

Take that 'fork in road' now

Paul Jacobs, Temecula Californian, 7-22-10

Yogi Berra famously said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

It is doubtful any forks were taken when Gary Johnson of Liberty Quarry's Granite Construction treated Riverside County Local Agency Formation Commissioner Russell Kitahara to breakfast at the Fork in the Road restaurant in Coachella, as reported in a Press-Enterprise article posted July 14.

At their July 13 meeting, three of five Temecula council members seriously questioned the conduct of the county formation commission, which acts more like an advocate for Liberty Quarry rather than an unbiased county agency charged with the basic responsibility of drawing lines on a map.

Other than ensuring land-zoning consistencies, LAFCO is not supposed to be overly concerned with what happens within those lines. That is the function of the local, city or county agency and the reason for having planning commissions, city councils and county supervisors.

Now that the three council members have had their suspicions supported by Kitahara's news article confession of not one but three meetings with Johnson, Temecula leaders are duty-bound to pursue a grand jury investigation of LAFCO.

Of the Fork in the Road breakfast meeting, Kitahara remembered that he had "corned beef hash," the restaurant name and that the amount of his share of the bill covered by Johnson came to about \$10, but details and dates of the discussion seem conveniently erased from memory like the 18.5 missing minutes of the Nixon White House recordings.

The article quoted Kitahara, "I guess I didn't really listen to him that much, because I don't remember what he was trying to tell me."

Kitahara is guilty of being a rude breakfast companion, if nothing else ---- and is it routine for Johnson to have things to tell him? Who was taking orders, the waitress or Kitahara?

Agency executive director George Spiliotis reportedly claimed the meetings do not violate the commission's rules, which is shocking because from LAFCO's past conduct toward Temecula, I didn't think the super agency had any rules.

Three of the five tines of the fork that are the Temecula City Council ---- Mike Naggar, Ron Roberts and Chuck Washington ---- have vocalized suspicion of impropriety within LAFCO. The entire council should back Roberts' call for grand jury and district attorney investigations. The city should also seek judicial relief from all past and present decisions going back to and including LAFCO's June 2009 denial of Temecula's annexation request.

Granite Construction plays hardball and Temecula needs to step up to the plate. Now is the time to take that fork in the road.