

# Bureaucratic quagmire

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## Nipomo annexation sparks anger, confusion

By Jerry Bunin  
Telegram Tribune

Angry Nipomo officials and citizens plan to ignore a Local Agency Formation Commission decision reached Thursday during an intense public hearing on five annexation requests.

People favoring the Summit Station annexation were frustrated and disappointed.

They accused LAFCO officials of not listening, of having their minds made up before anyone spoke and of causing problems rather than fixing them.

The commission and staff were the main speakers against the annexations and for an environmental study that area residents called expensive, time-consuming, unfair and unnecessary.

Nipomo Community Services District Chairman David Manriquez said his colleagues already decided to provide water to the 175-home Summit Station area without doing the environmental study.

During the tumultuous 3½-hour meeting, Supervisor Evelyn Delany suddenly jumped up and left silently when Ryder Ray, Nipomo services district general manager, spoke sharply to her.

He got progressively unhappier during the hearing as Commissioners Craig Pritchard and Duane Picanco seemed to question his skills, leadership and knowledge and implied the district didn't know what it was doing.

Ray and Summit residents, who asked the district to annex the area because of a severe water crisis, were astonished that commissioners feared the district wanted to annex too much land and could cause more growth and demand for water than the district could handle.

The district doesn't control growth in Nipomo, Ray said, noting the county regulates land use in the unincorporated community.

LAFCO Deputy Executive Officer Paul Hood, a county employee, told a reporter that LAFCO isn't a county agency and had to deal with Nipomo district because it was the applicant and the county Planning Department wasn't.

The district has grown by 72 percent in the last 10 years, Hood said, and the current 8,900 population could hit 15,000 in eight years.

Dianne Raynor, a Summit homeowner, said her neighbors moved to the rural area to avoid high-density living and want to be annexed so they can have enough water to keep their lifestyle, not because they want to subdivide and develop their land.

"Why require an EIR for simply bringing water into an area?" she

many could afford, several speakers noted.

"We don't want your sympathy," said Summit resident Eugene Kaye, "we want a solution. If we can't get one today, we're going elsewhere for water."

He noted the irony of commissioners worrying about the size of the annexation since the homeowners only wanted to add about 300 acres to the district. The commission staff told them the application should include 1,900 more acres between the current district boundaries and Summit Station.

Homeowners from the BlackLake Golf Resort also had complaints.

They sat quietly until the end and then almost didn't get a chance to speak when a flustered LAFCO Chairman Chuck Comstock suddenly closed the hearing because the audience got unruly.

The resort residents said they just learned a few days ago that the district applied nearly 90 days ago to annex them. Neither the county Engineering Department nor the district told them about the plan.

Laughter erupted in the audience when Hood reported not knowing why the district wanted to annex the resort. Hood also claimed the annexation could cause growth.

Ray said county engineering, which was notified about the meeting Thursday but wasn't represented, asked the district to take over the resort's water and sewer system.

The area is already entirely developed, and the district only applied to annex the 430 acres because county officials asked for it, said Ray, a BlackLake resident.

"My understanding is that the county wanted out of the sewer and water business," he said, adding that the district paid the LAFCO application fee because the county didn't want to.

When Delany wanted the EIR done before voting on the annexation, Ray told the county official that the district won't pay for it. "We'll send the bill to the county. Let them pay for it."

Delany then left, joining Supervisor David Blakely who had already departed for another engagement. Comstock abruptly closed the hearing, and the three remaining commissioners voted not to make a decision on the resort for two months because the application wasn't complete.

After the hearing was closed and the vote taken, Comstock let a representative of the resort homeowners speak.

Comstock, mayor of Grover City,

information he requested and needed.

Ray said the district has the capacity for 3,600 acre-feet of water, currently uses 1,400 acre-feet and will need 5,200 acre-feet by the year 2020, when the community is fully developed.

Hood said later that Ray's data was incomplete. "NCSO provided three pages of sketchy information for all five annexations."

Hood's statement astounded NCSO Chairman Manriquez.

"That's garbage," he told a reporter. "They requested sketchy information. We had to request their staff report. They weren't going to send it to us."

After getting the staff report, the district voted Wednesday to provide water to Summit Station on an emergency basis and to ignore LAFCO if it required an EIR.

"We're not (legally) subject to doing an EIR when going outside the district to supply existing parcels in an emergency situation," Manriquez said.

Summit Station resident Jack Carson said the emergency service is essentially permanent since the area's water situation was deteriorating long before the recent drought made it worse.

"When will it ever end?" a frustrated Carson said afterward. "This whole mess today could have been eliminated with a couple of meetings beforehand."

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"Why require an EIR for simply bringing water into an area?" she asked. "I may be a little slow but I can't understand why bringing a pipeline in will impact the environment."

Why, Raynor continued, should a public agency like the district do a full report when private companies like Cal Cities Water, regulated by the Public Utilities Commission rather than LAFCO, could serve the area without any environmental studies.

Cal Cities and another private water company separately offered to serve Summit Station, but they would require a much larger initial cost than

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Comstock, mayor of Grover City, represents the county's seven cities on the board, which is responsible for deciding how communities should grow, such as incorporating cities or annexing land to existing agencies.

Pritchard and Picanco, who represent the public on LAFCO, asked several times how the district could request annexing almost 2,800 acres to the 2,200-acre district when Ray didn't seem to know how much water he had or will need and where he will get it.

Ray said during the meeting and afterward that he'd given Hood all the

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