

February 7, 2002 (Agenda)

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

Proposed Policy Encouraging Urban Uses To be Located Within Cities

Dear Members of the Commission:

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended the Commission consider adopting the general policy that in Santa Barbara County urban uses ought to be located within cities wherever and whenever practical.

It is further recommended that the Commission direct staff to distribute the proposed policy to cities, special districts, the County and local interest groups for their review and place this matter on the April LAFCO meeting for further consideration.

DISCUSSION

There is a relationship between the extent to which the population is located within cities and the respective roles of County and city governments in providing municipal-type services and land use regulations.

More than 40% of the County population resides outside of cities and for these residents and property owners the County government is, de facto, their municipal government.

Situations frequently arise wherein the LAFCO staff needs policy direction regarding whether urbanized properties should be brought into cities. Examples are proposed annexations to special districts, usually to obtain utility services for parcels that are adjacent to or near cities. The LAFCO staff, property owners and public agencies would benefit from direction as to whether the property should also be included in the city for other services that are typically provided by cities such as local law enforcement, parks and recreation programs and participation in city affairs.

The staff is not requesting policy directing that all urban uses be located in cities, hence, the importance of the words “wherever and whenever practical” in the proposed policy. Nor is the staff suggesting that any particular areas be annexed to specific cities.

Many developing unincorporated communities are distinct from cities and this policy does not express any thoughts as to whether these communities should continue to develop based upon adopted County plans.

As an overall policy of local governmental organization the staff feels it would be desirable to establish a preference that urban areas be located within cities whenever practical. Positive aspects of adopting this philosophy could include:

- Encouraging local land use decisions to be made locally, that is, by a locally elected city council that is directly accountable to residents of that particular community.
- Advance the regional, countywide role for the County, allowing it to concentrate on countywide resource management, public social service, regional law enforcement, courts, and other countywide issues and services.
- Provide predictability regarding the responsibility for land use planning regulations and the provision of municipal services.
- Promote coordination between local agencies including cities, special district, the County and LAFCO with regard to planning and implementing the future organization of local governments and providing adequate public services for each of the communities.

The proposed policy is consistent with provisions of the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act that concern coordination of land use plans within city spheres of influence.

It is important that land owners not “whipsaw” city and county governments regarding land uses or development standards. There have been recent examples in which road widths permitted by the County differ from those for an adjacent city, creating potential advantages and disadvantages for developers to seek development approval in one jurisdiction or another.

With these issues in mind, and to facilitate future discussions, the staff has drafted the enclosed policy we have entitled the “Guidelines for Orderly Boundaries.” These contain general and specific policies for lands both within and outside city spheres of influence.

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To be truly effective these policies should adopted by the Board of Supervisors and city councils as well as the Commission. Having commonly adopted local governmental organization policies will minimize ambiguity for landowners, the development community and the general public and thereby provide greater predictability in providing public services.

Flexibility is essential in implementing intergovernmental policies. It is not proposed that these policies be enacted as an ordinance but rather as Guidelines to promote orderly city boundaries and efficient municipal services.

The proposed Guidelines do not speak to whether specific lands should be developed. They are not intended to be a land use plan. Rather they are meant to be “intergovernmental policies” that advance a general goal of urbanization occurring within cities whenever and wherever practical.

Please contact the LAFCO office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

BOB BRAITMAN
Executive Officer

cc: Members of the Board of Supervisor
Michael Brown, County Administrator
All City Managers and Planning Directors
Special District Managers
John Patton, Director, County Planning and Development
Bill Derrick, Executive Director, SBCAG