

September 6, 2001 (Agenda)

Local Agency Formation Commission
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara CA 93101

Grand Jury Report – Natural Resources in the Santa Maria Valley

Dear Members of the Commission:

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Commission receive the Grand Jury Report, accept public testimony and approve the enclosed response, together with any changes deemed appropriate.

DISCUSSION

The enclosed report of the 2000-01 County Grand Jury, “Natural Resources in the Santa Maria Valley,” makes several findings that mention your Commission.

The staff has prepared the enclosed draft response to the Grand Jury report for the Commission’s review and consideration.

If you have any questions please contact the LAFCO office.

Sincerely,

BOB BRAITMAN
Executive Officer

Local Agency Formation Commission

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cc: Mike Brown, County Administrator
John Patton, Director, Planning & Development
City of Guadalupe
City of Santa Maria
Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District

Recommended Local Agency Formation Commission
**Responses to 2000-2001 Grand Jury Report on
Natural Resources in the Santa Maria Valley**

Ancient Sand Dunes

Finding 2c: Expansion of city boundaries, by Guadalupe or Santa Maria, does not now need to be into contiguous land, most of which is devoted to agricultural production and is designated prime agricultural land.

Response to Finding 2c: Disagree.

California Government Code, Section 56741, requires that annexations to cities – unless the land is owned by the city and used for municipal purposes – must be continuous to the city at the time of annexation.

While it is not legal to annex non-contiguous properties, even if they are more attractive for development purposes, areas may be annexed to a city if they are connected by an annexed strip of land at least 200' wide, exclusive of roadways. City boundaries might be arranged to locate urban development on less productive agricultural soils.

Recommendation 2a: Housing needs for the population growth in the Santa Maria Valley, as projected in the County's Strategic Scan 2000, should be best met by cities and the County by carefully planned development on these ancient dune lands, rather than on highly productive prime agricultural land.

Response to Recommendation 2a: LAFCO cannot effectively direct population growth without the participation of cities and the County who prepare and adopt land use plans.

The Commission is required by Section 56377 to consider the following policies and priorities when reviewing proposals that could reasonably be expected to lead to the conversion of existing open-space lands:

- (a) Development or use of land for other than open-space uses shall be guided away from existing prime agricultural lands in open-space use toward areas containing nonprime agricultural lands, unless that action would not promote the planned, orderly, efficient development of an area.

(b) Development of existing vacant or nonprime agricultural lands for urban uses within the existing jurisdiction of a local agency or within the sphere of influence of a local agency should be encouraged before any proposal is approved which would allow for or lead to the development of existing open-space lands for non-open-space uses which are outside of the existing jurisdiction of the local agency or outside of the existing sphere of influence of the local agency.

The Commission though its review and approval or denial of city and special district spheres of influence can influence the direction that growth occurs but it requires the cities and the County to adopt land use plans that encourage and allow growth to occur where most desirable.

Recommendation 2b: Investigate promptly and thoroughly the feasibility of locating urban growth on one or more of these ancient sand dune areas in the Santa Maria Valley.

Response to Recommendation 2b: The Commission will cooperate with cities and the County in evaluating the feasibility of locating urban growth in these areas in conjunction with sphere of influence planning in response to proposed general plan amendments.

Laguna Sanitation District

Finding 4a: There is a growing need for more public recreational facilities in the Santa Maria Valley as the population continues to grow.

Response to Finding 4a: Agree.

The Commission approved the formation of the Orcutt Community Services District as a means to address the need for more recreation and other community services in the unincorporated community of Orcutt (LAFCO 99-15) that was defeated by the voters.

Representation on the Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District Board

Recommendation 9a: The SMVWCD should move forward on expanding its boundaries, at least those within Santa Barbara County, to provide for better groundwater management before the next election.

Response to Recommendation 9b: The Commission will consider any annexation proposal that is submitted by the District..

Recommendation 9b: The SMVWCD should adjust its boundaries to include all of the SMV groundwater aquifer.

Response to Recommendation 9b: The Commission will consider any annexation proposal that is submitted by the District..

Recommendation 9c: The SMVWCD should charge fees on the annexed lands at the same rate structure applied to existing district landowners, both rural and urban.

Response to Recommendation 9c: The recommendation is a policy matter for the SMVWCD and does not entail LAFCO review or approval.

Recommendation 9d: The District should revise its divisional boundaries in the near future to comply with the new Special District election laws.

Response to Recommendation 9d The recommendation is a policy matter for the SMVWCD and does not entail LAFCO review or approval.

Orcutt and the Orcutt Sub-aquifer of the Santa Maria Valley Aquifer

Finding 10: Orcutt does not have sufficient operating revenues to fund operating costs equivalent to Santa Maria's standards.

Response to Finding 10: Orcutt is an unincorporated area; Santa Maria is an incorporated city. The revenue sources and forms of government for each differ, as do the mixture of land uses in the community which has a significant bearing on available community revenues.

Recommendation 10: Santa Maria should not be encouraged to underwrite Orcutt's operating costs, and it should continue to resist discussions of Orcutt annexation.

Response to Recommendation 10: The community of Orcutt is within the City of Santa Maria's sphere of influence, however the Commission is unaware of any interest by the City or residents of Orcutt in annexing the area to the City.

Annexations to cities involve many factors and considerations, only some of which are fiscal in nature. The City of Santa Maria may benefit financially by the residents of Orcutt generating sales tax revenues for the City without commensurate public services being provided to the area.

The City of Guadalupe

Finding 13: It is legally possible for Guadalupe to annex currently non-contiguous land for urban growth needs. This would allow the City to plan its future growth on marginal farm land instead of converting adjacent highly profitable prime agricultural farm land to housing tracts.

Response to Finding 13: Disagree.

California Government Code, Section 56741, requires that annexations to cities – unless the land is owned by the city and used for municipal purposes – must be continuous to the city at the time of annexation.

While it is not legal to annex non-contiguous properties, even if they are more attractive for development purposes, areas may be annexed to a city if they are connected by an annexed strip of land at least 200' wide, exclusive of roadways. City boundaries might be arranged to locate urban development on less productive agricultural soils.

Recommendation 13: Guadalupe officials should continue plans and programs to obtain LAFCO approvals for expanding the City's Sphere of Influence and City limits to meet City population growth needs as projected by the County through 2030. They should annex ancient sand dunes (sub-prime agricultural land) northeast of Brown Road and an access corridor across prime agricultural land for needed upscale housing in the Santa Maria Valley. This development of "Guadalupe South" could increase the future real estate tax base and support local businesses.

Response to Recommendation 13: The Commission will consider proposals from the City of Guadalupe to expand its boundaries in light of the Commission's enable statutes and local policies. Until an application is submitted it is not possible to respond to specifics.