

Opinion

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LAFU
Sentinel Editorial *Local Agency Formation Commission*

Independent LAFC

Although we are sympathetic to the desires of the Board of Supervisors to reduce county operating costs, we believe it would be wise to maintain the operation of the Local Agency Formation Commission as an independent agency.

LAFC was formed a number of years ago by the state and given the authority to handle decisions on annexation and boundaries within each county of the state.

By state law the county is required to fund the Local Agency Formation Commission and provide it with whatever aid is necessary for its operation.

In many, but not all counties, it has gained independent status.

The commission itself is represented by four members from elected office and an appointed public member. In Santa Cruz County, two members of the county Board of Supervisors are on the commission plus two representatives from the cities and a fifth, public member, representing the general public.

The small LAFC staff, usually an executive director and a secretary, is directed by the commission, not the county or the city.

We believe it is extremely important to maintain this independent status for virtually every LAFC decision does have an effect either upon the county or the cities in one way or another (some decisions primarily affect special districts).

Regulations affecting annexations are under the direct jurisdiction of LAFC. It is in this case that one should emphasize the importance of an independent agency rather than one directed either by the county or the cities.

While we doubt if the county operation of LAFC would be a legal conflict of interest, there is no question about the fact that it could lead to political conflicts.

And when you look at the long range view of the county it is obvious that there will be future annexations, consolidations, etc. which are of vital importance to the people.

The regulations and determinations for these decisions should be based on the public welfare, not the particular self interest of one jurisdiction or another.

Of special interest at the moment is the possible annexation of Freedom to the city of Watsonville, a decision which eventually is going to have a great deal to do with the future of the urban areas of the Pajaro Valley.

Other decisions will be coming up on a multitude of issues in the years ahead affecting special districts such as fire districts, the control of services such as sanitation and refuse collection, the handling of wastes, etc.

In all of these decisions LAFC will be playing a key role.

Because both the cities and the county will be affected, they have the opportunity of direct representation in the LAFC decisions by their positions on the commission.

However, the staff work which obviously will play an important part in the decision-making process, should be independent without the bias of the interested parties.

Both the cities and the county have the opportunity to evaluate the staff work by their membership on the commission just as they have the opportunity to make budget decisions on the commission.

But when it comes down to the nitty-gritty policy decisions, an independent agency offers far better hope for fair decisions.

Due to the nature of its work, there will always be strong differences of opinion on LAFC projects and they may vary on the political tides of the times.

But we strongly feel an independent LAFC offers the best solution.

Andrew Tully