

Farmland Working Group

Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.

Stanislaus
LAFCO



LOCAL AGENCY
FORMATION
COMMISSION

What in the world is LAFCO?

It’s a commission with the unusual name, Local Agency Formation Commission – LAFCO. It was authorized by the California State Legislature in 1963. All 58 counties in California have a LAFCO.

LAFCo is the most important agency in the county. Period. Why? Because only LAFCO can authorize when and where cities can expand “grow” their borders.

Stanislaus LAFCO has three main goals:

- 1. Encourage the orderly formation of local governmental agencies.
- 2. Preserve agricultural land resources
- 3. Discourage urban sprawl

Stanislaus LAFCO Commissioners

Commissioner	Member
Amy Bublak	City Member
Sue Zwahlen	City Member
Vito Chiesa	County Member
Terry Withrow	County Member
Bill O'Brien	Public Member
Charlie Goeken	Alternate City Member
Mani Grewal	Alternate County Member
Jami Aggers	Alternate Public Member

The makeup of the commission: two county members (supervisors), two city members (mayors and/or councilmembers) and one public member. Each commissioner has an alternate who can attend

and participate in discussions. An alternate commissioner votes only if the city, county or public member is absent.

Registered voters in Stanislaus County elect their county supervisors, mayors and council members. From those elected officials, four of the LAFCO commissioners are chosen. LAFCO’s Public position, and the alternate Public position, are the only members that are not elected officials, they are assigned to represent the “public.” The Public commissioner and alternate Public commissioner are selected by three votes of the Stanislaus LAFCO commissioners. All commissioner terms are four years.

While the LAFCO commissioners control how, when and where Stanislaus County’s nine cities expand their borders, it’s the voters in the county that select four of the five commissioners. Every time we vote for a mayor, council member or supervisor, we’re voting for an elected official who could, one day, be a LAFCO commissioner.

Your vote is important

Take time to know the candidate’s position on maintaining sustainable cities and the long-term protection of farmland.

Ask candidates their position on land-use. Does the candidate want to build in and up so you’re not paying for sprawl? Does the candidate have a commitment to a sustainable urban community? Does the candidate have a commitment to the long-term protection of prime ag land? Does the candidate want to direct urban expansion to the

poorest soils and protect the best food-producing ag land?

If you want Stanislaus County to remain a major ag county, ask questions that give you answers that are relevant.

Local elections are non-partisan

Rather than asking a candidate his/her political party, ask what the candidate’s platform is... Republicans, Democrats and Independents in the local political arena are dealing with local issues – taxes, transportation, roads, police and fire services – these are all connected to land use. Ask candidates their position on land-use. It doesn’t take long for cities to sprawl one into another while paving over the best ag land. Take time to think about the future you’ll leave the next generations. Stanislaus County can quickly become another Los Angeles County – once the nation’s most productive ag county – the no. 1 ag county in the United States.

Your city’s mayor and council members and the county’s supervisors are the potential LAFCO members and make the final decision on how and where your city grows, and if the county protects its ag land.

Stanislaus LAFCO Staff

Executive Officer Sara Lytle-Pinhey	Assistant Executive Officer Javier Camarena
Commission Clerk Jennifer Vieira	Legal Counsel Shaun Wahid



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Our Mission: To preserve the agricultural foundation of our region and promote smart growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and

FROM THE CHAIR



Every LAFCO in California’s 58 counties has one unique charge – In addition to the four elected officials that serve, LAFCOs include a public member to ensure citizen representation and a broader perspective in their decision-making, especially regarding boundary changes and local government organization. This public member serves as a voice for the general community.

On April 23, 2025, Stanislaus LAFCO elected a Public Member and an alternate Public Member for four-year terms on the commission. Twelve residents applied, eleven applicants were public, never having held the position of an elected official in Stanislaus County. One applicant was a former county supervisor and LAFCO member.

The call for applicants read:
Serving as a public member to LAFCO is a unique opportunity. Minimum qualifications

for appointment include: (1) being a resident of Stanislaus County; and (2) persons not currently an officer or employee of the County, or any city or special district with territory in Stanislaus County. A public member represents the public interest within the county as a whole.

All applicants were required to complete a questionnaire. Eleven of the candidates introduced themselves and addressed the LAFCO members prior to the vote.

Below are comments made by members prior to the vote:

“We’ve got a lot of people here tonight that are obviously very qualified individuals, passionate about this and want to do this job for the right reasons. And that’s what I always look at...” Supervisor Terry Withrow

“It warms my heart, the people wanting to be engaged because we talk about apathy all the time at the board — not getting people to get involved on local commissions... And, having so many people wanting to get involved it truly makes me feel really good about where we’re headed as a community.” Supervisor Vito Chiesa

Public member nomination:
“I was actually impressed with all of the candidates and all of their resumes, a lot of great experience. But you know, to me, the one that stands out is Bill O’Brien. All of his experience, not only actually on this commission but as a city or county member and I would nominate him for the full public member,” Charlie Goeken, Alternate City Member

“...okay, I kind of went over this ahead of time, I think you have such an advantage when you have some experience in land use, and again, I think there’s a lot of folks that can do the job... I’m going to agree with Mayor Goeken, or member Goeken, and I’m going to second Bill O’Brien, I think the experience is pretty exceptional.” Mayor Zwahlen, City Member

The selection of a former elected official, and former LAFCO member, completely ignores the purpose of seating a public member – engaging and educating “the public” about land use issues that serves the broader community.

For LAFCO’s voting members to stress the need for the public member to be knowledgeable about land use issues is disingenuous. Very

few elected officials come onto LAFCO with a background in land use. Few LAFCO members have served on a planning commission.

How do members become knowledgeable about land use? The Stanislaus LAFCO staff informs and educates the commissioners at meetings and through communications. How do new members learn about issues such as SOI (Sphere Of Influence), MSR (Municipal Service Review), Housing Numbers, CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act), etc.? They attend LAFCO meetings – they listen, they learn.

Holding one LAFCO position for the public is to engage the broader community by way of a public voice. It’s to give the four elected members a broader perspective in their decision-making. Selecting a former county supervisor and LAFCO member as the public member denied the broader community of a voice as well as the opportunity to learn about boundary changes and local government organization.

When was the last time the public member wasn’t a former elected official?

“Selecting a former county supervisor and LAFCO member as the public member denied the broader community of a voice as well as the opportunity to learn about boundary changes and local government organization.”

Stanislaus County LAFCO is seeking applications for a PUBLIC MEMBER

DEADLINE TO APPLY IS MARCH 28, 2025

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cityofmodesto Modesto Residents are encouraged to apply for a vacant public member position on the Stanislaus Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). Your participation will help shape the future of our community and surrounding region.

The deadline to apply is March 28, 2025

https://www.stanislauslafco.org/current_projects.shtm

Farmland Working Group



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A Plan for Ag

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