



Fresno County LAFCo September 10, 2020

By Don Wright

The Commissioners of the **Fresno County LAFCo** met on Wednesday September 9, 2020 at the Fresno County Board of Supervisors chambers in the Hall of Records in downtown Fresno.

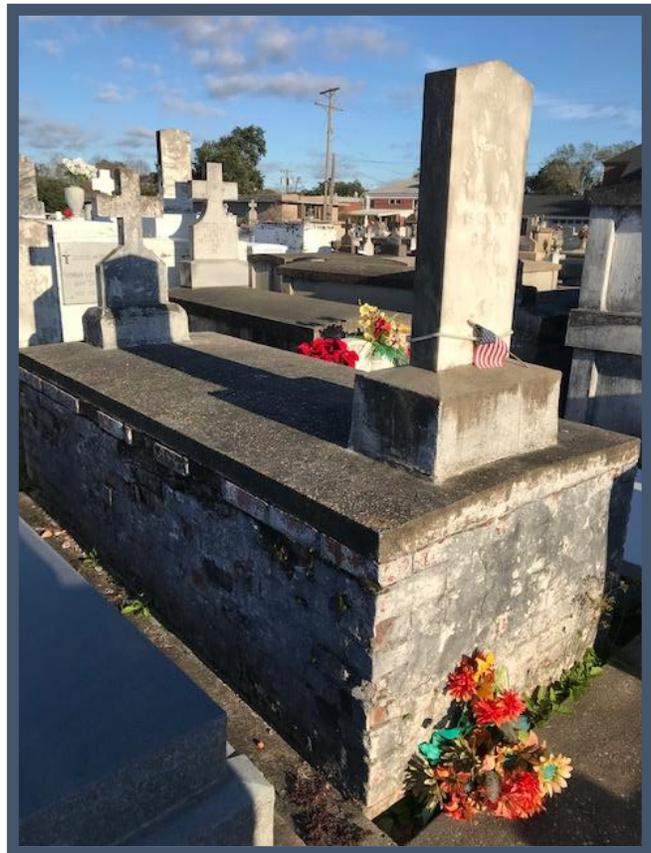
This meeting wasn't virtual nor was it heavily attended, which worked out well. The dozen or so folks who showed up as members of the public had plenty of room to spread out while wearing masks and not infect each other with the Big Marxist Virus.

What's LAFCo?

LAFCo is the Local Agency Formation Commission. It is a state commission, not city or county although there are 58 LAFCos in California, the exact same number as there are counties. Coincidence? I think not. Each LAFCo oversees the myriad of jurisdictional boundary interactions between municipalities, special districts and reviews services. As you'll see if you continue reading a big part of this is annexations of lands into new or existing entities; and conversely removing lands. It sets spheres of influences for planning purposes and review the efficiency of districts.

And LAFCo conducts reviews. A few years ago I tried to ascertain how many elected or appointed government seats had jurisdiction in my voting precinct. I wanted to send them all a letter asking them who they feared more – God or man. I thought it would be an insight into their thought process as they wrote laws and made decisions that absolutely impact my freedoms. The number was staggering. The federal side wasn't too bad. One president, two senators and a congressman. At the state and county I gave up on the appointed seats, there were just too many. The elected alone yielded a big hand full; and to my surprise the judiciary was a big chunk. There are dozens of judges up for election but if they run unopposed the race doesn't appear on the ballot. Same with special districts. At any time there are a good deal of special district seats open because no one wants to run and serve. If possible the county will appoint someone and when they swear into office they are the de facto elected representative.

LAFCo was very helpful in determining who had jurisdiction over my residence. The two main reviews LAFCo performs are Sphere of Influence and Municipal Services Review. All of the 15 cities



and 116 special districts in Fresno County have to these reviews. These MSR's are available online. That's where I got the names of the board members of the cemetery, fire, veterans memorial and a few other special districts. So, my point is, while a LAFCo meeting doesn't usually draw a large crowd like the more sexy irrigation and water districts do, there is a lot of information to help us stay informed on the inter-jurisdictional minutia swirling around us like unseen radio waves impacting our lives.

Annexation

Chairman **Daniel Parra** called to order at 1:30pm and Executive Director **David Fey** called roll. All five directors were present. We saluted the flag together. That was nice, haven't done that for a while. There were no public comments or conflicts of interest that I heard and the consent calendar was approved. That means the minutes and the annexation of a little under 40-acres of land was annexed to the City of Clovis. There is residential development going in at Shepherd and Clovis Avenues and the commission thought it would be best to have it a part of Clovis and not hanging out there in the County.

Why that last item of annexation was on consent calendar I don't know but the two action items were also annexational in nature. Once again the City of Clovis asked to annex 118 acres for a landfill – technically the request was titled “Clovis Landfill Buffer No. 4 Reorganization”. This will detach the land west of the Auberry Road/Friant Kern Canal intersection from the domain of the Fresno County Fire Protection District. The commission approved.

Next our friends at Laguna Irrigation District requested to annex 16,665 acres north of the City of Laton. LID General Manager **Scott Sils** was present but it wasn't appropriate to interrupt the proceedings to ask questions about what this means for the white areas and if the GSA boundaries will change and how the district's infrastructure and water supply will be stretched to accommodate the new lands. But having a modicum of knowledge about ID staff and boards I suspect these issues, like **Winston Churchill's** off the cuff remarks, were well thought out in advance. The commissioners approved the annex.

