



San Mateo LAFCo Overview  
San Mateo County Civics 101 Academy  
September 13, 2023



CORTESE-KNOX-HERTZBERG  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION ACT OF 2000

# Agenda

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Overview of LAFCo and Powers

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Types of Government Agencies

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Local Government in San Mateo  
County

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LAFCo and School Districts

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Municipal Service Reviews and  
Spheres of Influence

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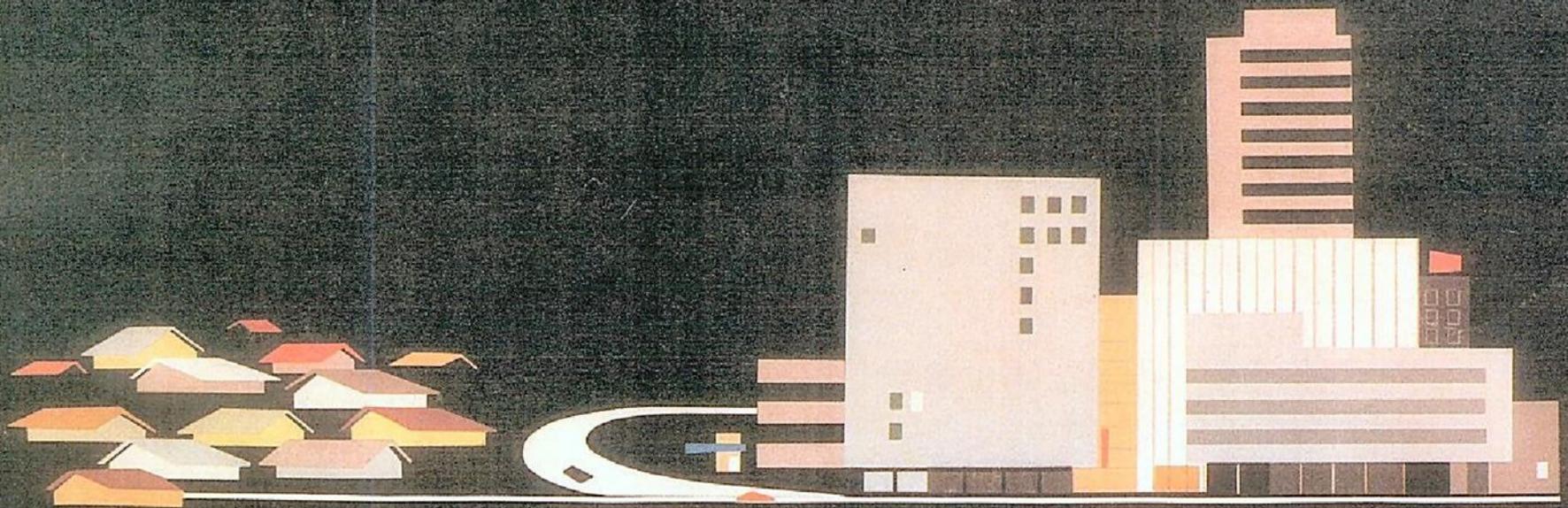
Recent projects

# What is LAFCo

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- The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) is a public agency for each county established by the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Act (State law).
- First created in 1963
- LAFCos are independent from local, county, and state government.
- LAFCo Commission is comprised of 2 County Supervisors, 2 City Council members, 2 Special District members, and 1 public member.
- “All commission members shall exercise their independent judgement on behalf of the interests of the public as a whole and not solely of the appointing agency”

# MEETING METROPOLITAN PROBLEMS



REPORT OF THE GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON METROPOLITAN AREA PROBLEMS  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA—Edmund G. Brown, Governor

# LAFCo Authority and Powers

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- With the primary purpose of regulating boundaries of cities and special districts, LAFCo adopts spheres of influence as plans for the boundaries of cities and special districts
- Processes annexation applications and applications for extension of services
- Prepares municipal service reviews of cities and districts in context of State policies promoting logical boundaries, efficient delivery of services and elimination of overlapping service delivery
- There are a number of actions and approvals that LAFCo does not regulate or review

# LAFCo Actions

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Annex land to cities or special districts

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Detach land from cities or special districts (rare)

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Consolidate two or more cities or two or more special districts

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Form new special districts and incorporate new cities (unlikely)

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Dissolve special districts and disincorporate cities (not common)

