

# Sphere of Influence (SOI) - Frequently Asked Questions

## ***About the Sphere of Influence and Urban Study Area***

It has been suggested, more than once, that the original reason for the push to incorporate Elk Grove into a city was the desire to grow the city to the South. The county had signaled that their plans were to leave the lands South of Elk Grove in agriculture. Meetings with Sheldon residents by hired planning consultants, shortly after incorporation, that asked their thoughts about the very expansion that is now included in their SOIA application substantiates this suggestion.

### **What is a Sphere of Influence (SOI) and what is its purpose?**

An SOI is the first step towards annexation and urban development. The approval of the SOI will dramatically increase the speculative value of the lands included in it.

### **Why amend the City's SOI?**

Whereas the city points to the need to do long term planning, growth estimates indicate that these lands will not be needed to accommodate urban growth for more than 20 years, which is the time horizon that LAFCO must consider for approval of the application. Planning beyond the 20 year time horizon is beyond the scope of a LAFCO application and inappropriate.

### **Why is the proposed SOI amendment acreage needed?**

It is not needed as there are substantial unused lands within the city and its existing sphere of influence, thousands of acres of it in fact. One need only look to Lent ranch, the recent high foreclosure rate, and the high commercial vacancy rates for existing properties. Clearly there has been an insufficient effort to address the jobs housing balance as evidenced by the unutilized commercial properties. Creating more commercial properties in this context would obviously not improve things. As well, the assertion that building more houses to the South of the existing city will improve air quality is illogical given that the jobs housing balance is so skewed and residents will have to commute substantial distances to work.

### **When was your application submitted to LAFCo?**

It was submitted at the height of the real estate bubble in May of 2008. In August of 2008 the application was revised with the SOIA being pulled out of the 100 year floodplain – an area that could not have been developed anyway. As for the extensive outreach, this was early on and the city never bothered to address the numerous concerns presented by attendees at their workshops, and since those early days no outreach has been evident for years.

### **Environmental interests have said the amended SOI will harm the environment.**

The SOI is the first step for eventual annexation and urbanization. The urbanization of the SOIA area will have devastating impacts on local wildlife and protected “listed” species. This area is utilized by species from the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and the Cosumnes River Preserve. The SOIA level of environmental review is the only opportunity to address the total impact of all of those lands being developed. The annexation level of environmental review would only be concerned with the specific parcels requesting annexation.

### **What is the Master Plan?**

The Master Plan, considered in the context of the present General Plan, would be so vulnerable to modification and amendment that its utility and vision would be minimal to nonexistent.

### **What is LAFCo and how are they involved?**

LAFCo is the discretionary entity who will approve or deny the Elk Grove application. In their decision they are supposed to: discourage sprawl, protect agriculture and open space, promote orderly growth and extension of government services, and consider only a 20 year horizon of growth. Elk Grove's application is quite lacking in all of these categories.

**Why is the City undertaking the expansion of the SOI now?**

This process was started during the largest real bubble in memory and it continues on from that initial momentum. Since the crash the population growth projections have been seriously adjusted downwards and there is clearly no need for the SOIA in the next 20 years. As for the SACOG Blueprint and the Sustainable Communities Strategy, this expansion is inconsistent with both and threatens our region's ability to minimize greenhouse gas production as well as continue to receive Federal transportation funding. As for the SSHCP, Elk Grove has been recalcitrant and unwilling to acknowledge that their SOIA request threatens the viability of and the ability to implement that HCP.

**Why should the City plan for growth in the proposed SOI amendment area?**

Given that the city is either ignoring or negatively impacting the regional plans in our region (MTP/SCS, Blueprint, SSHCP) it should not be planning for growth in the SOIA area. There are still thousands of unused acres within the city and its existing SOI, and the market study prepared for Elk Grove clearly indicated that there was no demonstrated need for considering growth. That study relied on old and inflated growth numbers and found that the maximum additional land that the city might potentially need is 1200 acres. Given the reduced growth figures since the real estate crash there is already adequate land for the city's needs.

**I am concerned about what will be developed in the proposed SOI amendment area.**

**How does land use planning figure into the project?**

You should be! The city's willingness to amend their General Plan regularly to allow for business as usual sprawl development is a harbinger of bad things to come. Land planning that is so malleable and easily changed to the detriment of the community has little value to that community.

**Why is land planning not occurring before the SOI is finalized?**

Besides lacking jurisdiction over those lands, there is a disincentive to consider planning when those plans would need to be analyzed as part of the environmental impact report on the SOIA as the probable development for that area. However, the city could have done the conservation planning within the structure of the SSHCP, and they have resisted this. They will likely take their chances with LACO and consider the conservation planning only when forced to.

**Is the City planning on pumping water from the Cosumnes River basin for future development?**

The real issue here is whether or not water is available. The Multiple Services Review, submitted to LAFCO to address this issue as well as others, did not adequately address this. Water is a problem that has yet to be adequately addressed, as is sewage.

**Is the SOI amendment the same thing as "Annexation"?**

The SOI is the first step in the process for annexation. There is not need for an SOI if annexation is not the eventual goal.

**The City already has enough vacant land within the City for growth.**

The market study that the city paid for to answer this question indicates that this is true.

***Property Values***

**How will the SOI amendment area impact my development rights and property value?**

It will reduce the value of any existing property value or development right. An overabundance of land for development dramatically increases the supply and therefore decreases demand

pressure. Markets are complex but they are not immune to the basic effects of supply and demand.

**Will this project impact or change my Williamson Act contract and the tax benefits I receive?**

No, but that is not the point. What it will do is change the likelihood that agricultural practices will be maintained on those lands.

### ***Conservation and Regional Planning***

**What is the South County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)?**

The City's description was accurate.

**How will the SOI amendment area impact the South County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)?**

The SOIA expansion has been and continues to be a major sticking point in finishing the SSHCP. The SOIA removes so much land from the inventory available to mitigate impacts from development planned inside the Urban Services Boundary that it threatens the viability of this important regional conservation plan.

**Is the City coordinating with Sacramento County on the SOI amendment area?**

The county has been cooperative.

**The City is not a good steward of rural and agricultural lands.**

By definition, if the city is trying to access 8,000 acres of agricultural land for purpose of urban development, it is not a good steward. Period!

**The City has a poor track record in open space and natural resources protection.**

Elk Grove has a good track record of mitigating for Swainson's hawk impacts when permitting urban development. However, developing the 8,000 acres south of the city will destroy some of the best remaining Swainson's hawk nesting and foraging habitat in our region. It is important to remember that the County established a line that it agreed not to grow past in 1993, called the Urban Services Boundary (USB). This line was not arbitrarily placed, it was a hard won compromise between development needs and environmental protections. All of the lands south of the USB were considered too valuable to be developed. Cities are not beholden to the USB, and Elk Grove's incorporation was a way around that restriction. They want to destroy what the county had to reluctantly agree were lands that were too environmentally valuable to touch.

### ***Public Participation***

**As a member of the public, how can I participate in the process?**

For more information about the urban study area, or to participate in future meetings, visit <http://www.egplanning.org/projects/urbanstudyarea>

Residents and property owners can contact Peter Brundage, Executive Director, at (916) 874-6458 or [Peter.Brundage@SacLafco.org](mailto:Peter.Brundage@SacLafco.org).

For more information about LAFCo, and for the FEIR all supporting documents for the Elk Grove LAFCo SOI Expansion Application visit [www.saclafco.org](http://www.saclafco.org).