

LAFCO studies areas served by Soquel Creek district

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The Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission will have to grapple with a number of options in adopting a sphere of influence for the Soquel Creek Water District.

Bill Farrel, a Santa Cruz consultant hired by LAFCO to study the issue, told the commission at a meeting yesterday that the water district's current boundaries extend beyond the county's urban services line.

It may be appropriate, Farrel said, for the water district's sphere of influence to be an area less than the current boundaries.

The boundaries now encompass 17 square miles stretching from Capitola to La Selva Beach and from the ocean into the mountains. In the mountainous areas, however, the district is, in some cases, more than a mile beyond the urban services line.

That line was originally drawn by the county in 1978 to control growth. Its purpose was to define where the urban areas in the county are and to encourage growth in those areas. The line is also meant to discourage growth and urban services in areas outside the boundaries.

Making the Soquel Creek Water District's sphere of influence conform with the

urban services line, Farrel said, may be the option most in conformance with the county's General Plan.

A sphere of influence, LAFCO Executive Officer Patrick McCormick said after the meeting, is used as a planning document for further annexations. The state has required LAFCOs to develop spheres of influence for each district. Currently, there is no sphere of influence for the Soquel Creek Water District.

The effect of having a sphere of influence less than the actual boundaries, McCormick said, would be to make it unlikely that LAFCO will annex any additional area to the district.

Also, McCormick said, LAFCO may find it easier to side with a landowner to de-annex from the district if the land is outside the district's sphere of influence. He noted, however, that the de-annexation issue may never arise. LAFCO acts only on requests to either annex or de-annex.

The Soquel Creek Water District proposed another option, Farrel told the LAFCO members; namely, to almost triple its sphere of influence, extending it out into the mountainous areas to the Zayante Fault line, which is about two-thirds of the way from the ocean to the summit. That, of course, is far

beyond the urban services line.

A third option would be to adopt a sphere of influence in conformance with the present district boundaries.

McCormick recommended that the matter be put on the agenda of LAFCO's June 4 meeting in order to get further public comment.

One member of the public, Lawrence Frommhagen, spoke against the water district's proposed sphere of influence.

"It has been my experience that water development is the spearhead for future development," he said. "Those of us who live in the mountains are happy with our private wells. I see this (the district's) request to extend the sphere of influence as part of a hidden agenda to annex the whole area."

Frommhagen added that if the area is annexed, assessment districts may be formed to charge property owners for installation of water mains and even building a dam at Glenwood.

Bob Johnson, general manager of Soquel Creek Water District, said it seemed the water district and LAFCO considered different factors in proposing spheres of influence.

"We made our proposal based on the total groundwater basin and the watershed," he said. "It seems they are looking at future annexations."