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Guest Editorial: Antonovich; "I will oppose any annexation that divides established communities!"

Thu 6 May 2010

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Antonovich No Comments



In response to several inquiries from residents in the 5th District regarding my position concerning annexations, I appreciate this opportunity to share my views. Under State law, known as the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, it is the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) which processes annexations in the County of Los Angeles. It is important to note that LAFCO is a State, not a County agency, and that its membership is intended to represent broad constituencies from throughout the County of Los Angeles. LAFCO includes representatives appointed by the County of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles City Council, members representing other cities in the County and special districts, a member representing the San Fernando Valley, and a member representing the public at large.

When the City of Santa Clarita was created, LAFCO excluded the west side of the Valley from the boundaries of the new city. Over the years, LAFCO has rejected, on three separate occasions, the City's application to expand its "Sphere of Influence," a pre-cursor to annexation, to include areas west of the I-5 Freeway. In each of these instances, LAFCO identified concerns about dividing up established communities, which is consistent with the provisions of Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg.

The City of Santa Clarita has annexed roughly 30 unincorporated areas since the City originally incorporated in 1987. The County has not stood in the way of these annexations, which, as far as I know, were supported by impacted residents. In rare instances, where I was concerned that accurate information be presented, the County provided information to impacted residents, but that is distinctly different from opposing an annexation altogether.

In terms of opposed annexations in the Santa Clarita Valley, I will oppose any annexation that divides established communities, particularly those annexations that are opposed by local town councils, chambers of commerce, and other community associations. If communities organize themselves in support of annexation and determine from within that the community supports annexation, I will not stand in their way so long as the annexation does not split up established communities.

The County Board of Supervisors has an adopted policy relative to annexations. Current policy, amended in December of 2007 by the County Board of Supervisors, states that "[t]he County will oppose annexations that carve up or fragment an unincorporated community that has a strong sense of identity." This policy is another factor that impacts our County Board's position as new annexations are proposed.

For unincorporated communities that wish to annex into a city, an application must be submitted to LAFCO. There are associated fees and costs, which can run to several thousands of dollars. While some cities may choose to front these costs and fees, and/or handle all of the submittals to LAFCO on behalf of unincorporated residents, there is no legal requirement for a city to do so. In times of lean government budgets, it may be particularly burdensome for a city to commit limited financial resources to an annexation that involves residents who currently neither live in the City, pay taxes to the City, nor vote for City elected officials or ballot items affecting the City.

The issues which I have discussed in this article will be foremost in my mind as proposed annexations are presented to the County or under consideration by LAFCO. To the extent a community is proposed to be divided, and established community representatives, town councils, chambers of commerce and community associations, oppose a specific annexation, I will oppose the annexation and make my position known to the commissioners who serve on LAFCO.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

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