




ALAMEDA
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

NAVIGATING GROWTH

**A Guide to
Local Agency Formation Commissions**

INTRODUCTION TO LAFCO | MAY 2025



The sun rises over
San Francisco, Oakland,
and the rest of the bay

HISTORY:

Metropolitan Area Problems



Vessels and
cranes at the
Port of Oakland
container terminal
in Oakland

In 1959, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr. appointed the Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems. The Commission's charge was to study and make recommendations on the "misuse of land resources" and the growing complexity of local governmental jurisdictions.

The Governor did this in response to California experiencing dramatic growth in population and economic development after World War II.

With this boom came a demand for housing, jobs, and public services. To accommodate this demand, the state approved the formation of many new local government agencies, often with little forethought as to the ultimate governance structures in a given region. The lack of coordination and adequate planning led to a multitude of overlapping, inefficient jurisdictional and service boundaries, and the premature conversion/loss of California's agricultural and open-space lands.

The Commission's recommendations on local governmental reorganization were introduced in the Legislature in 1963, resulting in the creation of Local Agency Formation Commissions, or "LAFCO."

LAFCO LAW: A Brief History

After
WWII

California experiences a post-war population boom. Housing and industry needs lead to the rapid creation or expansion of many cities and special districts. Without oversight, the results are often overlapping and inefficient services, at the cost of valuable agricultural land.

1959

Governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, Sr. forms the Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems (CMAP) to study and recommend solutions for the "misuse of land resources" and the growing complexity of local governmental jurisdictions.

1960

CMAP issues recommendations urging for a local governmental reorganization.

1963

Using the CMAP recommendations, the Knox-Nisbet Act is created. It creates Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs) and provides governance for the formation of new cities and special districts.

1985

The Knox-Nisbet Act, the District Reorganization Act, and the Municipal Organization Act are consolidated into the Cortese Knox Local Government Reorganization Act of 1985.

1997

The Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century forms to consider city, county, and special district boundary laws and takes testimony from around the state.

2000

LAFCOs gain independence as a state agency when the Cortese Knox Herzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (CHK) is passed in response to recommendations made in "Growth Within Bounds," the final report of the Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century.

ALAMEDA COUNTY TODAY

813

Square Miles

14

Cities

29

Special Districts

1.6M

2020 Population

1.9M

Projected Population
In 2050

Unincorporated Communities

Ashland, Castlewood, Castro Valley, Cherryland,
Fairview, Happy Valley, Hayward Acres, Hillcrest Knolls,
Rement Tract, San Lorenzo, and Sunol

Wildflowers
on Mission Peak,
Fremont

WHAT ARE LAFCOs?

You probably never heard about them



◀ LAFCOs are state-mandated quasi-judicial agency



▲ They were created by the California Legislature to control the boundaries of cities and most special districts



▲ LAFCOs are directed to achieve three main purposes:

- Discourage urban sprawl
- Encourage orderly government and development
- Preserve agricultural and open space lands



◀ There is an independent LAFCO in every county



▲ LAFCOs commissioners are local representatives that are not state-appointed, thus keeping local control within their respective counties



◀ Commissions have ability to adopt their own policies to fit local needs



▲ LAFCO base decisions on data-driven analysis, considering things like population and land use patterns, socioeconomic conditions, present and projected municipal service needs, and the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery



◀ They hold agencies accountable

LAFCO JURISDICTION

Countywide

14

Cities

Alameda
Albany
Berkeley
Dublin
Emeryville
Fremont
Hayward
Livermore
Newark
Oakland
Piedmont
Pleasanton
San Leandro
Union City

