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The OC LAFCO air is filled with the completion of many projects and activities during the previous fiscal cycle and a quick jump start with three months of fiscal year 2024-25 already behind us. Read on to a message from the OC LAFCO Chairman and his introduction to the highlights of this edition of The Pulse.



Welcome and Reflections from Chairman Wagner



Don P. Wagner

As OC LAFCO Chairman, I welcome you to the Fall Edition of The Pulse. Whether you are a first-time reader of this publication or have been keeping up with our activities through previous editions, we thank you for your interest in OC LAFCO.

I was appointed to serve as Chairman in January of this year, and over this time, the Commission and staff have continued to work as a team to accomplish the goals of the agency's three-year strategic plan and enhance resources that facilitate the carrying out OC LAFCO's legislative

authority and mandates. During fiscal year 2023-24, the Commission welcomed new members, experienced changes in staff, and saw a decrease in filed applications. However, even with these changes, the activity at OC LAFCO remained busy and much was done. To highlight a few, the Commission completed an overhaul of the agency website and resources, conducted several municipal service reviews, proactively monitored and adopted positions on legislation of LAFCO-interest, and improved internal policies and procedures. Each of these areas represent OC LAFCO's effort to fulfill our legislative mandates and be responsive to Orange County's local agencies and communities.

As we enter the last year of the Commission's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, as Chairman, I will continue to provide leadership that facilitates the

completion of our remaining goals and adoption of the next multi-year plan. To learn more about OC LAFCO activities, I invite you to continue reading or stop by one of our monthly meetings and don't forget to take the OC LAFCO Pop Quiz at the end of your read.



FALL EDITION



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The Rear-View Mirror

In August, the Commission received a year-end report on the accomplishments of the OC LAFCO 2022-25 Strategic Plan through fiscal year 2023-24. With two-thirds of the Plan in our rear view, this section of *The Pulse* highlights goals and objectives completed over the past year.

Goal One: Staff Development, Retention, and Recruitment



The Commission continues to keep the maintaining of quality staff talent as a priority. Much like other local governments and employers, retaining quality staff and external interruptions experienced by OC LAFCO have been a challenge. To address these situations, over the past year, OC LAFCO focused on developing and maintaining current personnel through cross-training opportunities, benefit enhancements, and the annual funding of professional development and training activities. With the average tenure of OC LAFCO employees currently at nearly 11 years, the Commission recognizes the importance of fostering employment continuity. Additionally, OC LAFCO acknowledges the significant role that the recruitment process plays in attracting strong talent. With that in mind and for the first time, OC LAFCO joined up with our partner to the south, San Diego LAFCO to establish a pool of candidates for future LAFCO analysts. The effort resulted in the receipt of over 50 applicants, an increase from past recruitments, and yielded savings in administrative costs and other resources. Additionally, the effort brought forward a new team member to the OC LAFCO team. As you read further, you will become acquainted with our new Analyst, Aimee Diaz.

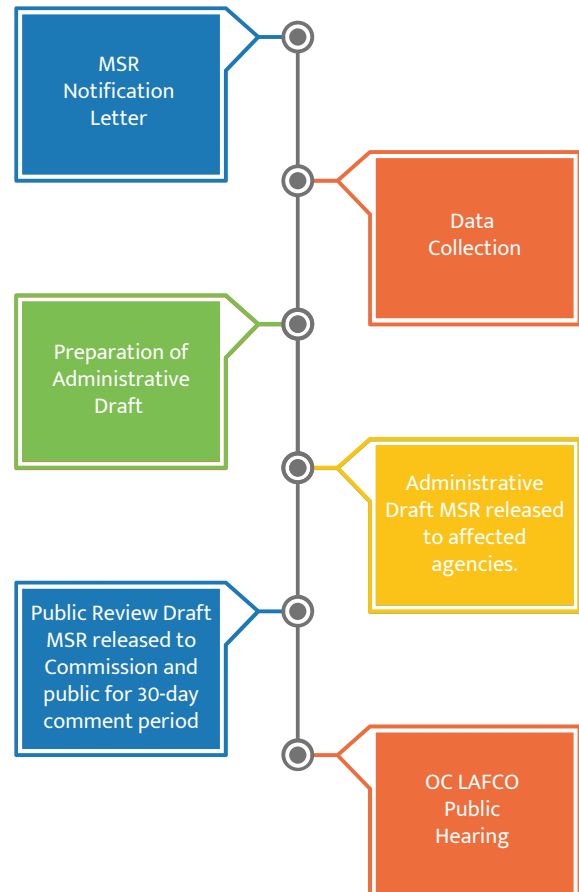
Goal Two: Improve Municipal Service Review (MSR) Process for Future MSRs



