

LAFCO (Local agency formation Commission)

Sentinel Editorial

LAFCO Controversy

The much discussed "conflict of interest" decision by the Local Agency Formation Commission provides a subject for philosophical differences which may never be resolved.

What happened this week is that the commission voted to reverse a previous regulation that prevented representatives of cities to vote on issues involving their own municipality.

At issue was the fact that every municipal or county representative on the commission had a potential "conflict" of interest in just about every annexation proposal as every proposal had a mushrooming effect in the sense that if one district was enlarged another was decreased.

Basically, there was the fact that with each increase in municipal annexation there would be a decrease in the size of the unincorporated area, i.e., the county.

Thus, if the city representatives couldn't vote on an issue, should the representatives of the board of supervisors be allowed to vote?

From a practical standpoint we agree with the decision made by the commission this week as virtually every proposal before LAFCO affects more than one area.

It is obvious, too, that many of the decisions may be more political than an exercise in better government.

The basic purpose of the Local Agency Formation Commission is to work toward better government by the consolidation of districts to provide better service to the people.

LAFCO was initially developed by the state to establish improved means to control of establishment of special districts, which were multiplying all over the state.

Thus, the principal objective of the commission is to establish a consolidation of services, designed to provide improved government for the people.

The basic question surrounding many LAFCO decisions is whether municipalities should expand their services into adjacent areas where the density of rural population has increased to the point where municipal services are essential.

Unfortunately, there has not been a united effort to achieve this goal in Santa Cruz County.

Considering the small size of the county, it is, indeed, unfortunate that we have not been able to consolidate some of the essential services needed by the people living in growing areas.

More recently there has been an effort to consolidate, at least, in theory some of the service facilities such as sanitation.

But even in some of these cases there has been a continuing battle at the political level

over the control of the facilities.

There has been serious differences of opinion between county representatives and the officials of every city within the county. Many of these differences still exist.

It has been our opinion that when you are talking about municipal-type services, especially sanitation, the area of expertise lies with the municipality that has been providing the services.

The cities have the experience and, in most cases, the ability and capability of doing a better job that can be accomplished by forming a special district in an unincorporated to do the same thing.

Usually, there is a financial issue involved in the controversy with the city representatives trying to save the city taxpayers' money while the county officials are trying to save money for their constituents.

The net result normally is that no one saves money.

The intelligence use of the facilities of the Local Agency Formation Commission can promote better government for all the people.

But to utilize this opportunity it will be necessary to eliminate the constant interference of political power plays and to concentrate on providing a better level of service for the people who are paying the bills.

Andrew Tully Writes