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Merge cities and special districts

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Allow cities or special districts to provide services outside of their boundaries

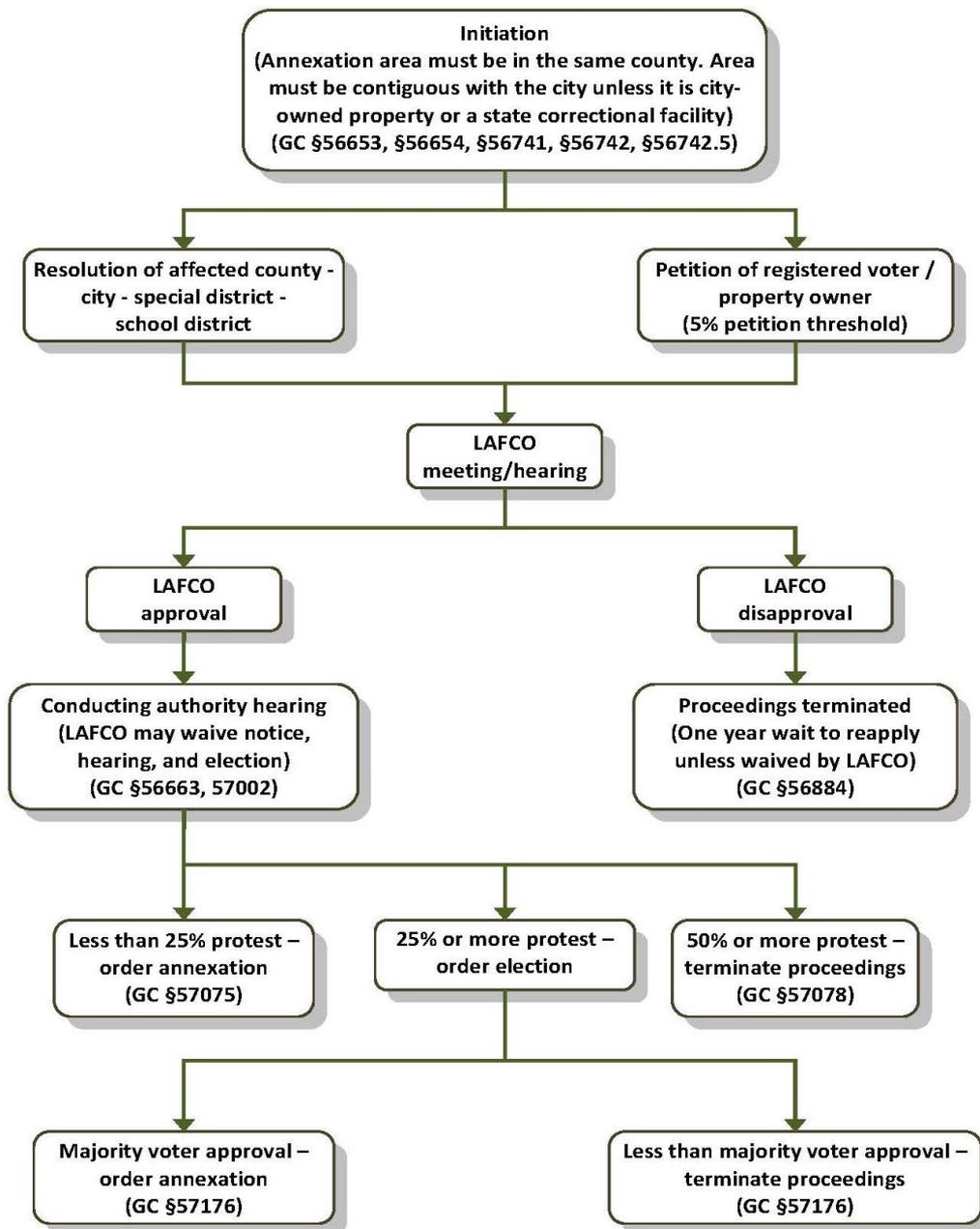
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Authorize activation or divestiture of special district powers

