY STRIVES TO BALANCE NATURE WITH GROWTH

**Ron Smith**  
**Antelope Valley Press**  
**July 10, 2005**

Every morning, I turn to the opinion section of the Antelope Valley Press so that I can read what is on the minds of people in our community. The opinions are manifold, and not everyone agrees; but a lively disquisition of issues is vital to a thriving democracy. Unfortunately, there have been a few letters to the editor filled with invective and false statements. These letters question the integrity of the Planning Commission and the city government of Lancaster. These pernicious letters neither constructively contribute to the dialogue of the issue of concern, nor add any real remedy or solution. Rather, they appear to be a vehicle for the individual's own political aspirations.

All of our governments are ruled by one controlling document under which all laws and actions must be judged: the United States Constitution. One of the most important precepts of our Constitution is the protection of property rights. The courts have ruled that if a government prevents an owner from the economic use of property, it shall be considered the same as if the land was seized and taken. However, this must also be balanced with the good of society.

Years ago our community decided that our Joshua Trees should be considered when planning our city's development. Many cities and counties within the Antelope Valley have had some kind of mitigation for the loss of these trees. Two examples of such are the retention of a particular number of trees within the project, or the transplantation of the trees. In the early eighties, the City of Lancaster realized that saving a few trees, or small stands of trees surrounded by developed land, did not protect the habitat; the flora and fauna that make up the Joshua Tree forest.

A biological report stated that a minimum of 80 contiguous acres of forest was needed to protect and make a viable habitat. The City of Lancaster decided to create a Prime Desert Woodland Preserve. By the year 2000 the city had nearly acquired, by donation or purchase, its goal and set the boundaries of the PDW as part of the General Plan update.

## **CITY STRIVES TO BALANCE NATURE WITH GROWTH**

### ***Continued***

The city owned 5 acres just West of Nancy Corey School, and traded it for land that was in the PDW, which allowed the city to consolidate 102.36 contiguous acres. This is what constitutes our Prime Desert Woodland Preserve today. All land deals and General Plan updates for the creation of this preserve were conducted at public meetings. There is no duplicity in our search for a balance between preservation and the rights of property owners.

Over the past year, I have considered our city's future development and its effect on the Joshua Tree habitat. On the Planning Commission, I have listened to testimony concerning this issue and have talked to concerned citizens, biologists, and Fish and Game representatives, to ascertain if a pragmatic solution could be found. The Planning Commission, at my request, is studying the feasibility of an on-going requirement for developers to support the expansion of the Ripley Prime Desert Woodland Preserve in the northern Antelope Valley and to provide educational programs about the habitat to our community's children. Due to its size and location, the Ripley Preserve is considered to be a much more sustainable habitat for Joshua Trees and other desert wildlife.

I could not have arrived at this without the passionate, and much appreciated, input from many of our concerned citizens. A collaboration of all stakeholders produces an outcome that is more beneficial for our city; this does not happen without citizen input. Recently I was privileged to participate in a successful meeting with residents and urban designers where the people of the community worked together on a vision for their neighborhood. Just last month the city council approved my plan to create a citizens committee for architectural design, which will formulate a vision for the look of our city.

I am proud of our city and the contributions our citizens have made. Many of us have the same desire: to enhance the quality of life in our city and create a wonderful place to live and raise our families. To obtain this we need a vision for the future—A vision formed from the collective ideas of this diverse community we call Lancaster. Not everyone can make it to a city council or commission meeting, but I urge every citizen of Lancaster that has a concern about the planning and growth of our city to contact me at [rdsmith@cityoflancasterca.org](mailto:rdsmith@cityoflancasterca.org).

Ron Smith is the Chairman of the Planning Commission for the City of Lancaster