29

Special Districts

DEPENDENT SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Alameda County Fire Department
Alameda County Flood & Water Conservation District
Alameda County Flood & Water Conservation District Zone 7
Castle Homes CSA (R-1982-1)
Castlewood CSA (R-1967-1)
Emergency Medical Services CSA (EM-1983-1)
Estuary Bridges (B-1988-1)
Extended Police Protection CSA (PP-1991-1)
Five Canyons (PW-1994-1)
Lead Abatement (LA-1991-1)
Morva CSA (R-1982-2)
Public Works Extended Services CSA (PW-2006-1)
Street Lighting CSA (SL-1970-1)
Vector Control Services District CSA (VC-1984-1)

INDEPENDENT SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Alameda County Mosquito Abatement District
Alameda County Resource Conservation District
Alameda County Water District
Castro Valley Sanitary District
City of Alameda Healthcare District
Dublin San Ramon Services District
East Bay Municipal Utility District
East Bay Regional Park District
Eden Township Healthcare District
Fairview Fire Protection District
Hayward Area Recreation and Park District
Livermore Area Recreation and Park District
Oro Loma Sanitary District
Union Sanitary District
Washington Township Healthcare District dba Washington Hospital Healthcare System
Zone 7 Water Agency*

LAFCO DOES NOT REGULATE:

- County boundary lines
- Community facilities
- School or college districts
- Other agencies such as JPAs or improvement districts
- Bridge or highway districts
- Assessment districts

THE COMMISSION

State law dictates LAFCO composition. The Alameda LAFCO is composed of two county supervisors selected by the Board of Supervisors; two city council representatives selected by a majority of the mayors in the county; two special district board members selected by the special district selection committee; and one public member selected by the other six members. There is an alternate for each category – city, county, special district, and public.

These members are all required by State law to think with their LAFCO “hats” and represent the interests of the public at large – not their elected positions.

Jack Balch

City Member
City of Pleasanton Mayor

John Marchand

City Member
City of Livermore, Mayor

Sherry Hu

City Member, Alternate
City of Dublin

Ralph Johnson

Vice Chair Special District
Member
Castro Valley Sanitary
District

Mariellen Faria

Special District Member
Eden Township Healthcare
District

Peter Rosen

Special District
Member, Alternate
Hayward Area Recreation
and Park District

Nate Miley

County of Alameda
District 4 Board of
Supervisor

David Haubert

County of Alameda
District 1 Board of
Supervisor

Lena Tam

County of Alameda,
Alternate
District 3 Board of
Supervisor

Sblend Sblendorio

Public Member

Bob Woerner

Public Member, Alternate



Berkeley
Skyline, including
Sather Tower, and
International House,
with San Francisco
Bay in the
background.

LAFCO STAFF

Rachel Jones

Executive Director


April Raffel

Commission Clerk

Andrew Massey

County Counsel

- LAFCO contracts with County for support services: Assessor, Auditor Controller, Records' Office, Clerk of the Board, Registrar of Voters, General Services Agency, Human Resource Services, Legal Counsel, Risk Management Unit, and Information Technology Department
- The Executive Officer takes policy direction from the Commission

A large circular inset image showing a vibrant green field of crops in Livermore. The field is filled with rows of young green plants, likely corn, under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the background, rolling green hills and several power line towers are visible.