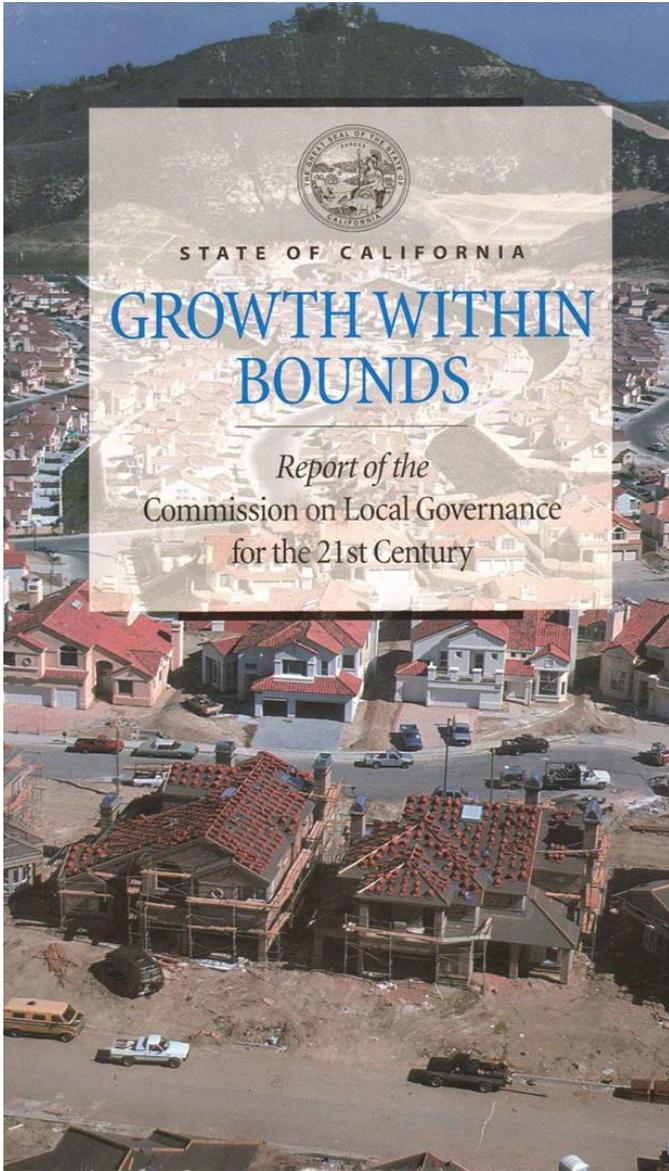
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LAFCo can initiate dissolutions and consolidations, but not annexation

# Inhabited City Annexation



# Annexation Process



# The LAFCo Lens

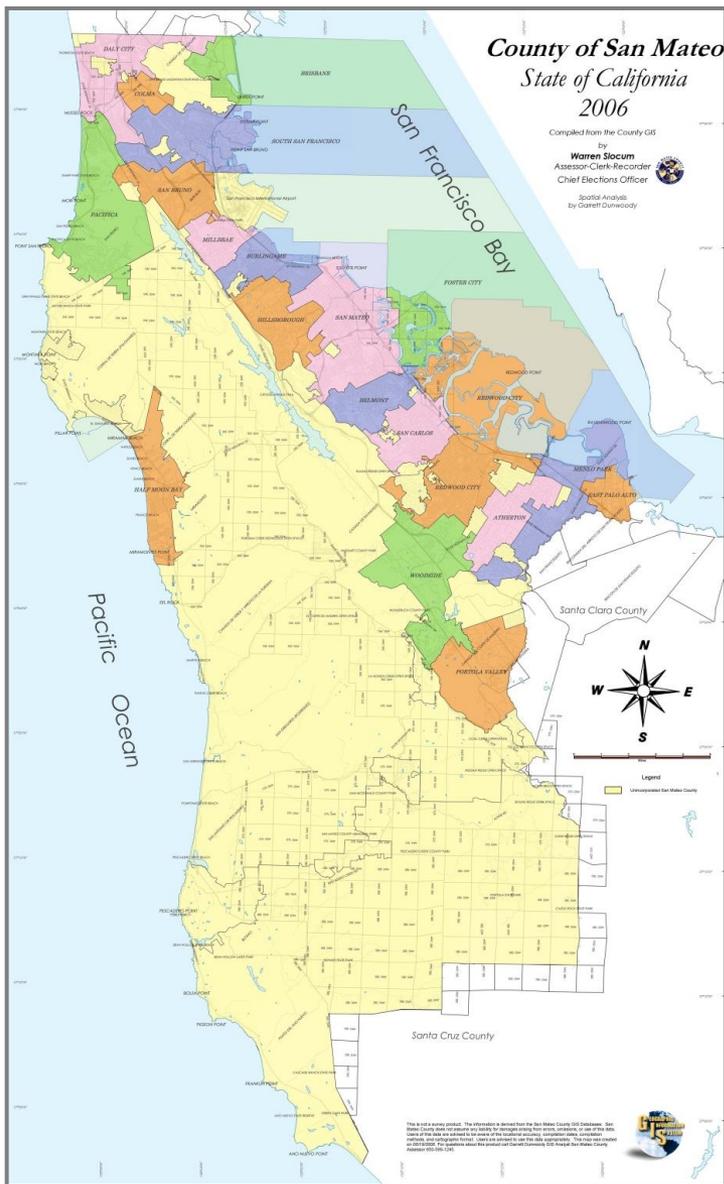
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- Study boundaries/organization in context of State policies promoting logical boundaries, efficient delivery of services and elimination of overlapping agencies
- County distinguished from cities: As subdivision of State, primary role: Health, Human Services, Criminal Justice (State Mandated Programs). Not a municipal service provider by design
- Where feasible, areas needing municipal services should annex to cities, particularly when land use is intensifying
- LAFCo adopts spheres of influence as plans for the boundaries of cities and special districts

