

Amid funding miseries, Inland officials want state anti-sprawl law shelved until economy improves

Duane W. Gang, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 5-7-10

LA QUINTA -- Elected officials from across Southern California expressed frustration Thursday with the state's anti-sprawl law and a lack of funding to implement its goals.

The officials questioned how they will cope with new requirements during a weak economy and as the state seeks to withhold more money from local governments.

"We know it is law and want to implement it," said Hemet Councilwoman Robin Lowe, president of the California League of Cities. "But is it appropriate at this time? What are the cities supposed to do? How do you think we are supposed to do this without any financial assistance?"

The law, SB 375, seeks ways to meet the goals of the state's greenhouse-gas legislation. AB 32 requires the state to reduce its emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

SB 375 aims to do that by limiting urban sprawl and reducing vehicle traffic in favor of more pedestrian-friendly residential and commercial developments, such as housing developments planned near train and bus stations.

To that end, the Southern California Association of Governments will give the California Air Resources Board a plan to reduce the region's emissions from 7 to 9 percent per capita by 2020, said Hassan Ikhata, SCAG's executive director.

"This is our best effort in getting something done -- ambitious and achievable," Ikhata said.

The Air Resources Board is expected to set final targets by September, and SCAG officials hope it is close to what they submit May 24.

SCAG is the regional planning agency for Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Orange, Imperial and Ventura counties, along with 189 cities in those counties. The association is holding its annual conference in La Quinta this week.

The Riverside County Board of Supervisors earlier this year approved a resolution urging Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to temporarily suspend AB 32. And an initiative in the signature-gathering phase aims to ask voters to suspend the legislation until the state's unemployment rate hits 5.5 percent for four straight quarters.

Many local officials at the conference Thursday questioned how cities and counties could put in place SB 375's requirements at a time when the state is raiding local funds.

The state wants to divert more than \$2 billion in redevelopment funds to school operations.

Fontana Mayor Mark Nuaimi said many cities already are doing what SB 375 aims to accomplish without Sacramento's heavy hand. Fontana, he said, concentrated new senior housing near its Metrolink station.

Nuaimi questioned where cities would get funding to meet the legislation's goal.