

DEPARTMENT OF
CITY PLANNING
200 N. SPRING STREET, ROOM 525
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012-4801
AND
6262 VAN NUYS BLVD., SUITE 351
VAN NUYS, CA 91401
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

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GABRIELE WILLIAMS
COMMISSION EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
(213) 978-1300

CITY OF LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA



JAMES K. HAHN
MAYOR

EXECUTIVE OFFICES

CON HOWE
DIRECTOR
(213) 978-1271
FRANKLIN P. EBERHARD
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
(213) 978-1273
GORDON B. HAMILTON
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
(213) 978-1272
ROBERT H. SUTTON
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
(213) 978-1274
FAX: (213) 978-1275
INFORMATION
(213) 978-1270
(818) 374-5050
www.lacity.org/PLN

DATE: April 6, 2005

TO: Honorable Ed Reyes
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Council

FROM: Con Howe 
Director of Planning
Los Angeles Department of City Planning

SUBJECT: Amendment to the Boundaries of the Sphere of Influence
CF-00-2206

BACKGROUND

On November 14, 2000, the City Council adopted a Motion (Bernson-Galanter, CF 00-2206) instructing the City Planning Department, with assistance from the Chief Legislative Analyst, to prepare an application to the Local Agency Formation Commission of the County of Los Angeles to amend the boundaries of the sphere of influence for the City of Los Angeles pursuant to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000. The sphere of influence is the geographic area in Los Angeles County that is determined to be the probable, ultimate physical boundaries and service area for the City of Los Angeles. The current boundary of the sphere for the City of Los Angeles is coterminous with the incorporation limits, as shown on Exhibit A.

BOUNDARY RECOMMENDATION

The requested northern boundary of the proposed sphere of influence amendment follows the natural ridgeline of the San Gabriel and Santa Susana Mountains. Staff recommends that the boundary of the sphere be expanded to include the areas near Dayton Canyon between the Ventura County Line and the City of Los Angeles on the west, north along the Ventura County line to the ridgeline of the Santa Susanna



Mountains, turning east following the ridgeline of the Santa Susana Mountains (west of the 405 Freeway) to the limits of the City of Santa Clarita at the Sierra Highway. The boundary then follows the limits to the south and then east, and continues to follow the ridge line eastward to the boundary of the Angeles National Forest before turning southward following the boundary of the National Forest and the unincorporated areas to a terminus south of Little Tujunga Road. In some areas, these proposed boundaries follow the current boundary with deviations to include unincorporated areas between the City of Los Angeles and Ventura County and between the City of Los Angeles and the Angeles National Forest. Along the northern segment, the border was chosen to include unincorporated areas in the San Fernando Valley that are south of the natural ridgeline of the Santa Susana Mountains as shown on Exhibit B. Slight modifications were made to account for ownership of parcels. The ridgeline separates the San Fernando valley from the Santa Clarita Valley and defines the northern edge of the drainage basin for the San Fernando Valley. Water flowing from the southern face of the ridge feeds the Los Angeles River and the valley aquifer. Municipal services that are gravity driven such as sewer service can be provided more efficiently by the local agency located downward from the ridge.

Portions of the Los Angeles River watershed that are in the proposed sphere of influence help mitigate flooding, maintain water quality and quantity, recycle nutrients, and provide an important habitat for plants and animals. The City Council established the Los Angeles Ad Hoc River Committee in June 2002 to focus on major revitalization efforts for the Los Angeles River including opportunities for parks, trails, recreation, nature, neighborhood identity, jobs, community development, tourism, and civic pride. One of the guiding principles for the Los Angeles River is viewing the river as an important natural resource with emphasis on the ecology of the river, flood management, and sustainability. Encompassing the watershed for the Los Angeles River in the sphere of influence for the City of Los Angeles is both logical and paramount to the continued success of revitalization efforts.

The Los Angeles River watershed is an important boundary on which to base the Sphere of Influence as it directly impacts the delivery of a wide range of services related to stormwater and water quality. Rain that falls within the unincorporated portions of the Los Angeles River watershed eventually passes through the City of Los Angeles. Any activities that generate water-borne pollutants regulated by the State will affect the City. The City of Los Angeles settled two lawsuits, in 2002 and 2003, related to State requirements concerning TMDL requirements in stormwater flows. Voters in 2004 passed a \$500 million bond to address stormwater needs and general environmental enhancements. Providing the City a Sphere of Influence over this area improves the City's ability to provide stormwater management services to the area and ensures more efficient, direct management responsibility for any pollutants that occur throughout the Los Angeles River watershed because there would be fewer governmental agencies with responsibility for that area.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT AREA

The proposed amendment area for the City's sphere of influence covers 19,242 acres, or slightly more than 30 square miles. Major ridgelines of the transverse Santa Susana Mountain Range are to the north and west, and metropolitan communities of the

Los Angeles Basin are to the south. Portions of Ventura County adjacent to the amendment area contain parklands, agricultural land uses and scattered single-family residences. Sunshine Canyon Landfill is adjacent to the area on the north. The project area is contiguous to portions of Council Districts 3, 12, 7 and 2 and community plan areas of Canoga Park – Winnetka - Woodland Hills - West Hills, Chatsworth - Porter Ranch, Granada Hills – Knollwood, Northridge, Sylmar, and Sunland - Tujunga - Shadow Hills - Lakeview Terrace - East La Tuna Canyon.

