

September 16, 1999

RECEIVED
SEP 22 1999



The Honorable Charles Campbell
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Ventura County Hall of Justice
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Subject: 1998-99 Ventura County Grand Jury Report: Special Districts

Dear Judge Campbell:

The Chief Administrative Office was directed to respond to Recommendations 1-4 of the Grand Jury's Report on Special Districts.

RECOMMENDATION 1: *The Board of Supervisors should fund LAFCO so that their study of special districts can be done more frequently, ideally every two years.*

RESPONSE: Studies of special districts need to be updated periodically. The most recent special districts study was completed by LAFCO in 1988. A study of special districts could appropriately be accomplished every five years by LAFCO staff or by contract. A new part-time LAFCO Planner position is expected to be available in FY 1999-00 to update the special districts study.

RECOMMENDATION 2: *A Citizens Advisory Commission or Committee should be established to act as an input to LAFCO to increase the level of objectivity for reorganization of special districts. This group could also examine the fairness of the special district portion of the budget in conjunction with the Auditor-Controller.*

RESPONSE: LAFCO is not authorized by statute to form a Citizens Advisory Commission or Committee to review the work for which LAFCO is responsible. The only limited exception is the ability of LAFCO to appoint a "Special District Advisory Committee" to review special district reorganization studies.

RECOMMENDATION 3: *Unless mandated by state legislation, special districts should have an automatic review date (perhaps five years) to validate the need for the district. Failure to meet a demonstrated need would cause dissolution of the district.*

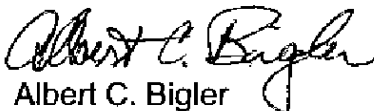
RESPONSE: LAFCO reviews all special districts every five years. The decision to maintain or dissolve a special district is based on the combination of several factors: (1) Is the special district the most efficient means of providing public services?; (2) What are the budgetary resources and constraints associated with continuing the special district?; and (3) Are the services provided by the special district still needed?

RECOMMENDATION 4: *The County should commit to make it easier for all the taxpayers to understand how their special district taxes are levied and used. One suggestion is to provide an insert mailed with tax bills that would provide some explanation, including description of common acronyms and abbreviations (F1).*

RESPONSE: Taxpayers need to be able to clearly understand how their taxes are calculated and used. Tax bills currently include the amount of each special district tax and the telephone number of each special district in the event that the taxpayer would like to obtain further information regarding a specific special district tax. Any decision to provide additional inserts in tax bills for public education purposes needs to be evaluated also for cost effectiveness. Tax bills are currently printed on the lightest weight paper available and, together with the envelope, weigh exactly one ounce. Providing additional inserts would significantly increase the postage costs for the tax bill mailings.

If you have any questions regarding this response, please contact me at 654-2681, or Jim Becker, Program Management Analyst, at 654-3531.

Sincerely,



Albert C. Bigler
Chief Deputy Administrative Officer

c: Ventura County Grand Jury
Arnold Dowdy, LAFCON/COG Executive Officer