# LAFCo Administration

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- LAFCos can directly hire staff or contract with other government agencies - San Mateo LAFCo contracts with the County of San Mateo.
- Staff works solely for LAFCo
- LAFCo budget is adopted by the Commission and is independent of other agencies
- By State law LAFCo is funded in 1/3 (County, cities, and special districts)



# Types of Government Agencies

- State of California
- County
- City
  - General law vs Charter
- Special Districts
  - Dependent vs Independent
  - Enterprise vs non-enterprise
  - Single vs multi-purpose
- Joint Powers Authorities/Agencies (JPAs)
- Regional Government Agencies

# Enterprise vs. Non-Enterprise

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- Enterprise Districts

- Similar to business enterprises
- Charge fees to recover cost of services
- Examples: Sewer and Water

- Non-Enterprise Districts

- Provide services that don't lend themselves to fees
- Examples: Mosquito & Vector Control District, Fire service, Open Space District
- Cities and districts may have both "enterprise" and "non-enterprise" functions (e.g., Park & Rec, Harbor District)



# Local Government in San Mateo County

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- County
- 20 cities
  - Smallest – Colma (Pop. 1,507)
  - Largest – San Mateo (Pop. 105,661)
- 22 independent special districts
  - Including – Water/sewer, fire, healthcare, open space/recreation, harbor, and police districts
- 33 County or city-governed special districts
  - Water/sewer, street lighting, drainage
- 16 Joint Powers Agencies/Authorities
  - County Library, sewage treatment, fire



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7 NORTH AMERICAN DATUM

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO COPYRIGHT

COLLIER-BURNS  
SERIES

REV. 1/1/84  
SHEET  
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MILLBRAE

# Common Misconceptions About School Districts and LAFCo

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- City and school district boundaries do not align
- Cities can have multiple school districts or districts can cover multiple cities and unincorporated area
- Residents of unincorporated areas want to annex to city so they can change school districts
- Residents of one city want to detach and annex to other city to be included in “better” school district
- LAFCo refers inquiries to San Mateo County Office of Education
  - County Committee on School District Organization