The land uses in the northern San Fernando Valley within the City of Los Angeles are classified mainly as Open Space or Minimum Residential with some Very Low and Low density Residential in the Porter Ranch area, as shown on Exhibit C. The land in the proposed amended area is designated by the County General Plan primarily as Non-Urban and Open Space. There are rural communities near Little Tujunga Road, and north of the 118 near the current western city border. Deerlake development has been approved north of the rural community of Twin Lakes. A small acreage of commercial and industrial developments exist at intersection of Interstate 210 and State Highway 118. Major arterial roads in the proposed amendment area include Interstate 5, Interstate 405, Interstate 210, State Highway 14, State Highway 118, and Little Tujunga Road. Metrolink runs through the proposed area between Interstate 5 and State Highway 14.

Mountain ridges of varying heights, canyons, and flat land define the topography of the proposed amendment area. It is largely undeveloped land and is within the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Zone—Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor, a system of natural lands that shelters wildlife and extends recreational opportunities in the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valley areas, as shown on Exhibit D. The northwestern portion of the proposed sphere of influence contains a Significant Ecological Area (SEA) as defined and delineated in conjunction with the Land Use and Open Space Elements of the County General Plan.

Major tributaries for the Los Angeles River originate on the southern slopes of the Santa Susana Mountains within the proposed sphere of influence for the City of Los Angeles. These include the Santa Susana Wash, Browns Canyon Wash, Limekiln Canyon Wash, Wilbur Creek, Aliso Canyon Wash, and Bull Creek. The headwaters of the Los Angeles River are in the Simi Hills, formed by Chatsworth Creek, Dayton Canyon Wash, Bell Creek and Calabasas. These tributaries provide an important habitat for plants and animals.

Recreation areas containing hiking, biking and equestrian trails are adjacent to and within the proposed amendment area. Parks include: Bell Canyon Park, Knapp Park, Roscoe-Valley Circle Park, Chatsworth Nature Preserve/Reservoir, Chatsworth Oaks Park, Rocky Peak Park, Michael D. Antonovich Regional Park at Joughin Ranch, Brown's Canyon Park, Moonshine Canyon Park, Limekiln Canyon Park, Porter Ridge Park, O'Melveny Park, Santa Clarita Woodlands Park, Stetson and Wilson Canyon debris basins, Wilson Canyon Park, and Veterans Memorial County Park. The Angeles National Forest is north of the proposed sphere east of the 405 freeway.

PURPOSE OF THE SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

A sphere of influence is a planning tool or guide for the probable, ultimate physical boundary and municipal service area of a local governmental agency. In general, the purpose of a sphere of influence is to:

1. Facilitate orderly growth in the unincorporated areas adjacent to a city;
2. Coordinate property development standards, and encourage timely provision of adequate and essential services, such as parks, recreation, and flood control and, if urbanization of unincorporated areas occurs, streets, sewer, water, solid waste disposal, and police and fire protection;
3. Promote cooperative planning between the city and county, various public/private service entities, major landowners, and facilitate proper implementation of their respective general or master plans;
4. Assist all government agencies and private entities in any planning and scheduling for extension of their facilities and services to assure it will be done in a logical, orderly, and economical manner, thus avoiding expensive and unnecessary duplication of effort; and
5. Promote, assist, and enhance property owners' ability to plan comprehensively, and with reasonable assurance for the ultimate use and development of their lands.

IMPACT OF THE SPHERE AMENDMENT

Historically, the City of Los Angeles has provided services to the proposed amendment area. The ridgeline of the Santa Susana Mountains and the Angeles National Forest provide natural dividing lines between Los Angeles and the jurisdictions to the north. The City has an extensive network of police, fire, sanitation, and other services in operation adjacent to this areas and logically would provide the most effective service to these areas. The Los Angeles Police Department provides police service, and the Los Angeles City Fire Department provides fire and paramedic service within the municipal boundaries and also serve the surrounding unincorporated area of Los Angeles.

An expansion of the City's sphere of influence would formalize a procedure for the County to refer proposed actions and proposals for unincorporated areas to the City for review and comment. It is imperative that the City have a role in any proposals for development of upstream areas since increased urbanization would tax the carrying capacity of the Los Angeles River by decreasing permeable area, resulting in a rise in inflow peaks and volumes into the river. Several of the tributaries that are in the sphere amendment area are currently classified in the 500 year flood plain. The City has a need to assure adequate flood protection, reduce the velocity of storm water and runoff, and keep stormwater pollution levels below the total maximum daily loads.

An amended sphere of influence would allow the City of Los Angeles review authority for projects located inside Los Angeles County, outside of the City Limits, but within the

sphere area. Even though procedures for interagency referrals would change, the existing jurisdictional authority for projects within the unincorporated area would remain with the County of Los Angeles. No environmental plans or policies will be altered due to modifications of the City's sphere of influence boundary, nor will changes occur to jurisdictional authorities. An Initial Study was prepared and it was determined that amending the sphere of influence would have no environmental impacts. A Negative Declaration was published for the amendment to the sphere of influence and is included as Exhibit E.

