**My View; Carol Beidleman**

**The Crowd Stood Against the Corporation**

The AES Corp. pre-application neighborhood meeting at Santa Fe Community College the night of Aug. 22 had a packed 175-strong crowd standing against — for so many reasons — the proposed Rancho Viejo Solar project. The involved Santa Fe County staff, standing uncomfortably in the front of the room at the beginning, adjacent to the table of four AES representatives, made brief statements then quickly left the meeting.

With the AES lead presenter then taking so much of the planned meeting time extolling the virtues of his corporation and the project, there was little time left for the audience to ask the questions they had submitted. Given that the first people to sign up to speak were the last to be selected, at which point the audience had diminished to a few, I felt my comments, as read, bear repeating in the public arena:

The reason we’re here today after years of dealing with this proposed project is because Santa Fe County has declined to designate utility-scale projects like Rancho Viejo Solar as Developments of Countywide Impact in the county’s code, which requires more rigorous review.

Instead, a private landowner and a Fortune 500 corporation, seeking financial gain, have taken advantage of the county’s inadequate Conditional Use Permit process to seek approval for a massive industrial facility in a location NOT zoned for this use and which should NOT be surrounded by residential neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, AES, with a long list of environmental violations and facility fires, has greenwashed this project, while withholding important information from neighbors and working behind the scenes to grease the skids for county approval.

What we need is courageous leadership with integrity from Santa Fe County officials to develop a strategic plan for the responsible renewable energy future we all need and want, not to facilitate or acquiesce on ill-advised projects that unnecessarily risk community safety and harm the environment.

-*Carol Beidleman is a wildlife biologist who lives in Eldorado*