# Municipal Service Reviews

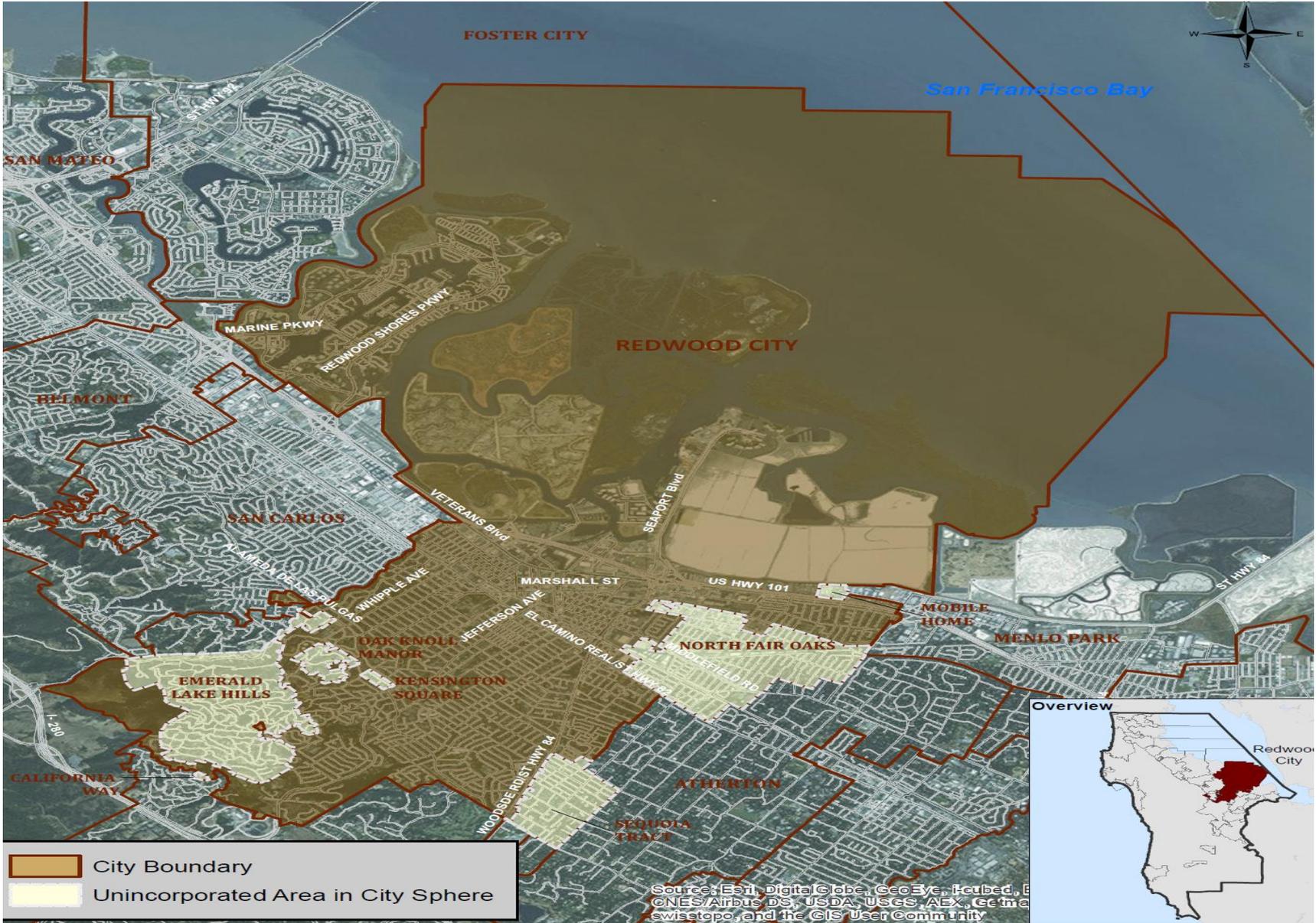
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- Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs) are state mandated studies conducted by LAFCo
- They analyze governance structures, fiscal health and efficiencies of service providers
- The determinations and recommendations in an MSR are non-binding, but the Commission or other entity could take later action to initiate certain changes
- MSRs are a prerequisite to a Sphere of Influence