Amending the boundary for the sphere of influence will have no effect on development—it will be neither easier nor harder. The primary effect of the boundary change will be to establish which government entity is the logical service provider. Becoming part of the sphere of influence does not change any processes or procedures. Any impact would come if an area is annexed, which can be requested without the amended sphere. Currently, unincorporated areas are governed by Los Angeles County; if annexed to the City of Los Angeles, they would be governed by the regulations and processes of the City. Any territories to be annexed would be pre-zoned. In the pre-zoning process, the City is required to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act and follow the same procedures and allow the same public comment as for a change in zone.

Although an expanded sphere of influence would facilitate processing requests for annexation from property owners and residents of inhabited areas, modification to a sphere of influence is not an annexation, nor does modification to an adopted sphere initiate annexation proceedings. No changes to jurisdictional boundaries, regulatory authority, public or private services, tax revenue distribution, or land use would ensue as a result of adopting a sphere of influence. The proposed area to be included in the amended sphere of influence of the City of Los Angeles will remain as part of the unincorporated portion of the County of Los Angeles. Future uses must be consistent with the General Plan and Zoning of Los Angeles County. A requirement of Government code Section 56425 is that any land included within the sphere of influence of the City of Los Angeles must be consistent with all parts of the General Plan for Los Angeles. No one part takes precedence. Land Use designations and zoning for the City of Los Angeles are assigned if and when the land in the sphere is annexed.

Because no development is being proposed as part of this project, the modifications to the City of Los Angeles's existing sphere of influence boundary will not result in a direct impact upon open space. Parks and recreation services provided within the amended sphere area would remain under the direct influence of the County of Los Angeles. The proposal will therefore not result in an impact to the quantity of existing recreation opportunities currently provided throughout the San Fernando Valley. Decisions on development or providing open space will depend on ownership of the land and the desires of the owner within established regulatory requirements.

ROLE OF LAFCOs

LAFCOs exercise both regulatory and planning functions. They are responsible for annexations and detachments of territory to and/or from cities and special districts, incorporations of new cities, formations of new special districts, and consolidations, mergers, and dissolutions of existing districts. In addition, LAFCOs must review and approve contractual service agreements, determine spheres of influence for each city and district, and may initiate proposals involving district consolidation, dissolution, establishment of subsidiary districts, mergers, and reorganizations (combinations of these jurisdictional changes).

The major planning task of LAFCOs is the establishment of a sphere of influence for each local agency in its jurisdiction. Prior to 2000, the State of California approved the formation of many new local government agencies, often with little forethought as to the ultimate governance structures in a given region. Lack of coordination and adequate planning led to a multitude of overlapping, inefficient jurisdictional and service boundaries, and to the premature conversion/loss of California's agricultural and open-space lands. The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act established Local Agency Formation Commissions as the regulatory agencies with countywide jurisdiction. Their purpose was to discourage urban sprawl, while encouraging orderly and efficient provision of services such as water, sewer and fire protection.

In considering an application to amend a local agency Sphere of Influence, LAFCOs must consider and make written determinations with regard to the following factors:

1. The present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open space lands;
2. The present and probable need for public facilities and adequacy of public facilities and services in the area;
3. The present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of services that the agency provides or is authorized to provide; and
4. The existence of any social or economic communities of interest in the area, if the commission determines that they are relevant to the agency.

Upon adoption, LAFCOs use a sphere of influence as a factor in making determinations and decisions for proposals concerning cities or special districts and adjacent territories over which LAFCO has authority and jurisdiction. LAFCOs coordinate the orderly development of a community by reconciling the differences between city and county plans so that the most efficient urban service arrangements are created for the benefit of area residents and property owners.

LAFCO requires consistency with city general plans in adopting or amending a sphere of influence. The Commission, when establishing spheres of influence, considers joint City/County Specific Plans and factors such as density policies, development standards, geology, and future use. LAFCO also considers fiscal impacts of proposed sphere amendments. LAFCO has sole responsibility for establishing a city's sphere of influence. Further, LAFCO is not required to establish a sphere that is greater than the

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city's existing boundaries. Spheres of influence for cities and special districts may overlap when both agencies expect to provide service to the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Los Angeles Department of City Planning recommends that the City request an amendment to the boundaries of the sphere of influence for the City of Los Angeles as shown on Exhibit A attached hereto. Accordingly, it recommends that the City Council approve the application to the Local Agency Formation Commission of the County of Los Angeles to amend the sphere of influence pursuant to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, included as Exhibit F and adopt the Resolution included as Exhibit G.

cc: Honorable Wendy Gruel, District 2
Honorable Denis Zine, District 3
Honorable Jack Weiss, District 5
Honorable Tony Cardenas, District 6
Honorable Alex Padilla, District 7
Honorable Cindy Miscikowski, District 11
Honorable Greig Smith, District 12
Mr. John Wickham, Office of the Chief Legislative Analyst