

**From:** [Becky Steinbruner](#)  
**To:** [Joe Serrano](#); [Debra Means](#)  
**Cc:** [Becky Steinbruner](#)  
**Subject:** Public Comment re: August 5, 2020 LAFCO Agenda Items #2a and Public Hearing on Item # 5c, and General Public Comment Item #4  
**Date:** Wednesday, July 29, 2020 2:22:29 AM  
**Attachments:** [Screenshot at 2020-07-28 23-57-29.png](#)  
[Screenshot at 2020-07-28 23-58-33.png](#)  
[Screenshot at 2020-07-28 23-59-06.png](#)

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Dear Mr. Serrano and Ms. Means,  
Please include my letter below as Public Comment for the Record regarding the August 5, 2020 Santa Cruz County LAFCO agenda items. I hope that my letter can be sent to Commissioners in advance of the meeting for their consideration.

Thank you.  
Sincerely,  
Becky Steinbruner  
3441 Redwood Drive  
Aptos, CA 95003

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Dear LAFCO Commissioners,  
I am writing you regarding two agenda items, one of which is the subject of a public hearing. I am also sending written general Public Comment on a matter not on your August 5, 2020 agenda.

**Item #2a. Project DC-20-02 Consolidation of Aptos / La Selva and Central Fire Protection Districts**

I saw the LAFCO Notice of Public Hearing for this matter in the July 14, 2020 Santa Cruz Sentinel on page 4B. However, because I attended the Central Fire Protection District Board meeting on July 14, I knew there would be no public hearing.

My family is a long-time resident of the State Responsibility Area in Aptos Hills served by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Aptos / La Selva Fire Protection District and County Fire / CalFire. As such, I am concerned about the difficulty in the consolidation process and the associated expenses because the agencies did not meet the LAFCO deadline of completion. The stress of the consolidation was fairly palpable at the Central Fire Board meeting on July 14.

I note that both Chiefs of Aptos / La Selva and Central Fire Protection Districts have abruptly taken leave of absence, and possibly have chosen to move to another area. That is a huge loss for the community.

I respectfully request that LAFCO waive any penalties or further fee requirements for consolidation efforts of the Central and Aptos/La Selva Fire Protection Districts in order to support a measured and thoughtful process of consolidation that will effectively move the process forward but without financial or emotional harm to any involved. It is my understanding that the MOU agreements had time-constraints by LAFCO that could not be met.

Further, I respectfully request that LAFCO remove the Day Valley Special Assessment before the consolidation process is complete if possible. These properties were assessed at a significantly higher rate when annexed in 1988, but the reasons to support continuing the higher assessment can no longer

be justified. This was discussed by the Aptos / La Selva Board at the December 12, 2019 meeting. Chief Lowe's thorough presentation concluded with the assurance to the Board that the Day Valley Special Assessment could be removed by LAFCO approval.

I urge you to place this on the next LAFCO agenda for discussion to provide relief to the Day Valley property owners in this economically stressful time, and separate it from the consolidation issue.

#### **Item #4 Public Communication (Items not on the agenda)**

I respectfully request that LAFCO place on a future agenda a discussion of consolidating Soquel Creek Water District and Santa Cruz City Water Department.

The benefits of a regional water management approach could bring forth practical and cost-effective solutions to the water storage problem in Santa Cruz County by better serving all ratepayers with reduced administration costs and decisions not driven by politics. Many ratepayers in the Soquel Creek Water District service area are discussing the merits of such consolidation and would appreciate LAFCO public discussion.

The two agencies currently are collaborating on the PureWater Soquel Project to recycle treated wastewater. Furthermore, the City of Santa Cruz is in the process of environmental evaluation to expand Water Rights Place of Use for the San Lorenzo River source to include the Soquel Creek Water District service areas. Consolidation is logical and would be more cost-effective for all rate payers.

I urge you to place this issue on a LAFCO agenda in the near future.

