

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY COMMISSION
ROOM 163, HALL OF ADMINISTRATION / 500 WEST TEMPLE / LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012 / 974-1491

December 14, 1976

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Board of Directors
West Los Angeles County
Resource Conservation District
6950 Hayvenhurst Avenue, Room 108-B
Van Nuys, California 91406

Directors of the Board:

SUBJECT: OPERATION OF THE WEST LOS ANGELES COUNTY RESOURCE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT (WLACRCD)

This report summarizes my remarks made to the Board of Directors at the meeting December 7. The study was conducted at the request of the Santa Clarita Valley Homeowners Concerned About Taxes. During the course of approximately three weeks, I conducted 19 interviews with concerned individuals associated with WLACRCD or authorities experienced in conservation work. A list of the persons interviewed is attached.

I also reviewed pertinent reports and documents, particularly those involving budgets, expenditures, and audits of the district. Following is a summary of my findings, together with a recommendation for improved management of the district in the future.

Findings

1. As the LAFCO staff report concluded, under present State law there is no legal basis for dissolving the district. Since the Board has

been meeting regularly, deciding on projects, and dispensing funds, the only possible basis for dissolution is that 'lthe board of directors has failed to furnish or provide services or facilities of substantial benefit to residents, land owners, or property within the district."

While one may question some projects which the district has financed, the soil conservation survey alone meets the requirement of "substantial benefit." Further, the charge of mismanagement does not provide a legal ground for dissolution.

2. There is evidence in the past of mismanagement, or at least of the lack of effective management. Problems have occurred in four areas:

Office Management - Several persons interviewed reported that the previous clerk was incompetent and irresponsible. I have not verified this information directly by examination of office documents. However, the fact that the district hired Ann Carroll to type the soil conservation survey report for the period from October, 1974, until February, 1976, while the previous clerk was still employed provides support for this conclusion. This problem is now resolved. All persons familiar with Mrs. Carroll's work commended her for her diligence and the quality and high productivity of her work.

Budgeting - The district has until this year consistently over budgeted for its operating expenses. The Auditor-Controller has twice warned the district in his annual audits - 1973 and 1975 - of this practice which has resulted in unnecessary accumulation of funds amounting to over \$228,000 in cash alone. The decision by the Board of Directors not to levy taxes this year was therefore an appropriate and responsible action. The need to levy taxes in the next two or three years should also be reviewed carefully.

Funding - A number of the persons interviewed criticized the district for acting as a funding agency to other government entities. Others, however, defended the funded projects, particularly the tree planting projects, for their environmental benefit in addition to the assistance they gave to unemployed individuals.

Programs - In the past the district has failed to function effectively in several significant conservation areas. In this respect, the program of the Topanga-Las Virgenes Resource Conservation District provides a good model to follow. In addition to a comprehensive soil conservation survey, it has worked actively in other important areas, particularly land use planning and zoning, public education, and obtaining assistance from the Soil Conservation Service to individual cooperators on erosion control and soil protection. The members of your board are familiar with these programs.

Recommendations

I believe most of the problems which have hindered effective operation of the district could be eliminated or substantially reduced by hiring an executive officer or district manager with appropriate background and technical expertise in conservation work. Whether the position should be part time or full time would need to be determined, but perhaps a part time assignment would be appropriate at the beginning. With such assistance, the Board could establish active programs developing district wide comprehensive conservation plans reviewing land use plans and requests for zoning changes or variances, reviewing environmental impact reports, conducting continuous public education, particularly at the schools, and securing the aid of the Soil Conservation Service to assist individual cooperators. As I emphasized in my presentation, without appropriate staff support, it is extremely

difficult for a board or committee to gather the information and prepare the necessary analyses and reports that experienced staff can provide.

I was impressed with the sincerity and concern of the board in making the district effective. I hope in the future that you can demonstrate to the community that your work is significant and results in substantial benefits to homeowners and landholders.

Sincerely,

BURKE ROCHE
Executive Secretary

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Attachment