



Board Agenda Item 54

DATE: August 6, 2024

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBMITTED BY: Steven E. White, Director
Department of Public Works and Planning

SUBJECT: Resolution Dissolving the Fresno County Agricultural Land Conservation Committee

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Adopt and authorize the Chairman to execute a Resolution dissolving the County of Fresno's Agricultural Land Conservation Committee, an advisory committee to the Board of Supervisors concerning the County's Williamson Act Program.

Since the State's elimination of Williamson Act subvention funding in 2002, and the Board of Supervisor's direction in 2009, to no longer accept new Williamson Act Contracts or Farmland Security Zone Agreements, the activity level involving the Agricultural Land Conservation Committee (ALCC) has greatly decreased.

Approval of the recommended action would dissolve the ALCC thereby creating efficiencies of staff time and resources by eliminating the need for ALCC meetings and expediting the decision-making process by the Department of Public Works and Planning coming directly to your Board for consideration and action on matters relating to the County's Williamson Act Program. This item is countywide in nature.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):

You Board may choose not to dissolve the ALCC and instead, retain the ALCC in its current capacity or suspend ALCC meetings until further notice.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no Net County Cost associated with the recommended action.

DISCUSSION:

The Land Conservation Act of 1965 (currently, California Government Code Sections 51200 - 51297.4; the Williamson Act) was passed by the State Legislature to preserve agricultural and open space land uses by discouraging premature and unnecessary division and conversion of those lands to non-agricultural uses. The Williamson Act authorizes the County to enter into Williamson Act Contracts (Contract) or Farmland Security Zone Agreements (Agreement) with property owners who voluntarily commit land to agricultural and agriculturally compatible uses for ten, twenty, or more years. By enrolling in the Williamson Act, property owners generally benefit from a reduction in property taxes.

Generally, each Contract is for a period of ten years (20 years for Farmland Security Zone Agreements) and is automatically renewed on its anniversary date. This makes for a perpetual ten-year or 20-year Contract or Agreement unless a Notice of Non-Renewal is initiated by the property owner or the County, or a petition for

cancellation is initiated by the property owner and approved by the Board of Supervisors.

In 1967, the ALCC was established by the Board of Supervisors as an advisory committee to consider, evaluate, and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors relating to establishment of agricultural preserves, applications for placing land under Contracts or Agreement, and review of applications to remove land from the County's Williamson Act program. The Department of Public Works and Planning (Department) supports the ALCC by accepting, processing, and evaluating Williamson Act applications and making recommendations to the ALCC.

Fresno County's ALCC was instrumental in establishing the criteria, standards, and framework for implementation of the County's Williamson Act Program. For several years, great effort was spent by Department staff and the ALCC in identifying the appropriate locations for establishing agricultural preserves (which is a prerequisite to rerolling lands into Contracts or Agreements), reviewing and making recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding enrolling and removing of Williamson Act Contracts from the County's Williamson Act Program.

However, since the State's elimination of Williamson Act subvention funding in 2002, and the Board of Supervisor's direction in 2009, to no longer accept new Contracts or Agreements, the activity level involving the ALCC has greatly decreased. The ALCC has only met an average of three times per year since 2018, and only considers an average of one to two items per meeting. Currently, items considered by the ALCC are limited to petitions to remove land from a contract (cancellation).

The Department is not aware of any restriction on your Board dissolving the ALCC. If the ALCC is dissolved, Department staff will continue to evaluate Williamson Act applications and the Department, rather than the ALCC, will make its recommendation to your Board. The Department believes this will result in efficiencies of staff time and resources by eliminating the need for ALCC meetings and expediting the process of coming before your Board for consideration and action on matters relating to the County's Williamson Act Program.

Since its formation, the ALCC has undergone multiple reorganizations and its membership is now comprised of seven committee members representing the following: Fresno County Agricultural Commissioner's Office; Cooperative Extension; US Department of Agriculture; Soil Conservation Service; Fresno County Farm Bureau; California State University Agriculture Department; League of Women Voters; and the Association of Realtors (Pearson Realty). There exists one vacancy at this time.

The Department conferred with County Counsel's Office in preparing this item.

REFERENCE MATERIAL:

BAI #11, January 23, 1996
BAI #4, November 14, 1995
BAI #63, December 12, 1968

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AND/OR ON FILE:

On file with Clerk - Resolution Dissolving the Agricultural Land Conservation Committee

CAO ANALYST:

Salvador Espino