

# Shasta LAFCO close to clearing huge backlog of studies

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Clay Duda/Record Searchlight File Shasta Local Area Formation Commission, or Shasta LAFCO, board members meet at Anderson City Hall on Jan. 8, 2014. In the past year the organization has made substantial progress clearing a large backlog of mandatory studies and reviews.

SHASTA COUNTY, California - For one Shasta County agency 2014 was a year spent catching up to 2008.

Following an agreement stemming from a class-action lawsuit in 2013, the Shasta Local Area Formation Commission, or Shasta LAFCO, kicked things into overdrive this year in an effort to clear a huge backlog of required studies and reviews for local cities and special districts that should have been completed more than five years ago.

The agency so far has finished the work for 31 districts in the county, and with one meeting left this year with hopes to gain board approval to finalize updated sphere of influence studies and municipal service reviews for 10 more districts, including the city of Redding.

“We’ve had to go into two meetings a month for the past two months to get it all completed, but if it wasn’t for (LAFCO CEO) Jan Lopez we wouldn’t have even come close,” said Steve Morgan, chairman of the Shasta LAFCO board.

Lopez was appointed to head the agency in October 2013, the same month Redding attorney Jim Reed filed a lawsuit alleging the organization had failed to complete dozens of mandatory studies and reviews while still collecting dues from districts around the county. An agreement reached in January gave Shasta LAFCO roughly a year to produce the outstanding documents for 41 districts, a hefty task for reports that routinely take months to research and evaluate.

“These are really minimal reports, I’m sorry to say, but that’s what we had to do to make it happen,” Lopez said. “I’m recommending that once we’re caught up we start staggering them earlier and looking to do comprehensive ones where needed.”

A LAFCO consultant since 1984, Lopez was a vocal critic of the local agency’s work under the helm of former Executive Director Amy Mickelson. When Mickelson left the position in July 2013 after a series of performance reviews, Lopez stepped up with a 15-month plan to get the organization back on track.

Fall River Mills residents Terry and Barbara Briggs are happy to see the progress.

“Our community service district realized we didn’t have the necessary municipal service review or sphere of influence study we needed when applying for grants in 2008, so we approached LAFCO to try and get it done — and that’s where we hit a big roadblock,” said Barbara Briggs, a former board member of the Fall River Valley Community Services District.

That district also sued Shasta LAFCO in 2013 seeking repayment of more than \$40,000 collected for services it said was never provided, but later reached an agreement that saw those studies completed this year.

Lopez said she’s eager to wrap up the remaining studies and look to the future, including deciding the fate of 10 seemingly defunct special districts discovered during research this year.

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