The Commission's fourth round of MSRs has been underway for four years, and there was progress in completing a review of all cities and special districts during the past fiscal cycle. MSRs were completed for a portion of South Orange County and agencies located in the western region of the county. With more than half of the fourth cycle MSRs complete, OC LAFCO has reached a significant milestone for this goal, and the effort has catapulted into a new fiscal year with the Orange County Water District MSR approaching the release date of the "Public Draft," and the Central Region draft MSR following closely behind. If you are interested in additional details on the MSR regions and schedule, visit the MSR webpage at the OC LAFCO website.

An MSR Process Crash Course

Has it been some time since your agency participated in the MSR process, or perhaps you are new to the city or special district? Whatever the situation, you may be unfamiliar with MSRs, and we wanted to introduce you to the "cliff notes" version of the process.



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Generally, the preparation of an MSR from beginning to end (consideration by the Commission) involves a one to two-year process. As noted in the graphic on page 2, the process includes multiple milestones that are established within a schedule prepared by OC LAFCO staff. Through the conducting of multiple cycles of MSRs, OC LAFCO staff notes that the gathering and analyzing of the data required for the MSR process can take up to six months and sometimes longer. However, with the data being the most critical component of MSRs, a significant part of an MSR schedule is assigned to data collection.

Another key part of the process is release of the Public Review Draft MSR and consideration of the MSR at a public hearing conducted by the Commission. Both of these key milestones represent an opportunity for local agencies and other interested parties to seek answers and provide comments on the report.

Finally, upon approval by the Commission, the final MSR is made available to the affected agencies and on our website, and surveys are sent to agencies for you to share your thoughts on the process. Many think the OC LAFCO website is the final resting place for our MSRs, but it is not. Over the years, we have received requests for MSRs from many stakeholders to include, other government agencies, field representatives of stated elected officials, local media, OC Grand Jury, and representatives from academia.

Goal Three: Promote Legislative Engagement

The past year’s activity involving legislation of LAFCO interest was generally quiet. This session brought minor clean-up of the law that governs LAFCOs (“CKH Act”) and other bills involving failing wastewater systems, property tax exchange for district formation proposals, and requiring indemnification from LAFCO applicants. At adjournment of the session, the Commission ended its monitoring with the adoption of positions on four bills. For more information on those bills, click the following link https://oclafco.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/6c_Leg-report-October.pdf to access the Commission’s most recent legislative report.

Goal Four: Optimize External Communication

The Commission uses various vehicles and tools to remain connected with local agencies and external organizations. OC LAFCO continues to facilitate this connection through the agency’s newly designed website and “The Pulse.” The agency’s news publication not only allows OC LAFCO to keep agencies connected to the Commission’s activities but also provides an opportunity for OC LAFCO to spotlight the activities of cities and special districts.

With November quickly approaching, Commission staff has already begun bundling the OC LAFCO media kits to be sent to continuing and newly elected OC legislators. Kits will include an OC LAFCO brochure, the recent edition of The Pulse, the latest legislative report, and other informational items. Additionally, staff will be opening up their calendars to schedule visits with the legislators or their local field representatives, who will have the opportunity to receive the LAFCO 101 presentation in-person or virtually.

Finally, the OC LAFCO team looks forward to visiting with the staff of cities, special districts and the County at the various agency hosted regular and quarterly meeting and other opportunities.



Mile Square Regional Park, Fountain Valley

Commissioner Activity

Reappointments

LAFCO commissioners, in accordance with state law, serve four-year terms with no term limits. For OC LAFCO, the average tenure of Commissioners has been relatively static, and over the past year, processes for three seats with expiring terms were conducted. This year, Commissioners Wendy Bucknum, James Fisler, and Carol Moore were reappointed by their respective appointing authorities and were sworn in on July 10 to begin their new terms. If you want to learn more about the appointment processes and current terms for OC LAFCO members, click here https://oclafco.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/09_Terms-of-Office_NewlyElected_August2024.pdf.



Regional and State Appointments

On the regional and statewide fronts, Commissioner Derek J. McGregor continued a two-year term on the California Association of LAFCOs (CALAFCO) Board of Directors and was appointed to the CALAFCO Legislative Committee earlier this year. Additionally, Commissioner McGregor was appointed to serve as Chair of the CALAFCO Southern Region. The region is comprised of six LAFCOs (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego). Fondly referred to as the “Big Six,” the group meets quarterly to discuss the affairs of CALAFCO, matters affecting the region, and partnership opportunities.