A vibrant
green field of crops
in Livermore

LAFCO FUNDING

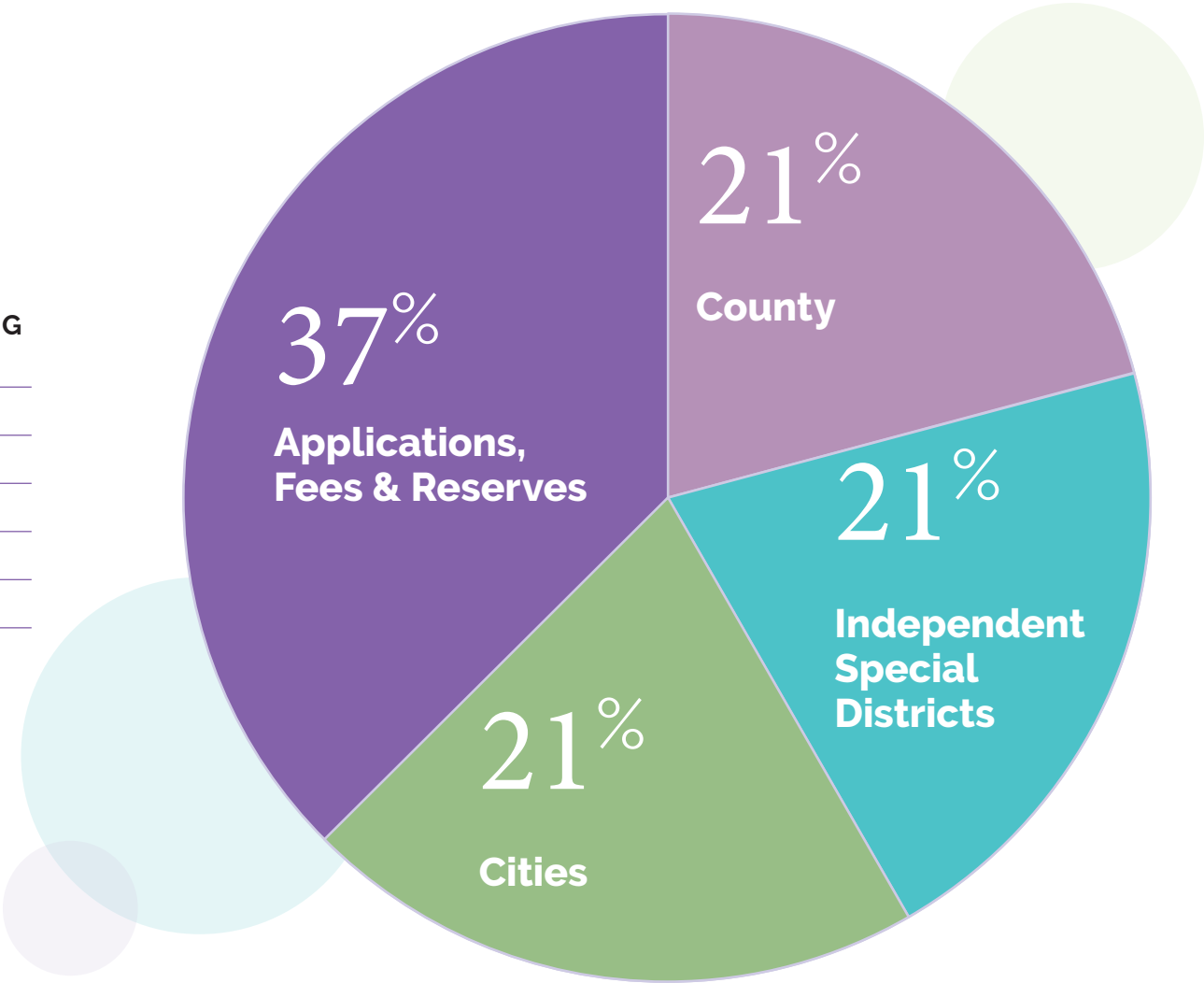
State law specifies the Commission's operating costs shall be divided into one-third increments between the (a) county, (b) cities, and (c) independent special districts.

\$910,855

2024-2025 Operating Budget

AGENCIES	OPERATING BUDGET
County	190,952
Independent Special Districts	190,952
Cities	190,952
Applications, Fees, & Reserves	338,000
Total Operating Budget	910,855

- LAFCOs are locally funded by county, cities, and special districts in equal apportionments
- Application fees help to offset expenses
- Must adopt a budget each fiscal year





Lake Del Valle at
Livermore, CA

MISSION STATEMENT

Alameda LAFCO provides oversight over local governments to make Alameda County a great place to live and work by balancing the preservation of agriculture and open space with provision of sustainable municipal services.

WHAT DO LAFCOs DO?

