

# Reasonable Annexation Policy

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It is unfortunate some state-appointed officials are wreaking havoc with a long-standing Santa Cruz policy that the city not provide urban services it possesses without annexation.

Santa Cruz' policy isn't uncommon in California, and to overturn it could have statewide implications.

Although the policy hasn't resulted in a large number of homeowners knocking at the door for cityhood, annexation is a reasonable requirement for areas which desire urban services SC may provide.

The pending issue centers around state and federal grants being used to expand the city sewage plant from 7 to 21 million gallon per day capacity for a "regional" facility. The state in effect forced Santa Cruz to accept sewage from Aptos and East Cliff-Capitola (both which had existing plants) to get disposal of treated sewage out of Monterey Bay, with each entity specifying how much of the increased capacity it could have of the larger plant.

Now, the state is saying the the city should accept sewage from Rolling Woods-Pasatiempo, whose septic tank systems seem to be degrading annually.

If not, the California Water Quality Control Board says it will cut off funds March 1 in an ongoing study on treatment and disposal.

The end result could be that the state will cause its own standards to be violated for a longer period than necessary. Those standards say disposal of treated sewage in the ocean should be at a depth of 100 feet. The present outfall

line is about 40 feet deep.

If the state cuts off funds for "current metering" that has been going on for nine months, then two choices are open to get some kind of conclusion on a year-round basis: (1) either start all over again when the question is resolved, or (2) wait about a year and begin metering for that period missed.

The state's reasoning is perplexing on other points, too.

In the first place, what is "regional"? Is it from the Pajaro River to the summit, or from Felton to Soquel?

Also, the state's stand in this instance runs opposite to what many of its recent laws that are aimed against urban sprawl.

The county hasn't been exactly helpful in this instance either, as the sewer/annexation topic turns from a political football to a legal battle.

County supervisors have expressed interest in population centers being centered near urban services, but have done little to encourage the Rolling Woods-Pasatiempo area to annex to the city. Quite the contrary, a separate sewer maintenance district has been suggested as the answer. In other counties in the state, the county normally puts it simple and direct, "If you want city services, become part of the city."

Cost to the homeowner for annexation doesn't seem to be a major factor. In Pasatiempo, for instance, the city has shown that by the time special assessments for street maintenance, fire protection and insurance rating, police, sanitation and water rates are taken into account, the SC tax rate wouldn't amount to much more than what is being

paid in property taxes.

Politics intervenes eventually, as some of those residents complain about the voting that has taken place in recent years to elect councilmembers. But, it's seldom mentioned that an area as big as Rolling Woods-Pasatiempo could have a big impact on the outcome of such elections, and that they would have a big say in the election of seven councilmembers, as well as one county supervisor.

Therefore, for cost and political reasons, it is difficult to understand why so many of those residents who have businesses and interests in Santa Cruz haven't gone along with annexation before.

Some 20 years ago, more than two out of three city residents saw far enough ahead to expand their existing sewer plant by approving a bond issue, and when the enlarged facility came about in recent years, Santa Cruz negotiated for some of that enlarged capacity with the idea capacity would be available for an increase in city population. It is incorrect to assume Santa Cruz has received some sort of free ride with the state/federal grant, as city residents pay taxes to those agencies, too.

If Santa Cruz is forced to provide sewer services to an area within its "sphere of influence," it will be breaking one of its own ordinances.

The SC policy is a reasonable stipulation for assuring better planned communities by encouraging people to live in areas where urban services are available.

The state is out of bounds when it says that requirement is unreasonable.