Derek J. McGregor
Public Member

Getting Acquainted with OC LAFCO Team Members

“Eight Years in the Making” - Meet Senior Policy Analyst, Gavin Centeno



With the typical eagerness of a Master of Public Administration graduate, Gavin joined the OC LAFCO team in 2016 and went right to work on many of the Commission’s prime-time projects. While his plate included many routine annexations and reorganizations, his leadership was and remains key in managing components of the Commission’s first communication plan. In this effort, Gavin has provided lead on the redesign of the OC LAFCO website, not once but twice, to ensure that interested parties have a good virtual experience when visiting the site. Other accomplishments of Gavin since his arrival at OC LAFCO include processing multiple island annexations (notably the Hamer Island annexation to Placentia) and boundary reorganizations involving the Cities of Orange and Tustin, conducting various municipal service reviews, contributing to improvements to the fiscal indicators web-based program, and development of the OC LAFCO Media Kit and outreach program for OC legislators. He also keeps OC LAFCO connected to our local agencies by regularly attending meetings of the independent special districts and other committees of the Orange County Business Council and the Center for Demographic Research. Gavin takes his Commission experience beyond OC LAFCO walls as he can be seen often participating on statewide conference and workshop panels to highlight the efforts of the Commission and our local agencies.

Gavin Fun Fact: Gavin’s childhood originated in the Philippines, where he remembers having to hand-pump water from a well for potable use. He stated that the work he now does with OC LAFCO resonates with him as a child growing up with limited and basic municipal services like a running faucet. Gavin says with pride that he is now part of an agency whose mission includes ensuring residents receive the most efficient and effective municipal services.

“The One Out of 50” - Meet Policy Analyst, Aimee Diaz



Becoming part of a small team with big desks can be daunting for some. But Aimee Diaz was willing to give it her best effort and submitted her qualifications through the OC LAFCO recruitment process. With over 50 applications received, Aimee’s professional and educational experiences stood out and pushed her to be a finalist in the process, and ultimately selected to join the Commission’s team in August. Quickly adapting to the OC LAFCO work culture, these days you will find her learning the ropes involving boundary changes, updating the County island profiles, navigating the agency’s GIS maps and resources, gearing up news kits to introduce OC LAFCO Commissioners and staff to legislators following the November election, and ushering in new ideas and thoughts. Prior to joining OC LAFCO, Aimee worked with the City of Lake Forest as an intern and recently concluded her graduate work at UC Irvine, receiving a Master of Public Policy.

Aimee Fun Fact: Outside of the office, Aimee loves to cook family recipes, incorporating the traditional flavors and techniques of her hometown (El Paso, Texas) and Northern Mexico.



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LAFCOs and JPAs: Who's in Charge?



Scott Smith

LAFCOs lack direct authority over Joint Powers Authorities (JPAs). However, State law does provide for LAFCO analysis of JPAs as providers of municipal services for their members.

LAFCOs have jurisdiction to form or alter the jurisdiction of cities and special districts that are formed by statute (Gov't Code § 56036) but not over JPAs, which are formed contractually between two or more participating agencies.

This is not to say that JPAs fall completely outside LAFCO's purview. Since 2017, State law has required that JPAs formed to provide municipal services file a copy of their founding agreement and any amendments to the respective county's LAFCO (Gov't Code § 6503.8). Failure to submit those materials results in a prohibition on that agency's issuing bonds or incurring indebtedness of any kind until the requirement is met.

Furthermore, JPAs are legitimately subject to study in Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs). The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act requires LAFCOs to "initiate and make studies of existing governmental agencies. Those studies shall include, but shall not be limited to, inventorying those agencies and determining their maximum service area and service capacities. In conducting those studies, the commission may request . . . joint powers agreements, and plans of . . . joint powers authorities." (Gov't Code § 56378. Emphasis added.) Through the MSR analysis, LAFCOs can legitimately review a JPA member's delivery of services under the auspices of its JPA partnerships and can consider and weigh alternatives to that joint delivery of services.

Again, because JPAs aren't cities or districts, LAFCO can't create, dissolve, or alter them, but can exert some influence over them as LAFCO reviews the delivery of services of their members. In doing this, LAFCO should focus its analysis and study on the delivery of services by the member agency through the JPA vehicle, not the efficacy of the JPA per se.

