

From: Becky Steinbruner <ki6tkb@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, November 2, 2022 12:20 AM
To: Joe Serrano
Cc: Becky Steinbruner
Subject: Public Comment re: Countywide Road Maintenance CSA Service and Sphere Review

******CAUTION:**This is an EXTERNAL email. Exercise caution. DO NOT open attachments or click links from unknown senders or unexpected email.****

Dear Santa Cruz County LAFCO,

I am happy to see the comprehensive Countywide Road Maintenance CSA's Service and Sphere Review. It is a much-needed review of how effectively the County Service Area mechanism works for the rural property owners who live on privately-maintained roads.

I am a property owner in CSA 33 and have been actively involved in the Redwood Drive maintenance work for 35 years, serving as the Liaison with the County Dept. of Public Works staff for much of that time.

Having read the Executive Summary and the CSA 33 Report, I would like to contribute the following comments:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The County governs all road county service areas

"These districts are fully managed and operated by the County of Santa Cruz. "

This is not completely accurate. In most CSA's it is the people who live in the boundaries that really direct the operations and get the bids, with the County collecting and administering the tax money, and providing some oversight for designs and engineering.

Sometimes miscommunication between the County and the Liaisons makes it difficult to meet deadlines.

2. The County service areas lack transparency

I support Director Serrano's recommendation that the County Dept. of Public Works updates the website to include better, more comprehensive information for the Road Maintenance CSA's but want to know who will pay for that, and if the CSA Liaisons will be consulted?

The Dept. of Public Works website "CSA Management" states:

"Annually, each service area will be charged their prorated share of costs involved in updating and maintaining the computerized service charge system."

<https://www.dpw.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Home/CSAs/CSAManagement/CountyFees.aspx>

As a CSA 33 member, I want to know how Dept. of Public Works staff will include the information for each CSA so that it is publicly accessible, how often and when it would be updated, and request that there be some mechanism for people new to the areas served by a CSA be able to contact their Liaison to answer questions about projects or operations.

While it could also be helpful to have some type of project tracking information that is regularly updated to give people information about the general status, it is likely better for Liaisons to continue calling the Public Works Dept. CSA representative to keep open communication flowing.

In the past, CSA 33 Liaisons would request a copy of all assessments to verify they were accurate and complete. It was very difficult to get mistakes corrected, even though our Liaisons would write and call repeatedly.

A huge problem for all CSA Liaisons has been the constant turnover in Public Works Dept. staff that handles CSA business. Accordingly, much information would get lost.

This was also a real problem for the paving contractors trying to submit bids and other required documentation to get paid. Sometimes, it has taken over two years for qualified contractors to get paid for work they did in a CSA. As a result, some contractors refuse to bid on CSA jobs.

3. The majority of the county service areas' financial health lacks stability.

LAFCO should not necessarily interpret this as being due to CSA mismanagement or County problems.

Because of the miscommunication issues between Dept. of Public Works staff and the CSA Liaisons, sometimes work ends up not going out to bid, or the bids get rejected by the County. Sometimes, that results in work that is needed to keep the road and culverts from deteriorating further so the project ends up costing more than the CSA had budgeted but still has to get done in order to keep from completely losing the road.

Therefore, the financial health of a CSA may be related to the lines of communication with the County staff, or to large repairs done with FEMA money that takes many years for reimbursement.

4. Certain county service areas have funding zones.

"These assessments are reviewed by the County on a yearly basis. Any increase in those assessments require resident approval."

This is actually the opposite of what occurs. The CSA residents meet annually to decide on their assessment rate, usually approving the CPI increase, and then the Liaison notifies the County Public Works Dept. as to what the residents decided. That decision is then sent to the Board of Supervisors to be formally approved.

"These boundaries are created and modified by the County of Santa Cruz. However, it is important that the formation, purpose, and distinction of each zone be available as public information. At present, this information is not available on the County's website."

This is a true statement, and having such basic information available on the Dept. of Public Works website would be very helpful for residents new to the CSA neighborhood.

5. The majority of the county service areas' spheres are coterminous.

It would be helpful to include on the Public Works Dept. CSA website information describing the process and costs associated if an area or parcel needed to be added.

This has been discussed by CSA 33 property owners who live on ancillary roads that cannot use CSA 33 money to maintain, or for parcels that have changed their primary access to use Redwood Drive, rather than Larsen Road (CSA 34).

6. I could not find the Appendices on the LAFCO Service and Sphere Review documentation website.

"The draft service and sphere review is attached to this staff report. Due to the size of the report, the appendices were not attached but are available on LAFCO's website under the "Service & Sphere Review Webpage."

