

# Stunning AMBAG proposal—a new layer of government

By LEE QUARNSTROM

AMBAG . . .

You've come a long way, baby . . .

From a single-purpose agency, in which local jurisdictions would voluntarily cooperate to fight the pollution of Monterey Bay and its tributaries . . .

To an organization which is now considering a proposed planning design which would involve AMBAG — the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments — in regionwide planning in a multitude of fields, including:

- Urban land-use development, including a generalized land-use plan as well as locations for regional centers.

- Transportation, including freeways, transit systems, airports and port facilities.

- Housing.

- Natural resources, including resource conservation.

- Water management, including sewage disposal, drainage and flood control.

- Open space and recreation.

- Economy, including a regional economic development district to stimulate employment.

- Social services, including comprehensive health planning, manpower planning and possibly some cooperation with regional criminal justice planners.

- Something called "institutional-cultural factors."

All of this and more was revealed to AMBAG directors last week as they held their regular monthly meeting at Watsonville city hall. The broad spectrum of regional planning proposals was included in a draft of the comprehensive planning program drawn up for AMBAG by Barton-Aschman Associates, a San Jose consulting firm.

Not only did AMBAG directors get their first look at the comprehensive proposal — it was distributed just before the meeting began — but they also got another chance to peek into the Alice in Wonderland world of regional government as seen through the eyes of Gov. Reagan, his cabinet and his staff. Among the proposals apparently under consideration by Reagan's cabinet, which is considering the role and status of regional agencies such as AMBAG, are ones:

- Requiring area wide planning organizations such as AMBAG — which consists of member cities and counties — to take a look at all special districts in the

region. If the governor's cabinet acts as expected any special district with regionwide impact might end up with a representative on the AMBAG board of directors.

- Inclusion on the board of directors representatives of educational institutions, particularly school districts.

- Consolidation of AMBAG counties with San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties into a larger regional agency.

- What Les Doolittle, AMBAG executive director, termed "the governor's so-called local government reform plan." Under this proposal from the governor's office many county lines in California would be abolished, causing consolidation of counties into larger counties or regional governments. "Let's make no mistake about it," Doolittle told AMBAG directors, "some members of the governor's cabinet know very little about local government and I'm not sure they're interested in learning any more about it."

- The fact that SB90, which Doolittle said was "the so-called tax reform measure," may thrust an added burden onto local taxpayers if the governor decides to expand the size and duties of AMBAG and other similar regional planning agencies. Chairman Phil Harry said politicians in Sacramento are mandating more and more local programs but saying that they are not actually mandated so the local jurisdictions and not the state have to pay for them. Under SB90 any state-mandated program must be entirely funded by the state.

A delegation of AMBAG directors will soon go to Sacramento in an attempt to find out what Reagan and his cabinet are up to and also to try to lobby against the proposed sweeping changes.

Now, back to the nearly 200 pages of the Barton-Aschman comprehensive planning proposal:

AMBAG directors had very little to say about the huge document at the Wednesday night meeting. Doolittle, noting that there is a shortage of the reports, asked members to circulate them, especially to city and county planning directors, and to come back next month with comments.

A pitch in favor of the Barton-Aschman package was made by Walter Monasch, Santa Cruz County planning director.

Monasch said the regionwide planning proposed by the consulting firm would not take responsibility away from city and county planners but would allow the local

planners to concentrate more on local needs and responsibilities. He also said regionwide planning — much of which would be carried on by AMBAG under the proposal — would allow city and county planners to see how their work would "mesh in the larger, area-wide framework. We all have a role to play," Monasch said, "and we have to know how those roles relate to one another. The relationship mechanism between jurisdictions is important. That's what to look for in this proposal."

The Barton-Aschman not only lists broad areas where regionwide planning could and should be done under the auspices of AMBAG it also lists 52 specific "jobs" which would be done over a five-year period.

The report says that the present AMBAG staff of five employees would have to be expanded to eight during the 1973-74 fiscal year and eventually to 10 by the end of the five-year planning period.

AMBAG's 1973-74 budget of \$431,000, already presented preliminarily to directors, would be reduced to \$371,000 in 1974-75, and would be \$411,000 in 1975-76, \$412,000 the following year and \$419,000 in 1977-78, the final year of the proposed planning period.

Of the \$431,000 budget for the upcoming fiscal year a total of \$207,000 would be raised locally, including \$55,000 from AMBAG dues, the rest in special assessments in jurisdictions benefiting from specific AMBAG projects.

Planning philosophy and policy matters basic to the comprehensive study were outlined to AMBAG directors by Darwin G. Stuart, one of the Barton-Aschman consultants who helped draw up the proposal. These included the conclusions that:

- "The problems, issues and goals of cities, counties and the AMBAG region are very similar. Consequently, many planning tasks and related planning techniques are also very similar; but, at the regional level, are to be applied at a different, broader, areawide scale."