This article was written by Scott Smith and Gregory Mikhanjian. Scott is a partner at Best Best & Krieger who has served as part of the Orange County LAFCO General Counsel team since 1994. Greg is a law student at Chapman University who will join Best Best & Krieger in 2025.



Gregory Mikhanjian

Agency Spotlight: Los Alamitos

It appeared to be cooling off and somewhat resembling a fall afternoon when Executive Officer Carolyn Emery “zoomed” in to speak with City Manager Chet Simmons to hear all about the origin of the city’s name and scoop on some of their upcoming premiere events.

The City is known for its distinguished and award-winning schools and beautiful parks. What are some other things or events the City will be hosting that we should know about?

Chet: Los Alamitos is a small town, but given our location, our activities and events extend beyond our 12,000 residents and are often attended by the neighboring community of Rossmoor and the cities of Cypress, Seal Beach, and Long Beach. Each year the city hosts 25 public events. We are successful in this through a partnership with our non-profit organizations and the effort coined as “Serve Los Al.” Key activities include serving youth shelters, recognition of our military, and a July 4th celebration. Another popular annual event is the “Taste of Los Al” where our residents and neighboring communities can experience the delicious variety of our town’s restaurants. These events attract up to 7,000 people each year and bring lots of positive impacts to our neighborhoods and others outside of our city’s boundaries.

What are some key accomplishments of the City over the last year?

Chet: Over the past few years and through the leadership of the city council and commitment of the city team, we’ve focused on charting a sustainable future that has resulted in a variety of benefits to our residents. An important directive set by the council was putting our financial affairs in order, and this was accomplished through the implementation of a fiscal sustainability plan and a structurally balanced budget. Additionally, we recognized that some forward-thinking was necessary, and we did quite a bit of outreach to our residents. Through this collaboration, the city is allocating considerable funds to repair our roads, pay down pension liabilities over the next 10 years, and revitalize the city’s main square with an active transportation plan and encouraging new businesses and development within our town.

The City’s logo embodies creativity and goes beyond the literal boundaries of the city, county and country. Can you share the history behind the logo?

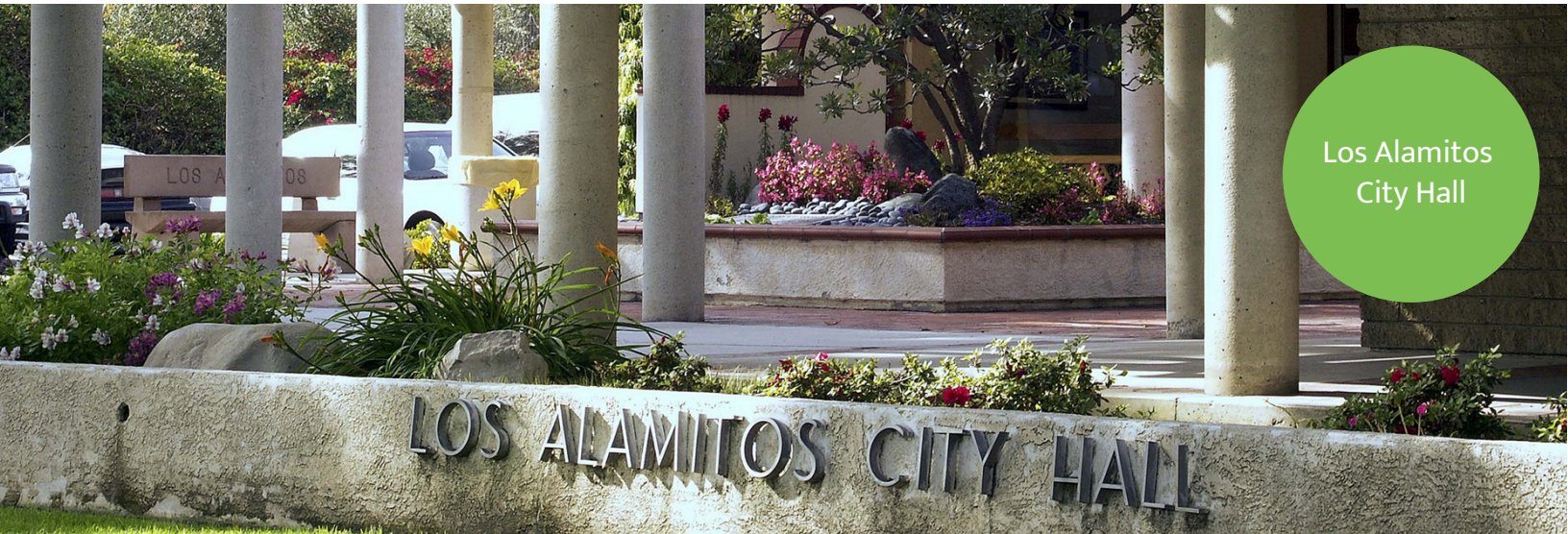
Chet: With including three countries (United States, Mexico and Spain) in the city’s logo design, there was a desire by city council and staff to reflect our respect for the presence of the military base and the various cultures that settled within Los Al’s current boundaries prior to the establishment of Orange County and our cityhood. The logo also incorporates cottonwood trees which is Los Alamitos’ namesake.