#### **Item #5c Public Hearing to Consider Service and Sphere Review for County Service Area 9**

I would like to request that future LAFCO public hearing agendas provide a brief description of the CSA on the agenda. The public would benefit by a simple description such as what is found on page 22 of the Service and Sphere Review:

*"CSA 9 performs a series of Public Works services that are provided to sub-areas of the County. These services are highway lighting, neighborhood street lighting, landfill operations, recycling, unincorporated road maintenance, school crossing guards, streetscape maintenance, and parking maintenance."*

I have read the Draft CSA 9 Service and Sphere Review and find a number of issues troubling.

#### **1) The CSA 9 Service and Sphere Review Findings are not addressed with any relevant action in the Recommendations.**

The Findings on page 8 are concerning, and raise issues that cause the public to question transparency and fiscal accountability. Where is the oversight? When and how does CSA 9 hold regular public meetings with affected property owners? I know of only one held in the Seascapes neighborhood last winter, the first in many, many years, that concluded with the staff urging homeowners to vote for an assessment increase.

I appreciate LAFCO staff observation noted on page 19 that CSA 9 information is not easily accessible and that a County webpage would be an improvement. Why is this not a Recommendation that the Board of Supervisors take such action to request that Department of Public Works create a webpage link that improves fiscal transparency and accountability?

The Findings outline glaring problems, namely that CSA 9 is facing financial constraints, there are no new projects in 2020-2025 that will benefit taxpayers, and the CSA's records and documents are not readily available. Why, then isn't LAFCO making any recommendations for improved service, but instead only

recommending the report be approved and filed?

**2) There is no fiscal CSA 9 oversight or transparency.**

This is apparent in reviewing how the funds are spent with favoritism to improving areas in Soquel and Aptos where two very large projects that benefit large developers have been prioritized but other areas of the County are neglected. (See page 17-18) There will be no new CSA 9 Projects in 2020-2025 because the money was all spent disproportionately on these two projects for the benefit of developers.

*Project #1* in Aptos Village has gifted \$7,392,194 to improve the area in order to support the Aptos Village Project subdivision developers. Phase 1 of this work paid to move the bus stop on Soquel Drive to a less-convenient location for the public so that the developers can create a new connector gateway entrance from Soquel Drive. There were no new bike lanes added to Trout Gulch in this project.

Phase 2 of the work, which has just begun, will erase the existing bike lane on a critical portion of westbound Soquel Drive, remove a significant amount of necessary on-street parking for existing businesses, and remove seven parking places from the parking lot owned by Parish Publick House, a popular existing restaurant, in order to create a turn lane from Soquel Drive to Aptos Creek Road. This publicly-funded improvement is in fact a mitigation for the Aptos Village Project's phase 2 subdivision.

It is difficult to understand why the County Public Works Department has prioritized such an unbalanced allocation of CSA 9 funding to this area, at the expense of funding critical projects in other areas of the CSA 9 sphere of taxpayers. Why is there no similar relief for residents in Seacliff whose safety would be greatly improved with a dedicated center turn lane on State Park Drive and Seacliff Drive, where many accidents have occurred? If CSA 9 has a countywide sphere, why are there no projects in the unincorporated areas near Watsonville or Davenport? Why isn't any CSA 9 revenue being used for the Rio del Mar drainage improvement project, or to create bike lanes and sidewalks along Spreckles Drive, leading from the Aptos Village to Rio del Mar ?

*Project #2* similarly is a large CSA 9 expenditure of \$1,094,113 to install a traffic light at Robertson and Soquel Drive in Soquel Village. This traffic light is a traffic mitigation for the Nissan Dealership Project developer at Soquel Drive and 41st Avenue and is yet another gift of public money to support a large developer. Although not described in the narrative, *Project #2* most likely also includes removing on-street parking on eastbound Soquel Drive for existing Soquel Village businesses and remove the existing bike lane in order to create a new traffic turn lane onto Porter Street as yet another traffic mitigation for the Nissan Dealership Project developer.

**3) All CSA 9 Zones are in fiscal deficit with no clear explanation of how the taxpayer revenues have been spent.**

This is a disturbing problem that has been brought forth in the Findings, yet not at all addressed in the Recommendations. Simply listing "DPW Services" and "Building and Improvements" is not transparent, and there is no detailed description of what benefit the expenses brought to the affected property owners paying the assessments. (See page 15)

I very much appreciate LAFCO staff recommendations that (page 19) the County Dept. of Public Works (DPW) create and maintain a better information portal for the CSA 9 affected property owners with webpage improvements.