THE SERVICE AND SPHERE REVIEW

The maps in Figures 1 and 2 are excellent.

Information in Table 1 regarding CSA 33 is not accurate in that there are more than 60 people living in the Area (it is likely more than 300 people) and the lane miles is not 6.31 miles (Redwood Drive is 2.2 miles long, and is a one-lane road in some areas)

CSA 33 REVIEW (page 182 of packet)

Overview

"The County currently has 2 employees assigned to manage all 34 road CSAs, including CSA 33."

This came a surprise to me, as historically, there has only been one County Public Works staff person responsible for CSA business, and that person also had many other responsibilities besides CSA business.

Population Growth in Table 63 is not accurate because the basic number of "60 people" residing in the Area too low. As stated previously, the actual number is likely over 300.

Figure 75 on page 184 packet appears to have several inaccuracies that would best be reviewed and corrected with the CSA 33 Liaisons.

Figure 76 on page 185 packet is missing data for 2019-2020.

Table 65 on page 187 packet is also missing data for 2019-2020.

Discussion of Sphere of Influence on page 187 packet will need correction and clarification:

"However, the County should consider annexing the 25 parcels currently within the CSA's sphere boundary but outside its jurisdictional boundary. Figure 79 on page 173 shows the proposed sphere boundary."

CSA 33 needs to augment its boundaries to include a 58-acre parcel that has historically been included in CSA 34 but now that the property owners are building, the primary access is from Newell Drive and is within CSA 33 jurisdiction. Also, it is unclear where the 25 parcels recommended for annexing are located.

Figures 78 and 79 are not accurate in placement of the roads. (pages 188 and 189, respectively)

District Summary on page 190 states the Board of Supervisors are elected at-large, but in fact are elected via District-based elections. It also states there are 6.31 lane miles in CSA 33 but that is not accurate (Redwood Drive is 2.1 miles long, for a total of 4.2 lane miles).

Service Provision Determinations (page 191 packet)

1. *"Growth and population projections for the affected area.*

The population of CSA 33 in 2020 was estimated to be 60. Based on LAFCO's analysis, the population within the CSA will be approximately 62 by 2040."

As explained previously, there are likely more than 300 people living within CSA 33 boundaries.

3. *"Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies including needs or deficiencies related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, and structural fire protection in any disadvantaged, unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence. (page 191 packet)*

CSA 33 does not have a standalone capital improvement plan ("CIP") in place. LAFCO encourages the County to consider developing a CIP for the CSA and have it available on the County's website. "

While CSA 33 may not have a standalone CIP, the CSA 33 membership has voted annually to maintain a 15% reserve fund for emergency repairs and annually assesses and prioritizes improvement projects on a two- to three-year projection plan.

5. "Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities. LAFCO encourages the County to explore additional methods to collaborate with neighboring local community groups, such as road associations and/or homeowners' associations to build a stronger working relationship with the CSA's residents." (page 191 packet)

There is regular dialogue and collaboration with CSA 34 Liaison and Community leaders as we share a fire evacuation route connecting our communities, and also share FireWise Community event notifications and collaborate on vegetation management programs. CSA 34 residents have chosen to assess themselves with a different focus than CSA 33 residents have done, primarily because the Redwood Drive CSA 33 community is much larger.

6. "Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies. Senate Bill 929 was signed into law in September 2018 and requires all independent special districts to have and maintain a website by January 1, 2020. SB 929 identifies a number of components that must be found within an agency's website. At present, the CSA does not meet the statutory requirements under SB 929."

It is not practical for CSA 33 to maintain a website, although various attempts have been initiated over the years. The problem has been in keeping the information current as residents who volunteer to do this work leave the neighborhood. It would be better and more sustainable if CSA 33 information were included on the Dept. of Public Works website, along with similar relevant information for other CSA's.

This would address Item #7 regarding transparency as well.

Sphere of Influence Determination issues have already been addressed, relating to population, CIP, lane miles, and funding approval mechanisms.

In closing, I really do appreciate this comprehensive analysis of all Road Maintenance CSA's and support the Recommendation that Director Serrano meet with all Liaisons to determine additional mitigations and improvements that would help those who are intended to benefit by the CSA funding mechanism for ensuring rural privately-maintained roads are safe and available for resident travel, infrastructure commerce traffic, and emergency responders.

I think a very effective method of accomplishing this meeting would be a hybrid town hall conference with all CSA road maintenance Liaisons and interested residents, and include local paving contractors as well.

Thank you for your good work.

Sincerely,
Becky Steinbruner
3441 Redwood Drive
Aptos, CA 95003
831-685-2915