

# ***NEWS***

## *From the San Bernardino County* **Local Agency Formation Commission**



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### **LAFCO Wins Statewide Award for Victorville, Helendale Planning *Commission Awarded for Effort to Balance Mining, Growth, and Defining Oro Grande***

A planning effort by a local agency designed to allow two High Desert communities to grow and thrive while protecting the local mining industry and defining the boundaries of a historic community won recognition from a statewide organization.

The San Bernardino County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) received the “Most Effective Commission” Achievement Award at the recent statewide meeting of the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions (CALAFCO).

“This was a complex and potentially contentious process,” said LAFCO Chairman and First District County Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, who represents the High Desert. “But through the hard work of LAFCO staff, along with cooperation from Victorville, Helendale and the mining companies, we achieved a result that ensures responsible growth in the Victor Valley while protecting our critical mining industry, and preserving the rural nature of Oro Grande.”

LAFCO had spent three years working to expand the sphere of influence for the City of Victorville. LAFCO was also required to establish a sphere for the Helendale Community Services District, which was established in 2006. A sphere of influence is a formal designation that sets boundaries for the probable growth of a city or public agency.

LAFCO is charged with reviewing and approving or denying city incorporations, annexations, and the establishment of boundaries and authorized services for numerous local agencies, including fire districts, community services districts and water agencies.

In this case, LAFCO faced several competing interests. The spheres of influence proposed by Victorville and Helendale CSD, which is north of Victorville, overlapped by more than 21 ½ (13,760 acres) square miles. The proposal by Victorville also took in a vast and productive mining area north of the city and reached west to the historic community of Oro Grande, a small agricultural area along the Mojave River.

Supervisor Mitzelfelt and LAFCO Executive Officer Kathleen Rollings-McDonald held a series of meetings and negotiations over a period of months to work out compromises with officials from Victorville and Helendale, in addition to the residents of Oro Grande and the local mining companies.

Helendale and Victorville worked out a compromise boundary, while LAFCO worked with the County mining geologist and local mine operators to identify active and potential mining lands to ensure that residential and commercial development would be kept a safe distance away to prevent future conflicts. Victorville agreed to modify its development plans to maintain an appropriate buffer.

During the process, the residents of Oro Grande made it clear they wanted their community to remain independent from any potential future annexation into Victorville. But formal boundaries for the unincorporated community had never been established. Executive Officer McDonald said that the definition of this historic community was a long-time coming and will allow the community to work together for its acknowledgement and preservation.

LAFCO staff took it upon themselves to work with residents and local leaders to determine where the boundaries should be. They then used the mechanism of expanding the sphere of influence of the existing County Service Area 42 within Oro Grande to create a formal definition of the community for the first time.

Victorville’s expanded sphere of influence accommodates future development along Interstate 15, including the proposed Desert Xpress high speed train, while Helendale’s sphere may allow it to pursue cityhood in the coming decades. Local mining, with its economic and environmental benefits, is protected and Oro Grande for the first time has formal boundaries, which must be considered in any future annexation attempt.