Comments for Palm Desert City Council Meeting, April 11, 2024

My name is Donald Zeigler, and I am a full-time resident of Palm Desert. I have addressed to you before about my concerns regarding the dangers of summertime heat in our valley and the dangers resulting from our reliance on the SoCal Edison grid. I have specifically called for the addition of backup, resilient power for critical city facilities as a goal that should be established in city policy. We live in a dangerous environment here in the summer and it is only getting worse. The strain on the electricity grid in California makes the likelihood of a power outage during a summer heat wave almost inevitable. I have met with some of you about this and carried on correspondence with others and with city staff in pursuit of the simple goal of making it city policy to be prepared for the power outage when it eventually happens. To not do so risks the lives and safety of 50,000 residents of the city.

So, while preparing my comments to come later, I was surprised to find that this council passed amendments to the General Plan Housing and Safety Elements in 2022, Resolution 20-2022, that did indeed address the threats presented by heat in the valley. I'll speak to the Housing Element later, but the Safety Element contains a city policy goal that reads as follows:

5. 3 Backup energy sources. Obtain and install backup power equipment for critical public facilities to ensure they are functional during a power failure that might result from extreme weather.

Installing backup resilient power is already city policy. So, it is very disappointing that no one on this council made implementing a goal that has been city policy for the past two years part of the goals you established last month for the next two years. And this a Safety goal! Of all the responsibilities this body has, the safety of its citizens should be at the top of the list. So, I urge you to take the first step and create a backup power system for a city facility. And not a gas generator. Utilize modern, clean technology, and install a system that can run for days independent of the Edison grid. Maybe this city hall complex, or a fire station. Somewhere. It could be a model for future installations at the mall or even for an HOA. You have identified the need and made it a city policy. Now just do it.

Goals and Policies

Goal 1. Leadership. City leadership that promotes collaboration within the region that sustains maximum resilience to emergencies and disasters.

Policies

1.1 **Hazards Information.** Establish and maintain a database containing maps and other information that identifies and describes the community's hazards.

1.2 **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.** Maintain and regularly update the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) as an integrated component of the General Plan, in coordination with Riverside County and other participating jurisdictions, to maintain eligibility for maximum grant funding.

1.3 **Hazards Education.** Consult with agencies and partners to provide public education materials on safe locations and evacuation routes in case of emergency or hazardous event.

1.4 **Critical Facilities.** Prepare existing critical facilities for resilience to hazards and develop new facilities outside of hazard-prone areas.

1.5 **Emergency Plans and Processes.** Consult with the Coachella Valley Emergency Managers Association and CVAG to maintain and update the City's Emergency Operations Plan, and maintain SEMS compliant disaster preparedness plans for evacuation and supply routes, communications networks, and critical facilities' capabilities.

1.6 **Utility Reliability.** Coordinate with providers and agencies including the CVWD and Southern California Edison for access to reliable utilities and water supply to minimize potential impacts of hazards and emergencies to pipelines and infrastructure.

1.7 **Citizen Preparedness.** Continue to promote citizen-based disaster preparedness and emergency response through Riverside County's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training and certifications.

4.8 **New Essential Public Facilities.** When planning new essential public facilities for the SOI, avoid locations within any state responsibility area or very high fire hazard severity zone. If not possible, mandate construction methods or other measures to ensure minimal damage to the facilities.

4.9 **Existing development in Fire Hazard Zones.** Direct the Planning Department Code Compliance Division to identify and track properties that are not in conformance with contemporary fire safe standards adopted by the City, especially of road standards and vegetative hazard. Reach out to these property owners during redevelopment or other permitting processes to work out a mitigation plan to achieve conformance.

4.10 **Redevelopment in Fire Hazard Zones.** Require all redevelopment in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) to comply with the latest California Building Standards Code (Title 24), including the California Fire Code (Part 9). Coordinate with the Fire Department on evaluation of rebuilding after a large fire and require implementation of fire safe design and additional measures where necessary.

4.11 **Long Term Fire Hazard Reduction.** Coordinate with the Fire Department and consult with private property owners, homeowner associations and other organizations to identify roadside fuel reduction plan, otherwise provide for the long-term maintenance of defensible space clearances around structures, and include fire breaks in the VHFHSZ where appropriate.

Goal 5. ~~Extreme~~ weather. Improved quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors during extreme heat events.

Policies

5.1 **Extreme Heat Vulnerabilities.** Analyze and address groups with vulnerabilities to extreme heat, including youth, the elderly, nursing homes, or communities with older structures that lack adequate air conditioning.

5.2 **Education on Extreme Heat.** Educate visitors and residents on the risks of extreme heat using brochures, public service announcements, and other methods.

5.3 **Backup energy sources.** Obtain and install backup power equipment for critical public facilities to ensure they are functional during a power failure that might result from extreme weather.

5.4 **Below ground utilities.** Provide information and education to encourage private stakeholders with formation of assessment districts that would finance and replace overhead electric lines with subsurface lines that will not be affected by fallen trees and branches during windstorms.

5.5 **Tree trimming.** Support utility companies in their enforcement of the national guidelines on tree trimming and vegetation management

Extreme Heat

The climate in Palm Desert is hot and arid. Exposure to extreme heat or extended periods of high temperatures results in a variety of health effects, including increased heat-related mortality (Chestnut et al. 1998; Medina-Ramon et al. 2006).

Because of a changing climate, Palm Desert is anticipated to experience increasing levels of heat. By 2100, the Riverside County region is anticipated to experience an increase ranging from 4.3°F to 8.7°F (Scripps Institution of Oceanography 2018). Similarly, Palm Desert is anticipated to experience an increase in the number of days when temperature exceeds 112.1°F, the local threshold for extreme heat. While Palm Desert's historic number of extreme heat days through 2011 was four occurrences per year, by 2050 the number of extreme heat days could increase to 56 per year, on an average of 21 to 25 (Scripps Institution of Oceanography 2009 & 2018). Increased heat, when combined with drought and high winds, can exacerbate wildfire risk in and around Palm Desert.

Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation

As described in Chapter 6 Environmental Resources and above, climate change can have widespread impacts at different levels on the community. Climate change impacts temperature, precipitation and other natural processes, thus potentially affecting natural hazards including wildfire, flood, and extreme weather.

Similar to the state trend, the projections show little variation in total annual precipitation in Palm Desert throughout this century. Palm Desert had an average annual rainfall of 3.8 inches during 1961 to 1990, which is almost 79 percent less than the average in California. Average rainfall in Palm Desert is predicted to increase up to 0.1 inches, with a 0.051 inches to 0.099 inches increase in maximum one-day precipitation throughout the century. These projected changes in precipitation are not expected to have a significant impact on Palm Desert compared to the current conditions. However, the maximum length of dry spell (days with precipitation < 1 mm) is projected to increase by 8 to 13 days in mid-century (2035-2064), which can further drought and related hazards including wildfire.

Human-Caused and Other Hazards

Hazardous Materials

A hazardous material is any material that, due to its quantity, concentration, or physical or chemical characteristics, poses a significant present or potential hazard to human health and safety or to the environment if released. Hazardous materials include, but are not limited to, hazardous substances, hazardous wastes, and any material that a business or local implementing agency has a reasonable basis to believe would be injurious to the health and safety of persons or would be harmful to the environment if released.

While Palm Desert has nonresidential land uses, it has very few generators of hazardous or toxic materials. Potential uses associated with possible hazardous materials production may include commercial, quasi-industrial or medical operations. The city and SOI have one abandoned hazardous waste site that is designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a Superfund site (EPA 2014). The site, Enfield Chemical, is located at 77539 Enfield Court, just south of