



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

Witnesses at Little Hoover Commission's August and October 2016 public hearings and participants at the November 2016 advisory committee proposed numerous recommendations for consideration. At various business meetings in 2017, the Commission discussed these and other potential recommendations. A summary of potential recommendations currently under consideration follows.

The June 22 roundtable discussion has been convened to consider if these recommendations are helpful, can be implemented or might have unintended consequences. The Commission also welcomes discussion on alternative suggestions. The primary focus of the roundtable meeting discussion will be on the recommendations related to governance and transparency, although potential recommendations focusing on climate change adaptation and healthcare districts also are included in this summary.

**GOVERNANCE - POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) The Legislature, in committee hearings and floor votes, as well as the Governor in bill signings, should curtail a growing practice of introducing bills to override LAFCO deliberative processes and decide local issues regarding special district boundaries and operations.
- 2) The Legislature should provide one-time grant funding to pay for specified LAFCO activities, particularly to fund certain critical Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs) and to incentivize LAFCOs or smaller special districts to develop and implement dissolution or consolidation plans with timelines for expected outcomes. This grant process potentially could be overseen by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. Funding should be tied to process completion and results, including enforcement authority for corrective action and consolidation.
- 3) Alternatively or additionally, augment the existing LAFCO funding formula by allocating a certain percentage of local property taxes to fund LAFCOs as suggested in testimony from the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions (CALAFCO).
- 4) After conducting a Municipal Service Review and finding dissolution or consolidation of special districts is warranted, provide LAFCOs the authority to initiate dissolutions or consolidations with a higher threshold for a public vote.
- 5) Require special districts to hold a public hearing on findings and recommendations after the completion of a Municipal Service Review.
- 6) The Legislature should provide LAFCOs the statutory authority to do reviews of inactive districts throughout California and dissolve them without the action being subject to protest and a costly election process. SB 448 (Wiekowski) would implement this recommendation. The bill was unanimously adopted by the Senate in May 2017, and currently is under consideration by the Assembly. As currently written, the bill also would require each county tax bill to list special district taxes and would require the State Controller, by 2019, to annually publish a list of all special districts in California.
- 7) The Legislature should strengthen LAFCOs by easing a process to add special district representatives to the 28 county LAFCOs where districts have no voice.

- 8) The Legislature should adopt legislation to give LAFCO members fixed terms, to ease political pressures in controversial votes and enhance the independence of LAFCOs.

### **TRANSPARENCY – POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) Every LAFCO website should provide basic information and links to all of the special districts within each county service area, including a standardized dashboard reflecting revenues from property taxes and user fees, debt service and fund balance changes.
- 2) Every special district should have a published policy for reserve funds, including the size and purpose of reserves and how they are invested.
- 3) Every special district should have a website that provides the following information in an easy-to-understand format:
  - ✓ Name, location, contact data
  - ✓ Services provided
  - ✓ Governing body, including election information and the process for constituents to run for board positions
  - ✓ Compensation details – total staff compensation, including salary, pensions and benefits
  - ✓ Compensation details for the five staff with highest compensation (including salary, benefits, pensions, loans, annual leave balances, annual travel expenses)
  - ✓ Budget (including revenues and expenditures, bond debt and the source of revenues, including fees, property taxes and other assessments, as well as other revenue)
  - ✓ Reserve fund policy
  - ✓ An explanation of how the revenue sources are consistent with state law and do not constitute a permissible tax
  - ✓ Geographic area served and demographic data based on available census data
  - ✓ Average and median customer fees and other customer charges
  - ✓ Description of relationship and coordination with other local government agencies
  - ✓ Copy of most recent Municipal Service Review
  - ✓ Copy of most recent annual report provided to the State Controller's Office
  - ✓ State and local agencies providing oversight of operations, compliance with state laws and financial reporting and audits and frequency of such reviews and links to the oversight bodies websites
- 4) The California Special Districts Association, working with experts in public outreach and engagement, should develop best practices for independent special district outreach to the public on opportunities to serve on boards and special district elections including election results and voter participation data.
- 5) The State Controller's Office should disaggregate information provided by independent special districts from dependent districts, nonprofits and joint powers authorities on its By the Numbers and Employee Compensation websites. (SB 448 would require the State Controller to list all special districts on its website by 2019.)
- 6) The State Controller's Office should standardize definitions of special district financial reserves for state reporting purposes.
- 7) The Secretary of State, working with county, city and special district representatives and the State Controller, should streamline or consolidate its public agency reporting requirements.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION – POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) The Legislature should place a requirement in statute that special districts formally include climate adaptation and climate mitigation as key operational considerations within their governing documents and missions.
- 2) The California Special Districts Association (CSDA), in conjunction with its member districts, should document and share climate adaptation experiences with the Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resilience Program’s adaptation information clearinghouse being established within the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR). Similarly, CSDA and member districts should step up engagement in the state’s current Fourth Assessment of climate threats, a \$5 million state research project designed to support the implementation of local adaptation activities. The CSDA also should promote climate adaptation information sharing among its members to help districts with fewer resources plan for climate impacts and take actions.
- 3) The Legislature should replicate statewide a program established by Oakland-based East Bay Municipal Utility District, in which real estate transactions trigger an inspection of sewer lines on the property and require repairs if broken. Or, as an alternative, it should commission a study of costs versus benefits – possibly by a university or the appropriate state department. Such a study would build long-term support, if feasible, for legislation.
- 4) State regulatory agencies should explore the beginnings of a new regulatory framework and adaptive approach that incorporates moveable baselines when defining a status quo as climate impacts mount.
- 5) The California Special Districts Association, and special districts, as some of the closest-to-the-ground local governments in California, should step up public engagement on climate adaptation, and inform and support people and businesses to take actions that increase their individual and community-wide defenses.
- 6) The California Special Districts Association and special districts should lead efforts to seek and form regional partnerships to maximize climate adaptation resources and benefits.

### **HEALTHCARE DISTRICTS – POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) The Legislature should work with the Association of California Healthcare Districts to enact proposals the association developed in 2016 to accomplish these two objectives:
  - ✓ Update the 1945 legislative “practice acts” that enabled voters to create local hospital districts, renamed healthcare districts in the early 1990s. Experts widely agree that statutory language in the acts no longer reflects rapid changes in healthcare during the past half century, especially regarding roles of healthcare districts without hospitals.
  - ✓ Make healthcare districts directly respond to local healthcare needs by conducting needs assessments every three years and demonstrate annually how they are addressing those needs. This information will be shared with the local LAFCO that oversees the district.
- 2) The Legislature, which has been increasingly inclined to override local LAFCO processes to press changes on healthcare districts, should defer these decisions to LAFCOs, which in statute already have that responsibility.
- 3) The Association of California Healthcare Districts and its member districts should step up efforts to define and share best practices among themselves.