

LAFCO: Last Stop for the Dana Reserve

by Gianna Patchen and Andrew Christie



On Sept. 19, the San Luis Obispo Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) met to review the proposed annexation of the Nipomo [Dana Reserve development project](#) into the County, which would destroy more than 3,000 mature oak trees and related habitat in one of the region’s last remaining oak woodlands. Last April, the County Board of Supervisors, dismissing the concerns of the community and a community-developed alternative site plan, granted the project a development permit on a 3-2 vote despite its violation of dozens of County General Plan, Land Use Ordinance and tax sharing policies.

The Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club submitted comments to LAFCO urging the Commission to deny annexation of the development.

We noted that this project increases the likelihood of irreversibly overdrafting the aquifer and threatens water reliability and groundwater health in both the Nipomo Mesa aquifer and the Santa Maria basin. The County and developers have ignored the significant negative impacts to water supply, ecosystems, climate resiliency, fire safety, community health, and more.

The South County Advisory Council urged the County to adopt the Community Alternative Plan, which would make the development responsible and sustainable while still bringing needed housing to South County. This alternative was disregarded.

It is not a viable option to annex this development, especially with the preexisting "Severe Water Shortage Conditions" in Nipomo. The financial strain and threat to water reliability are unacceptable, especially when the Community Alternative Plan better serves the public good. Golden State Water Company raised concerns that the water service agreement (WSA) and the Environmental Impact Report's estimate of the Dana Reserve Project's water demand are unrealistic and grossly understated because they rely on future implementation of water conservation measures that far exceed the preexisting strict conservation measures that were implemented to achieve a 50% reduction of water use on the Nipomo Mesa.

The Water Resource Advisory Committee (WRAC) from the Northern Cities Management Area, representing water supplies of Arroyo Grande, Oceano, Pismo Beach and Grover Beach, has stated it does not believe "that the water supply is sufficient to support new development" as "groundwater demand has exceeded the available groundwater supply."

The Nipomo Mesa Management Area's Severe Water Shortage Conditions and the existing concern from local water authorities and experts is sufficient evidence that the Dana Reserve Project as it stands should not pass through LAFCO at this time.

The Santa Lucia Chapter commends the Nipomo Oak Alliance, Nipomo Action Committee, and South County Advisory Council for producing an alternative project design that would largely reduce the threats to water reliability and groundwater health, avoid the destruction of rare native chaparral habitat and a coastal oak woodland, reduce the project's greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants, reduce the excessive vehicle miles traveled (from 3,000 car trips a day to 1,700) and unplanned population growth (lowered from 4,500 to 2,600). The proposed alternative plan will bring the project into compliance with dozens of County land use policies and avoid multiple violations of the Land Use Ordinance, a significant improvement over the project as proposed. Denial of annexation is necessary for the County to move forward with a project that meets LAFCO's requirements for sustainable development.

LAFCO is expected to [vote on annexation](#) on Nov 14th. [A lawsuit challenging the project for violations of the California Environmental Quality Act](#) is ongoing.