In what you hear out and about in the community, what are the most important quality of life characteristics that residents are seeking when calling the City of Los Alamitos their hometown?

Chet: Residents have communicated to the city council and staff that their quality of life includes addressing the needs of our seniors, public safety and ensuring the city’s charter supports the planning needs of the community. In response to that, the council has adopted a Senior Master Plan to address the needs of our residents in age range of 50 to 100 years. Additionally, we are improving areas of public safety by collaborating more with our school districts. Lastly, amendments to the city’s charter that support modernization projects will be on the fall ballot for consideration by our residents. We learned a lot during the pandemic by getting out and meeting with residents. A theme that I’ve embraced is “build the arc before the rain.”

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Los Alamitos
City Hall

Can the City deliver on what residents are seeking and has the pandemic impacted the City’s ability to do so?

Chet: Yes, we can. As a small city, the pandemic forced us to reevaluate the ways services were being delivered. During that time, we also went out into our neighborhoods to hear their thoughts and adapted to new ways of doing business, including embracing the option of virtual meetings and delivering city council meetings directly to their homes. Los Al’s neighborhoods include tight-knit communities, and being a small city allows us to stay connected to them. A lesson we’ve learned is that to stay connected to our neighborhoods, the city must modernize its infrastructure to meet our residents where they are today.

Your professional career includes executive positions with cities with a population of approximately 12,000 and 90,000 residents. What are the stark differences, if any, in providing leadership to staff of cities with distinct differences in staff?

Chet: For me, the work is the same. In my role with Los Al, I’ve experienced responsive leadership from the city council, and the biggest thing for me is to ensure that our staff have the resources needed to carry out responsibilities. At Los Al, staff have the flexibility to collaborate across departments to support one another and not do things in a vacuum. At Los Al, there is a presence of gaining something from someone else, and we believe in one city, one team. These things may be harder to do on a larger scale.

For your tenure as a public servant, in particular with Los Alamitos, what are you most proud of?

Chet: I am very proud of the dedicated and creative team we have at the city. We have committed department heads and members of the police department that are out there with the community. There is an authenticity and comradery that exist among our entire staff.



Chet Simmons

Chet Simmons was appointed the City Manager of Los Alamitos in 2020 where he leads implementation of city-council adopted policies and the city’s executive team. Chet arrived at Los Alamitos by way of the City of Westminster where he served in numerous capacities for 13 years.

With an area of 4.1 square miles, the City of Los Alamitos is located along the western boundary of Orange County, adjacent to the cities of Cypress, Seal Beach and Long Beach. The City is home to approximately 12,000 residents and is known for its majestic parks and California Distinguished and Blue Ribbon schools.

How Well Do You Know OC LAFCO?



The newly added feature to *The Pulse* is where our readers may sharpen or express their knowledge about LAFCO. A big thank you to Chet Simmons for hanging around after his interview to be the very first to show his knowledge on LAFCO.

OC LAFCO POP QUIZ

#1: Is the “O” in acronym for LAFCO appropriately lower (LAFCo) or upper case (LAFCO)?

Chet’s Answer: The “O” should be capitalized. When all letters in the acronym are capitalized, it lets people know you are a big deal.

#2: How many Commissioners serve on OC LAFCO?

Chet’s Answer: Is it 15?

#3: What year were LAFCOs established?

Chet’s Answer: 1900s, I think.

#4: What is the name of the statewide organization that represents 56 LAFCOs?

Chet’s Answer: Is it CSDA?

With a few lifelines thrown his way, Chet passed our pop quiz with a near-perfect score! To see how well you scored, check out the answers at the bottom of this page.



City of
Cypress

Quiz Answers: **1** Upper case “O,” according to OC LAFCO. **2** 11. **3** 1963. **4** CALAFCO.