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ABAG debate turns into shouting match

By KITTY GRIFFIN
Herald Staff Writer

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An argument between Solano County supervisors about how to respond to a regional government plan by the Association for Bay Area Governments (ABAG) turned into a shouting match Tuesday night.

ABAG's plan, similar to Assembly Speaker Willie Brown's AB 4242, places major growth planning decisions in the hands of a Bay Area governmental body whose makeup so far has not been determined. It was developed by an ABAG planning subcommittee during the past few months.

County board chairman Sam Caddle sits on that committee, and made strong objections during the process. Supervisor Lee Simmons sits on ABAG's executive committee, and also objected.

Simmons, who represents west Benicia, said her vote against the plan at the executive committee was not an objection to the idea of regional government, but only a stand against ABAG's lack of sensitivity to counties and cities during the plan's development.

Supervisor Jan Stewart of east Solano County proposed that whatever regional cooperation is needed should go through the county Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs).

LAFCOs are five-member boards that chiefly approve annexations. They comprise two mayors, selected by fellow

mayors, two county supervisors, selected by fellow supervisors, and a fifth member from the county at large, selected by the other four.

As for a proposed critical letter of response to ABAG's plan, composed by the county administrator, Stewart said, "I would not respond at all. Once you fool around discussing (the regional plan policies), you are in complicity."

Supervisor Osby Davis of Vallejo then critiqued the points of the proposed letter of response.

Supervisor Don Pippo of Vacaville said, "This letter could have been summed up by a note that says, 'You've got to be kidding.'"

Stewart, admitting she didn't

go over the proposed letter carefully "because (the plan) is so heinous to me," reiterated her position against sending a response at all. "It's that last line that kills me," she said, referring to the administrator's suggestion that "...changing the historical duties and authorities of local government should occur only after all major policy issues have been fully worked through."

And not even then, Stewart argued.

Davis then suggested compromise wording.

Plugging a second look at the concept of regional cooperation, Simmons said, "We need to reach out to cities, the state, those who live contiguous to us. Nobody knows who's on first

and who's on second. Maybe county government is functionally obsolete; maybe city government is functionally obsolete... Rather than talk about new layers of government, maybe we should talk about consolidating..."

Pippo lashed out at Simmons, accusing her of declaring city and county government obsolete, and saying he wants no part of a process that may be unconstitutional.

Simmons tried to respond to Pippo, who shouted her down, leading Simmons to raise her voice over his to make her points. With both Pippo and Lee shouting, chairman Caddle bellowed at Simmons, "Lee, keep your voice down!" But Simmons rebuked Pippo

again, saying he had a chance to offer ABAG input when he attended a meeting 10 weeks ago, but said nothing, and ABAG members reported he had been a "pussycat" at the meeting.

When order was restored, Caddle pushed for sending a negative response rather than "just remaining silent and mute," but failed to convince Pippo and Stewart.

The vote to send a revised letter to ABAG, objecting to the plan but acknowledging the need to cooperate regionally, passed 3-2, with Caddle, Simmons, and Davis voting in favor.

Caddle said ABAG will review local responses the week of June 7.

Revisions

90

6-29-1990

'crippling' ABAG plan

■ Regional government discussions go on, but as more and more concerns are addressed, the proposal has less and less muscle

By KITTY GRIFFIN
Herald Staff Writer

The regional government plan shaping up within the Association of Bay Area Governments is not as steel-edged as some members would like and goes too far as far as others are concerned.

As it leaves the hands of ABAG's Regional Planning Committee and heads toward ABAG's Executive Committee, the earlier directives on funding rewards and punishments have been removed to a catch-all category of "difficult to tackle" issues.

All reference to governance has been set in the same section.

And a last-minute call for a regional general plan was scrat-

ched as soon as it appeared in the draft that members considered Wednesday.

The Executive Committee is asked to deal with the governance hot potato in a cover letter that the Regional Planning Committee will forward, a move that disappoints a few committee members.

"There is nothing more important than governance," said Angelo Siracusa of the Bay Area Council. The issue was not included in the Executive Committee's charge. "I hope we weren't prohibited from doing it," Siracusa said.

Although committee

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members came out against a "watered-down" version of the written policies staff earlier this month, which was developed largely to accommodate objections from committee member Sam Caddle of Solano County, the version presented Wednesday appeared crippled.

Since the last meeting, 31 letters from local jurisdictions have reached ABAG, only five of which have endorsed the draft. Another five, including Solano County and Fairfield, rejected it. Eight letters generally concurred, but expressed concerns, and nine neither endorsed nor rejected it, but asked questions and expressed concerns.

The draft considered Wednesday reflected those concerns.

Salvo when the meeting opened was the idea that a regional general plan would be developed. But Oakland City Councilwoman Marge Gibson-Haskell led an unrelenting charge that turned that concept upside down, giving local governments the initiative and cratching the phrase "comprehensive regional plan."

Under Gibson-Haskell's revision, cities and counties would

keep their present general plans, but would be expected to make any alterations in keeping with ABAG's regional plan goals and objectives. Revisions would be reviewed by the regional government for consistency with those goals and objectives, rather than with some imposed general plan.

"Any kind of regional planning process uses both 'from-the-bottom-up' and 'from-the-top-down,'" said Siracusa.

