

LAFCo re-affirms 'zero sphere' for Harbor District

By Clay Lambert [clay@hmbreview.com] | Posted: Wednesday, July 15, 2015 5:13 pm

San Mateo County's Local Agency Formation Commission voted unanimously on Wednesday to reaffirm a decades-old finding that the San Mateo County Harbor District unduly burdens bayside taxpayers and duplicates some countywide services. But members stopped short of calling for the dissolution of the embattled special district.

In fact, despite a series of unanimous votes that accepted some damning conclusions, all five members of the commission expressed interest in letting a determined and revamped Harbor Commission fix its own shortcomings.

"There is a new board," said LAFCo member Michael O'Neill. "There were a lot of sins in the past, but I'd hate for the hammer to come down, so to speak."

O'Neill seemed to sum up the feelings of the five-member board, which had just heard testimony from Harbor Commission President Tom Mattusch, Commissioner Sabrina Brennan and a half-dozen other county residents who all called for patience.

Wednesday's vote in the San Mateo County Hall of Justice in Redwood City was the culmination of a painstaking and state-mandated process that included a consultant's report and attendant exhibits that sometimes seemed to leave even LAFCo commissioners a bit unsure about what they were voting on.

The vote merely re-affirms a finding that the district overlaps with other government agencies and is therefore inefficient. LAFCo made similar findings in 1977 and 2006, yet little changed with respect to governance at the district. Now as then, LAFCo staff recommended dissolving the district and turning over Pillar Point Harbor to San Mateo County. But millions in existing debt and an estimated \$17 million in deferred maintenance leave adjacent governments with little interest in taking on Pillar Point and Oyster Point harbors.

County Supervisor Don Horsley -- whose district includes Pillar Point Harbor -- sits on LAFCo. He suggested that he work with Harbor Commissioners over the next year or more to help prioritize suggestions that include better accounting practices, improved planning for capital expenditures and an



LAFCo vote comes down

Members of the Local Agency Formation Committee considered the San Mateo County Harbor District on Wednesday.
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end to years of dysfunction among staff and elected officials that were outlined in a recent civil grand jury report.

Mattusch was persuasive in his address to commissioners. He said the current harbor board had taken steps to improve data management, refinance its debt with the California Division of Boating and Waterways, adopt more reasonable user fees and to hire a professional general manager.

“The (Harbor Commission) can’t do that while fighting a dissolution process,” he said. “Come back in a year and see if I’ve been blowing smoke.”

LAFCo indicated it was prepared to do just that.

“If they do not (make progress,)” Horsley said, “I think the county would have to vote to dissolve the Harbor District.”