*"The County's website offers limited resources involving CSA 9 and it is difficult to locate certain information or background material. LAFCO Staff Recommendation: It may be beneficial for the County to include links to staff reports or other supporting documents related to the annual rates, capital improvement projects or other useful information. Additionally, the webpage should include all past and future LAFCO service reviews involving the CSA as additional resource material."*

I have attached screen shots of the current DPW website and the scant information available on CSA informational links.

Zone A expenditures for streetlighting are \$2,339,119 with a 2019-2020 deficit of \$1,770,873 (Figure 7 on page 26 and Table L on page 29) Why did expenditures increase by nearly five-fold in 2019/2020? "FY 2019-20 Budget includes a significant increase in three key budget line items: Services & Supplies, Fixed Assets, and Appropriations for Contingencies." There is no information available to the public to explain this.

Zone B expenditures for Live Oak School crossing guards shows a significant increase from \$15,280 in 2019/2019 to \$49,319 in 2019/2020, and no students were in school for the last three months of the school year, due to COVID-19 shutdown. (See Figure 11 on page 33) This brings about a \$37,611 deficit. (Table N on page 35) however, how can there be a deficit when every year previous, the revenues consistently exceeded expenditures? (page 33)

Zone C expenditures in 2019/2020 exceeded revenues to create \$3,404,309 deficit (page 42) Why are agricultural parcels charged the same rate as commercial/school/church (\$113.90) if they do not generate large amounts of plastic, such as do hoop-house and strawberry growing operations? (page 40)

Zone D expenditures for countywide road maintenance in 2019/2020 seemed quite stable, but repeat a chronic deficit, \$120,354 pattern (page 49)

Zone E expenditures for Live Oak improvements in 2019/2020 increase nearly five-fold without explanation to \$49,397 (page 53) to cause a \$10,551 deficit (page 56) Why have revenues decreased by 4%, according to the audit?

Zone F expenditures for Soquel Village parking lot improvements were nearly doubled at \$84,232 (page 60) without explanation, creating a deficit of \$10,551 (page 62)

#### **4) Population Growth Projections and Confusing Population Numbers in Countywide CSA 9 Spheres.**

*"Under this slow growth model, LAFCO staff projects that CSA 9's entire population in 2035 will be approximately 153,000."* (page 22)

However, CSA 9 Zone D Countywide Road Maintenance 2035 population projection is 140,704 (page 44)

#### **5) Disadvantaged Communities**

The report discusses disadvantaged communities (page 22):

*"...staff's analysis indicates that there is one area in CSA 9 designated as a disadvantaged unincorporated community. This area is located within the Freedom County Sanitation District. However, CSA 9 is not subject to SB 244 because it does not provide water, sewer, or fire service."*

What about Live Oak? My understanding is that areas of Live Oak are disadvantaged, yet a number of the CSA 9 Zones assess these property owners so the burden is cumulative.

In closing, I respectfully urge LAFCO Commissioners not to simply rubber-stamp this critical CSA 9 Service and Sphere Review without incorporating the following recommendations to the Board of Supervisors to direct County Department of Public Works to:

- 1) Create and maintain links on the DPW website homepage to a CSA 9 webpage that will provide transparent and accurate information with simple explanations of expenditures for the public to review;
- 2) Hold well-noticed public meetings annually with affected property owners in the area of the County where the CSA Zone is located, at a time when working people can attend, and on a rotating location for the CSA 9 countywide fee areas; and
- 3) Stop gifting public money for large projects that disproportionately benefit developers and leave no money for other projects that benefit the greater good of those paying the fees. Developers must pay for all traffic mitigations and improvements that are caused by and will benefit their projects.

A better level of transparency is sorely needed, and I hope that your actions to amend the LAFCO staff's recommendations will help correct these problems. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Becky Steinbruner  
3441 Redwood Drive  
Aptos, CA 95003