Siracusa also warned that the "lulu" problem (Locally Undesirable Land Uses, such as siting landfills) won't get resolved without a top-down plan. He also regretted losing ABAG control of the housing balance issue, but Gibson-Haskell said cities would be able to work out trade-offs among themselves to meet ABAG goals and policies.

Caddle complimented Gibson-Haskell for "a right approach."

"A lot has been said about my objections," said Caddle, "but if you got out and talked to the man on the street, he doesn't want regional government."

Caddle's influence on the draft comes out in a section calling for better funding for counties from the state, according to the committee's staff person, Gary Binger.

The draft includes sections:

- Encouraging growth where infrastructure exists.
- Discouraging automobile use and commuting distances.
- Discouraging growth beyond urban growth boundaries.
- Providing affordable housing.
- Providing for new communities.

• Reaching a consistent behavior through regional goals and objectives.

A section on the role of subregional government has been deleted, in response to some cities which objected that they already have regional government, and others that said they don't want "another layer of government."

Background papers will be produced elaborating on confusing issues, including housing density, job-housing balance, fiscal concerns, traffic and other topics.

Members of Bay Vision 20 which met Monday to develop their own plan, are to get the ABAG document as soon as possible, unless the Executive Committee decides not to forward it.

"They're basically trying to rediscover the world, as the minutes seem to show," said Gibson-Haskell.

Tom Powers, chairman of the Regional Planning Committee, said last week, "We need to make a recommendation to Bay Vision 2020, whether to adopt it or not."

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Reaction to ABAG plan vote mixed

By KITTY GRIFFIN
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When the Association of Bay Area Governments' regional plan triumphed at ABAG's executive committee Thursday night, Supervisor Lee Simmons wasn't just disappointed. She was "damned angry."

The executive committee recommended the plan 16-4, with little discussion.

"It went too fast," Simmons said when it was over. After the vote, she took Director Revan Trantor aside to remind him of her earlier complaints that there is scanty discussion of policy matters on the executive committee.

Simmons, who represents west Benicia on the County Board, made a strong state-

ment, but she planned to say more before the cut-off.

"If you look at the document, they're giving away their rights," Simmons said. "No doubt there will be a small body that will be telling the Bay Area what to do."

Supervisor Sam Caddle, who represents east Benicia, fought the plan as a member of the Regional Planning Committee. He said Friday, "From what I've been told, Supervisor Simmons represented this county well. It's unfortunate they approved it without a consensus for support. It seemed like a railroad job...We've got to see now what happens when it goes to Bay Vision 2020 and to the legislature."

But Simmons and Caddle are way ahead of most people in the county on the topic of regional government, judging from what others said Friday afternoon.

The plan, months in the making, lists five policies having to do with where cities and counties should allow growth and where not, what kind of housing they should have, and discouraging the use of cars, among other things. It also assumes there will be a regional government structure to guide those policies for the whole Bay Area, although the document doesn't spell it out.

Now it will be sent to Bay Vision 2020, which also is working on regional policies. In addition

to ABAG's plan and Bay Vision 2020's upcoming plan, the state assembly is reworking another regional government plan, AB4242, which met resistance in its original form.

More residents appear to know of AB4242 than the closer-to-home versions being formed in the Bay Area.

• Benicia City Manager Mike Warren said he is not familiar with the ABAG document, but his council was opposed to AB4242.

"Generally, local governments are not willing to give up their responsibilities," he said. "Local representatives are in the front lines. They're directly accountable to their neighbors. They correctly assume they understand the local situation better than anyone else.

"On the other hand, we have traffic problems, housing problems, that Benicia or other local governments can't deal with alone. It requires a

broader solution."

• John Everts, city planner who is responsible for the housing element, said he is not familiar with the plan.

• Jim Sperring, mayor of Suisun City, a member of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, and head of the Hannigan Rail Study, also said he doesn't know a lot about it.

"The only thing that alarms me about regional plans is losing local control," Sperring said.

"The regional government shouldn't be able to say to one city, you can have this highway, and to another, you can't.... But I do think any community decision has to see how it affects others in the region...."

Sperring also noted communities can get more federal funding if they act together as a region.

• Ed Wohlenberg, city manager of Vallejo, said, "The plan represents the best judgment of those concerned, on what the next steps will be (in solving regional problems). But it's just one step on a long journey. It's easy to get too ex-

cited about it. There's Bay Vision 2020 and the one in Sacramento as well.

"I don't think this plan will have a lot of influence on the final outcome. There's a whole array of ideas in the legislature. It's a huge problem, and resolving it is like the state trying to adopt a budget.

"Cities aren't going to have as much influence as they used to," Wohlenberg said.

Two Benicia citizens who are not in government reacted to the Thursday night action this way:

• The Rev. John Bogart, an Episcopal priest, said, "My general feeling is some kind of regional government is inevitable. Regional problems can't be solved by one body. I don't think it will take away much local autonomy. I'm sort of resigned."

Things within cities will probably continue to be resolved by local officials, but things that cross county lines will have to be resolved by regional government, Bogart said.
"Solano County will just have

to have strong people on it to speak up for Solano," he said. "It'll turn out OK."

Rolland Tinney, who is chairman of the Rancho Benicia neighborhood association this year, said he has no strong opinion, but is interested in following the issue.

"It probably won't be solved in my lifetime," Tinney said.