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Contra Costa LAFCO seeks one special individual

By Nick Marnell

If you made a new year's resolution to become more active in local government, an alternate public seat with the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission may be just what you are looking for.

According to statute, LAFCO is an independent agency created by the state of California, charged with encouraging orderly growth, discouraging urban sprawl and preserving agricultural and open space lands. The commission meets these objectives by regulating the boundaries of cities and special districts and conducting municipal services reviews and other special studies.

Lamorinda residents may be familiar with the commission's objective of regulating special district boundaries, as the city of Lafayette considered seceding from the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District in 2013 and briefly discussed annexation by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. Had the city and the two districts worked out the details of the planned detachment and annexation, MOFD or the city would have submitted an application to LAFCO for approval.

"LAFCO would consider the impact on the government agencies, and would look out for the best interests of the residents of Contra Costa County," said Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin, a LAFCO commissioner since 2010. Tatzin said that most of the applications that LAFCO receives deal with annexations and consolidations. If LAFCO doesn't agree with the submitted terms, it would send the parties back to restructure the deal or to rethink the entire process. In rare events, LAFCO is sued over its decision. "LAFCO doesn't lose many of those lawsuits," Tatzin said.

Contra Costa LAFCO comprises seven voting members and four alternates. These include two members from the Board of Supervisors, two members from municipal councils, two members from independent special district boards and one public member, plus one alternate in each sector. Alternate members participate in meetings, but vote only when the regular member is absent or has a conflict of interest. The alternate public member recently resigned, hence the current opening.

Candidates face few rigid requirements. Lou Ann Texiera, LAFCO executive officer, said that since the alternate public member is a public official, that person must fill out a standard annual financial disclosure statement with the California Fair Political Practices Commission. The alternate public member may not be an elected public official or a member of a special district board.

"I'm not set on a certain type of person, other than someone who is willing to invest the time required, is interested in planning, land use, public safety and healthcare, and has a strong sense of fiscal responsibility," said District 2 Supervisor and LAFCO Commissioner Candace Andersen.

Tatzin stressed that public sector experience is not required of those applying for the alternate public position. "You have got to be comfortable looking out for what's best for the residents of Contra Costa County," repeated Tatzin, a member of the LAFCO ad hoc committee that will interview candidates and recommend finalists to the commission.

Details of the position, including an application, are listed on the Contra Costa LAFCO website.

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[back](#)

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