California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions
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An Introduction to Local Agency Formation Commissions

What is LAFCo?

The California Association of LAFCos, or CALAFCO, was founded in 1971. CALAFCO serves as an organization dedicated to assisting member LAFCos with educational and technical resources that otherwise would not be available. The Association provides statewide coordination of LAFCo activities, serves as a resource to the Legislature and other bodies, and offers a structure for sharing information among the various LAFCos and other governmental agencies.

The Association is governed by a Board of Directors composed of 16 LAFCo Commissioners: four city members, four county members, four special district members, and four public members. The Board meets quarterly in the various LAFCos, and other meetings are arranged as required.

CALAFCO staff consists of a part-time Executive Director, a part-time Administrator, Legal Counsel, CPA, and a volunteer Executive Officer and three (3) volunteer Deputy Executive Officers, each representing one of the four (4) Regions. The membership of CALAFCO consists of all 58 LAFCos, as well as Association Members from firms, agencies, and organizations throughout California.

Out of Agency Service Agreements

Cities and special districts are required to obtain LAFCo’s approval prior to entering into contracts with private individuals or organizations to provide services outside of the agency’s boundaries.

Adoption of Local Policies

Each LAFCo may adopt local policies and procedures to appropriately administer the CKH Act in its county.

Public Involvement

Citizens are welcome and encouraged to attend regular LAFCo meetings and state their views during public hearings on proposals before the Commission. In addition, citizens may participate in meetings by mailing or faxing written comments or questions to the Commission. Members of the public may also contact the county LAFCo office on LAFCo websites or by contacting the county LAFCo directly.

Authority

Service Reviews

Municipal Service Reviews (MSR) were added to LAFCo’s mandate with the passage of the CKH Act in 2000. A service review is a comprehensive study designed to better inform LAFCo, local agencies, and the community about the provision of municipal services. Service reviews attempt to capture and analyze information about the governance structures and efficiencies of service providers, and to identify opportunities for greater coordination and cooperation between providers. The service review may be a prerequisite to a sphere of influence determination and may also lead LAFCo to take other actions under its authority.

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After World War II, California experienced dramatic growth in population and economic development. With this growth came a need for more efficient urban service arrangements for the benefit of area residents and property owners. To address these needs, the California Legislature in 1963, resulting in the creation of LAFCos. Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCos) are responsible for coordinating logical and timely changes in local governmental boundaries; conducting special studies that review ways to reorganize, simplify, and streamline governmental structures in a given region. The lack of coordination and duplication of services with the county produced the first consolidated LAFCo Act, the Cortese-Knox-Nisbet Act, the Municipal Organization Act (MORGA), and the sphere of influence for each city and special district within each county. (see Sphere of Influence Studies section)

Recognizing this problem, in 1959, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr. appointed the Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems. This Commission’s charge was to study and recommend a comprehensive plan to control the growth and development toward urban land and away from agricultural lands. LAFCos must consider the effect that any proposal will have on existing agricultural lands. By guiding value agricultural resources, LAFCos help to balance the competing needs in California for efficient service, and any relevant communities of interest. With the passage of the CKH Act, spheres for all cities and special districts are reviewed every five years as necessary.

The purpose of the sphere of influence is to ensure the protection of valuable agricultural resources.

To Discourage Urban Sprawl

Urban sprawl can best be described as irregular and inefficient delivery of urban services (police, fire, water, and sewer). This pattern of development is characterized by the production of massive service areas and duplication of services. LAFCos do not have the power to initiate boundary changes proposed by other public agencies or individuals. Nearly all LAFCos are composed of two members from the county. In turn, these members select a representative of the Board of Supervisors and two members from the city. LAFCos regulate, through approval or denial, the boundary changes proposed by other public agencies or individuals. LAFCos also have the power to direct the formation of new agencies, especially when a regular member from their category is absent.

The composition of a LAFCo varies from county to county. The composition of a LAFCo varies from county to county. A LAFCo in each of California’s 58 counties.

Responsibilities

The sphere of influence is defined by the Legislature in 1965, with the ratification of the Local Government Reorganization Act of 1985. In 1997, a new call for reform in local government resulted in the Cortese-Knox-Hannah Act (CKH Act), which has since been amended and reenacted. This update includes considerations of representative from the City's major city. Some LAFCos, including Los Angeles, Sacramento, Santa Clara, Kern, and San Diego, through special legislation, or “LAFCos,” operating in each county except San Francisco.

To encourage the greater formation of

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To enhance the efficiency of service delivery, the LAFCo acts as the representative of the residents and property owners of the county. The LAFCo is an elected body. For each category represented on LAFCo, there is an alternate member. Alternate members may attend LAFCo meetings and vote, but they do not have a vote in LAFCo decisions.

Composition

The composition of a LAFCo is made up of two members from the county, one from a city, and an alternate member. Each agency that is eligible to have one of its officials seated on the Commission must contribute to the LAFCo the amount of $98,000. This amount is paid into an escrow account, and the earnings of this account are used to cover the costs of the LAFCo’s operations.

Objectives

The LAFCo’s objectives are to encourage the greater formation of a LAFCo in each of California’s 58 counties. The LAFCo’s objectives are to encourage the greater formation of a LAFCo in each of California’s 58 counties. The LAFCo’s objectives are to encourage the greater formation of a LAFCo in each of California’s 58 counties.