# Spheres of Influence

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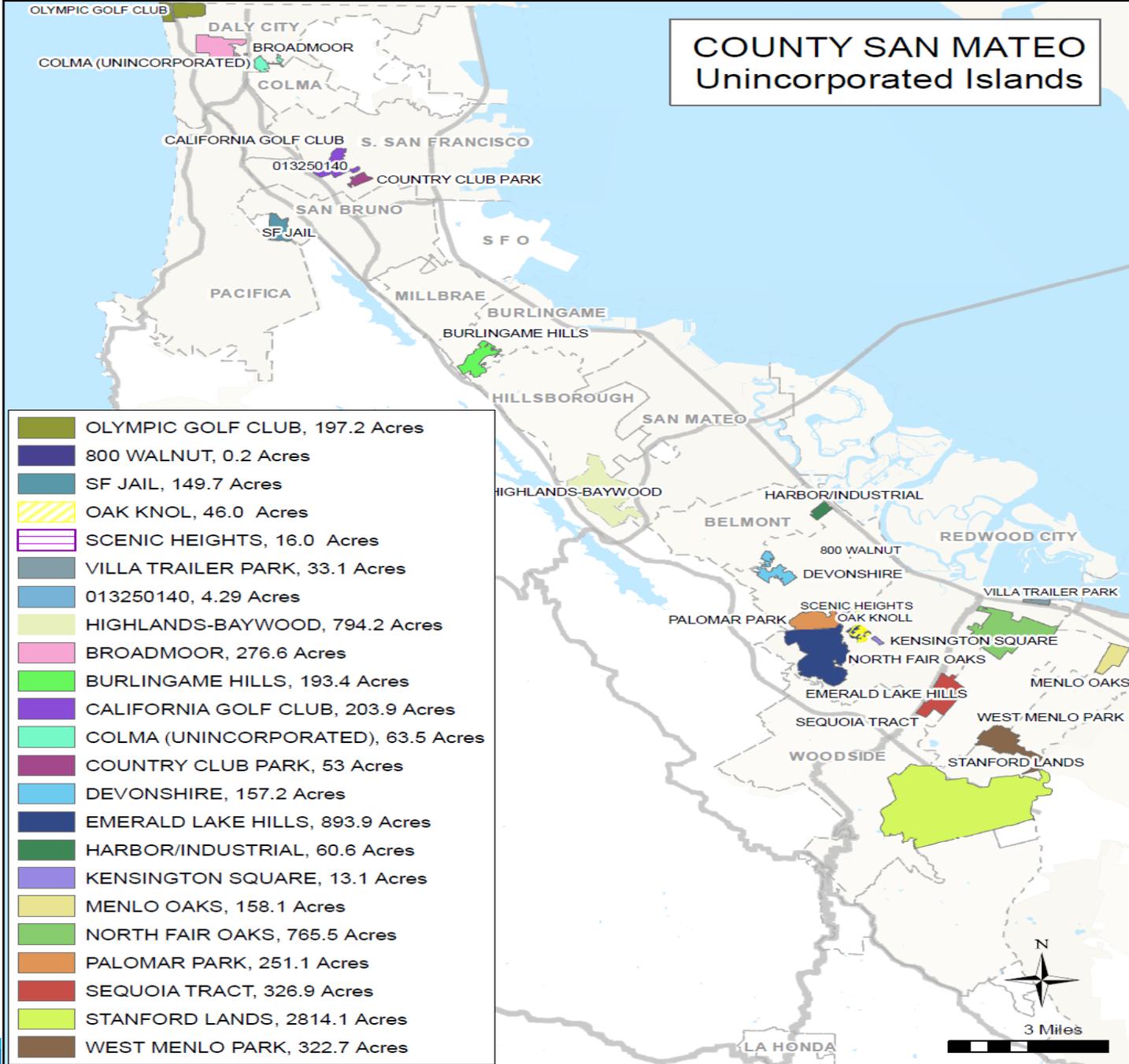
- Sphere of Influence (SOI) is a plan for the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency
- The MSR helps inform what the SOI could be
- Factors that need to be considered for an SOI include land uses and the need and capacity of public services
- City vs District SOI
- Types of SOIs
  - Expanded
  - Coterminous
  - Dissolution (Zero)