- "The need for coordination and leadership by AMBAG should not be mistaken for undesirable overlap and redundancy. Regional plans in many areas, such as housing and open space, should incorporate comparable city and county plans rather than repeat existing work unnecessarily."

- "AMBAG should focus on the development of regional guidelines to help set a perspective for local governments" in many

fields of planning. "These guidelines would emphasize the relative significance of local and regional problems in comparison with other regions, the state and subareas within the region." These regional guidelines should be broad in nature rather than dealing with specific suggestions for adoption by local governmental jurisdictions.

- "Some problems and issues are more clearly of regional significance than others." These include coastline planning, open space, transportation, water management and others and "should be given priority emphasis in the regional planning program."

- The AMBAG planning process, called "ambitious" by the framers of the report, "must be paralleled by a similar strengthening of city and county planning activities" if the regional planning program is to be effective.

- "Many elements within the recommended work program are required by state and federal legislation."

- "An expanded and strengthened regional planning program cannot be created overnight. The recommended five-year planning program is consequently based on a strategy of staging and evolution, gradually improving the capabilities of AMBAG to provide planning services in a variety of important problem areas."

- Changes in state and federal attitudes toward regional agencies such as AMBAG — such as those now under consideration by Gov. Reagan — might cause shifts in policy, authority and funding.

The report contains 52 tasks to be accomplished during the five-year planning period. After listing each task the report also suggests more specific work activities to be carried out by AMBAG staff to accomplish the tasks. Among the 52 jobs proposed are:

- Incorporation of citizen input to the regional planning process.

- Stimulation of community awareness of the regional planning process, including making people aware of their opportunities and responsibilities to participate.

- Development of a data collection and storage system.

- Forecasting of population growth. (Stuart said that a general optimum population figure for the region — not a specific number of residents — could be derived.)

- Provision of technical assistance and training to AMBAG's member agencies.

- Research to facilitate regional and local planning.

- Provision, on a contract basis, of local planning assistance to smaller jurisdictions within the region.

- Preparation of a regional general plan, with input from AMBAG as well as local cities and counties.

- Promotion of interagency cooperation and communication among member cities and counties.

- Cooperation with other councils of government in California and throughout the nation to develop policies and procedures with impact on regional planning.

- Review of project plans of regional significance which might be developed by local agencies within the district.

- Review of financial strength of local governments within the region "with respect to public fiscal capabilities and tax-based resources." This would include a study of federal revenue sharing impact within the region.

- Coordination of capital improvement programs of member agencies to "maximize the effectiveness of overall plan implementation strategies."

- Maintenance of a monitoring system "which will provide feedback on changes in urban and natural environments."

- Review of "existing governmental structures in the AMBAG region, with a view to improving fiscal and administrative efficiency. Possible changes in tax structure and fiscal relationships, together with organizational changes involving possible consolidations and annexations, should all be considered. An improved design for government structure should be suggested, identifying organizational criteria which reflect regional and local needs and working relationships."

- Review of zoning and other land-use controls, "seeking ways in which these measures may be used more effectively in guiding development in the AMBAG region." This includes preparation of "guidelines for the local governmental use."

- Development of guidelines for location of new regional commercial centers.

- Development of solid waste disposal plans.

- Study and development of guidelines for safety against earthquake damage.

- Consideration of the noise pollution problem.

- Consideration of energy needs within the region.

- Development of a regional transportation planning program, including coordination of efforts by existing local transit authorities and districts.

- Integration of airport planning.

- Consideration of any need for port facilities.

- Development of a regional housing plan, incorporating local programs and plans.

- Inventory wildlife which might be endangered by development with an eye to protecting those species.

- Consideration of other natural resources and their protection.

- Development of an air quality plan in conjunction with the existing air pollution control districts.

- Coordination of water-distribution plans in the three counties.

- Continued consideration of sewage disposal plans.

- Work on county storm drainage and flood control plans.

- Identification of recreation facilities and open space requirements that are regional in nature and coordination of local plans.

- Consideration of agriculture, including its economic importance in the AMBAG region.

- Preparation of a plan for economic development, with proposals for reducing unemployment, including seasonal joblessness.

- Development of criteria for selection of industrial sites.

- Coordination of social services in the areas of health care, law enforcement, criminal justice, manpower training, anti-poverty programs and education with an eye to eliminating overlapping services.

- Coordination of public safety services, such as fire and police protection, "so as to maximize the value of these services."

- Establishment of criteria for historic preservation of buildings and sites.

- Adoption of regional standards relating to appearance and design of urban development.

- Determination of "the adequacy of the potential for major public facilities, such as convention centers, concert halls, art galleries" and of potential use for military landholdings within the region.