What's RCD?

It was item number eight on the agenda that lured me out of my lair to the LAFCo lair; a workshop by the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts. **Karen Buhr**, Executive Director of the CARCD gave a presentation about her organization, its partners and the role RCD plays in helping farmers and ranchers.

Buhr spoke by phone narrating a Power Point presentation. She said the RCDs sprung from the efforts during the Dust Bowl to promote soil conservation. Over time outreach proved to be the weak link in accomplishing the goals set out. RCDs mission was to create a network with farmers and ranchers to help them get in touch with local experts, financial assistance and education.

RCDs are a State of California program and fall under LAFCo guides. Buhr said something that kind of surprised me. She said there is no need for inactive RCDs. It was refreshing to hear that spoken out loud in California; where at the state level anyway, government considers its primary purpose is to expand as much as possible. Turns out there are six RCDs in Fresno County but only three are active – according to the LAFCo review. Fey told me after the meeting the blessings of local districts include accountability and transparency. They can be very effective, unless they slow down or stop. Apparently the curse of local districts is there are a bit like a diet; once they lose momentum its difficult to fire them back up.

Statewide there 95 RCDs and they cover most of California but for San Francisco and Los Angeles. RCD supports ag by helping landowners implement conservation programs. The educational portion includes working with schools. Technical assistance helps with permitting and fire resilience is now part of RCD and includes timber and flat land.

Buhr said the Kern County RCD has a water conservation program with mobile labs and assistance with regulatory programs. She said a lot of work is being done in Kern County with drip systems and drone surveys for water efficiency. The mountain areas benefit also. The Sierra RCD helps with tree removal and disposal. The Grasslands RCD works with the water district to meet conservation goals. East Stanislaus RCD has a soil health hub and working with researchers for healthy soil throughout the Valley.

Partnerships are key according to Buhr. RCD works closely with the Natural Resource Conservation District and they have several joint programs. There is also a close relationship with the California Department of Conservation. They team up to get state money. Buhr said the RCD rarely works alone.

Buhr suggested RCDs could partner with GSAs to implement water conservation practices. RCDs could be the public outreach and tech support arm of GSAs. It's publicly accountable, transparent and accessible. She said using RCDs is a good way to maintain local control and Public Policy Institute of California wrote a report highlighting this role. Buhr said other things but this is the point in the meeting where questions and answers began.

Q&A

Commissioner **Mario Santoyo** asked what RCD brings to this area and its many existing agencies? He also wanted to know how RCD is funded? Buhr said principally grants and the occasional assessment if it can partner with an entity capable of setting assessments.

Santoyo asked one of the questions that was on everybody's mind – is there competition between RCD and other entities for grant funding? Buhr had a good answer to a good question saying most grants are in cooperation with other entities and RCD has no baseline funding to just apply for grants. Nor does a RCD have any regulatory or taxation powers.

Another question from Santoyo – the GSAs have been formed for some time now, are sensitive in how the issues are handled. Why hasn't RCDs been working with the GSAs by now? And Buhr had another good response. She said in some parts of the state GSAs aren't as well developed as here in the Valley. She also said the RCDs' aren't really in the policy business and more the implementation business. RCDs may become more helpful as the GSPs are kicking in.

Kings River Conservation District General Manager **Paul Peschel** said LAFCo needs to help keep grant applications from stepping on toes otherwise his board won't be happy. If I understood Buhr's response correctly RCDs almost never apply for grants alone. They partner with existing entities therefore eliminating competition. Peschel also asked about geographic boundaries and how RCDs and GSAs can work together if their boarders don't align. Buhr said RCDs can work outside of the lines as long as they get permission from LAFCo.

There was a sterling example of alphabet soup. KRCD isn't an RCD and there's the NRCD that isn't the NRDC. So be careful. A Natural Resource Conservation District under the USDA is much different than the huge corporate environmental law firm known as the Natural Resources Defense Council. Commissioner **Buddy Mendes** helpfully said the KRCD came about by an act of congress to build Pine Flat. Santoyo asked Peschel what KRCD does that overlaps RCD? Peschel said he sees an opportunity to use RCD as an additive to what KRCD does.

Steve Hayes is General Manager of the Sierra RCD manager. He said the RCD works with Fresno State University for applied research and is funded by DWR for some of this work. His is one of the active RCDs and you can find more information at www.sierrarc.com

I asked if RCDs could pass grant funds along to growers. Buhr said there is some money in the State Water Efficiency & Enhancement Program, SWEEP that becomes available now and then. That's

an area of interest for many GSAs and farmers looking to upgrade their irrigation systems. It just so happens WaterWrights.net has plans to take a closer look at this subject in the near future.

Fey thanked Buhr for her presentation and everyone for attending. There was no closed session and the meeting was adjourned. The next LAFCo is schedule for October 14th at the same location.

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Fresno County LAFCo

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Staff: David Fey – Executive Officer, Amanda Olivas – Clerk to the Commission, George Uc – Senior Analyst & Juan Lara – Analyst

Legal Counsel: Kenneth Price – Baker, Manock & Jensen

Fresno LAFCo

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