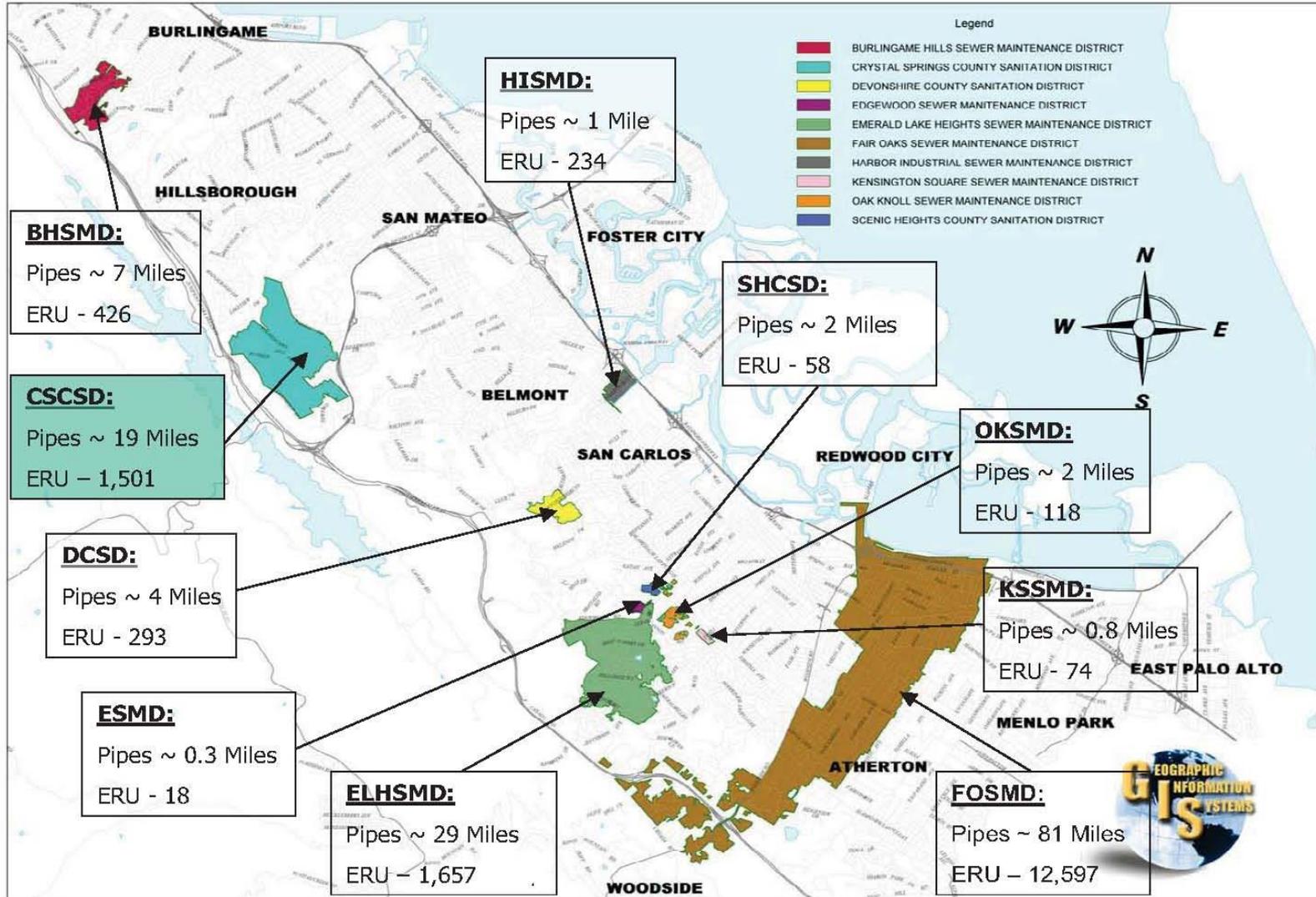
# REDWOOD CITY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE



# COUNTY SAN MATEO Unincorporated Islands



# County Administered Sewer and Sanitation Districts



# Recent LAFCo Projects

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- Municipal Service Reviews for:
  - County Service Area 11 (Pescadero)
  - City of East Palo Alto, East Palo Alto Sanitary District, and West Bay Sanitary District
  - City of South San Francisco
  - Westborough Water District
  - Broadmoor Police Protection District – Special Study
  - City of Burlingame
  - Town of Hillsborough
- Applications
  - Belmont annexations
  - Proposal to establish the East Palo Alto Sanitary District an independent special district, as a subsidiary district of the City of East Palo Alto
  - County Service Area 11 (Pescadero) annexation – anticipated
  - Sewer annexations and water extensions

# Resources

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- Website: <https://lafco.smcgov.org/>
- Rob Bartoli, Executive Officer, [rbartoli@smcgov.org](mailto:rbartoli@smcgov.org)
- <https://calafco.org/>
- Report: What's so special about special districts?  
[https://calafco.org/sites/default/files/resources/Whats\\_So\\_Special.pdf](https://calafco.org/sites/default/files/resources/Whats_So_Special.pdf)
- League of California Cities <https://www.calcities.org/>
- California Special Districts Association <https://www.csda.net/>
- California Association of Counties <https://www.counties.org/>

# Questions?

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*Guide to the*  
CORTESE–KNOX–HERTZBERG  
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