View towards
the towns of east bay,
San Francisco bay area
and Hayward

A PLANNING AGENCY

LAFCO plans for orderly growth and development by considering proposed **amendments to jurisdictional boundaries** of cities and special districts; and works collaboratively with local agencies on growth, preservation, governance and service issues by **conducting service reviews**, prior to **updating the spheres of influence** of cities and special districts once every five years, or as necessary.

Vineyard rows in
Livermore Valley



A REGULATORY AGENCY


LAFCO regulates the boundaries of cities and special districts. Boundary change proposals to LAFCO may include annexations to, or detachments from cities or districts; incorporation of new cities; formation of new districts; dissolution of districts; disincorporation of cities; or other changes such as consolidations and mergers of cities and districts.

LAFCO regulates service extensions of cities and special districts. Agencies are required to obtain LAFCO's approval prior to **extending services outside of their boundaries.**

Districts are required to obtain LAFCO's approval prior to exercising their power to **provide new or different services.**

Traffic passing
through downtown
Emeryville





An aerial
view of
Alameda Point,
with skyline of
San Francisco
across the Bay.

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

A Sphere of Influence designates an agency's probable future physical boundary and service area. It is territory that a city or special district will annex in the future. It is also the area where local government will build facilities and deliver services sometime in the future. A sphere of influence is often bigger than a local government's current jurisdiction.

DETERMINING A SPHERE

The Commission considers several factors in determining a sphere:

- Present and planned land uses
- Present and probable need for public facilities and services
- Present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services
- Existence of any social or economic communities of interest

The intent in preparing the written statements is to orient LAFCOs in addressing the core principles underlying the sensible development of local agencies consistent with the anticipated needs of the affected communities.



MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEWS

A **Municipal Service Review (MSR)** is a comprehensive study designed to better inform LAFCO, local agencies, and the community about the provision of municipal services.

Service reviews attempt to capture and analyze information about the governance structures and efficiencies of service providers, and to identify opportunities for greater coordination and cooperation between providers. The service review is a prerequisite to a sphere of influence amendment and may also lead a LAFCO to take other actions under its authority, such as reorganizations, like consolidations or dissolutions of local agencies.



Unusual snow
fall after winter storm
in Fremont, CA
one of the
Silicon Valley
communities

MSRS INFORM LAFCO AND LOCAL AGENCY DECISIONS

These MSRs must make recommendations and provide information on growth and population projections, present and planned capacity for an agency to provide service, the financial ability of an agency to provide services, the opportunity of shared facilities among agencies, accountability of agencies to the public, and other issues determined by the Commission, one example being how the agency plans to face climate change.

- Orderly growth: agencies and territory
- Future boundary changes
- Service delivery options
- Regional Transportation Plans

Turbines
in Altamont
Pass Wind Farm
near Livermore

LAFCOS CREATE PUBLIC VALUE

Sustainable Communities

Actively sync the development of local agencies and their municipal services to meet changing community needs and priorities.

Housing

Approval of boundary proposals or services often helps accommodate housing needs of all incomes and types.

Land Preservation

Redirects urban uses away from agricultural and open space lands to help preserve open spaces, parks, farmlands, and wildlife.

Economic Activity

Extends of services to agricultural lands to maintain economic vitality.

Accountability

Promotes public accountability and transparency of local agencies.



Pleasanton Ridge
Regional Park,
Alameda County

GET INVOLVED

There are many ways to stay informed and get involved in Alameda LAFCO.

Utilize The Website


The Alameda LAFCO website is your resource for news and announcements, meetings, policies & procedures, application materials, spheres of influence, municipal service reviews, special studies, and other resources.

CONTACT STAFF

Reach our Commissioners and Staff at <https://alamedalafco.org/contact-us/>.

ATTEND MEETINGS

Alameda LAFCO meetings are open to the public. Visit alamedalafco.org for a complete list of meetings and agendas.



Aerial photo
of downtown
Oakland California and
Lake Merritt