



MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

January 31, 2023

Chairwoman Nora Vargas
SANDAG
County Administration Center
1600 Pacific Highway, Rm 335
San Diego, CA 92101

VIA Email: nora.vargas@sdcounty.ca.gov
SANDAG.Chair@sandag.org

SUBJECT: City of El Cajon's Request for Consideration – East County Fair, Equitable, and Balanced Representation on SANDAG Committees

Dear Chairwoman Vargas:

The East County Mayors have failed to reach consensus on important SANDAG committee appointments. As such, the City of El Cajon provides the Chairwoman with a fair, equitable, and balanced proposal for your consideration. Alternatively, El Cajon requests that the Chairwoman postpone making appointments until an equitable process for tie-breaking is established for East County cities.

Background

For a number of years, the mayors of El Cajon, Santee, Lemon Grove, and La Mesa have met annually to decide who will represent the interests of the East County cities on the various SANDAG committees. There is no chairperson, no formal agenda, nor any minutes kept. Rather, it has traditionally been an informal gathering to collegially agree on a fair and equitable way for the East County cities to be represented at SANDAG.

Over the last two years, however, this once-friendly and respectful process has frayed under the pressures of double-dealing and mistrust. In 2021, the East County mayors agreed that Santee Mayor John Minto would replace El Cajon Mayor Bill Wells on the SANDAG Executive Committee, with Lemon Grove Mayor Raquel Vasquez being the alternate. It was further agreed that this arrangement would reverse itself the following year. Despite agreeing to this arrangement, Mayor Vasquez privately approached the SANDAG Board Chair and had herself placed as the primary member on the Executive Committee with Mayor Minto as the alternate; an arrangement she has managed to maintain through her private conversations

with the SANDAG Board Chair for two years and in contravention to the will of the majority of East County mayors.

On January 25, 2023, the East County mayors met once again for the purpose of determining East County representation on various SANDAG committees. Mayor Vasquez immediately declared herself Chairperson of the group—even though no such distinction has ever existed—which immediately led to a breakdown in effective communication and ultimately a failure of the group to conduct the business for which it met. Capitalizing on the chaos she created with her unilateral pronouncement, Mayor Vasquez sought to adjourn the meeting stating that all SANDAG committee assignments would remain the same and anyone who disagreed with this approach would be recorded as “abstaining” from voting for a preference. Mayor Wells repeatedly voiced his disagreement with Mayor Vasquez’s conduct at this meeting, as well as strenuously objecting to being reported as an “abstention” in cases where he clearly voted for an opposing position.

The East County mayors and alternates met yet again on January 30th in an effort to cooperatively work through the issue of committee representation. This provided a chance for a balanced compromise, and El Cajon’s representatives came to the meeting with that in mind. Unfortunately, once again, Mayor Vasquez cultivated an uncompromising environment that fueled La Mesa Councilmember Jack Shu’s bullying conduct. The lack of leadership from both parties resulted in 2-2 deadlocks in all attempts to establish SANDAG committee representation in a reasonable and fair manner so all constituencies are equitably represented.

Additionally, La Mesa Councilmember Jack Shu’s behavior at this meeting can, at best, be deemed dishonest and at worst considered outright bullying. Councilmember Shu’s false assertion during this meeting that El Cajon has been “in power too long” and should therefore be denied *all* committee representation (despite being the largest city in East County) is the most egregious form of race-based politics. First, he ignores the simple truth that El Cajon has never used its size and position to yield power at SANDAG. Second, Councilmember Shu blatantly denies large Middle Eastern, Latino, and African American communities of El Cajon a seat at the SANDAG table through their elected officials. Somehow, according to Councilmember Shu, the white majority residents of La Mesa have been “historically disadvantaged.”

The actions of Mayor Vasquez and Councilmember Shu to subjugate the group to their will, without regard to past agreements made or the opinions of others strike at the heart of the issues that El Cajon (and perhaps Santee) has with this process. Not only do we formally protest the way this meeting was conducted and how its outcome is apparently planned to be represented, but herein raise serious questions that need to be comprehensively addressed

regarding the outright and fundamental dysfunction and circus-like atmosphere that now prevails at SANDAG at all levels.

El Cajon's Request

El Cajon presents a fair, equitable, and balanced approach for the Chairwoman to consider. This proposal ensures that all cities are represented and there is no preference toward party politics in the following proposal. It also meets the express interest of several of the elected officials.

Position	Primary	City	Alternate	City
Executive	Mayor John Minto	Santee	Councilmember Jack Shu	La Mesa
Planning	Mayor Bill Wells	El Cajon	Councilmember George Gastil	Lemon Grove
Transportation	Councilmember Patricia Dillard	La Mesa	Councilmember Ronn Hall	Santee
Public Safety	Councilmember Steve Goble	El Cajon	Councilmember Patricia Dillard	La Mesa
Borders	Councilmember Laura Koval	Santee	Councilmember Jack Shu	La Mesa
Audit	Mayor Racquel Vasquez	Lemon Grove	Mayor Bill Wells	El Cajon
Regional Energy	Councilmember J. Mendoza	Lemon Grove	Councilmember Ronn Hall	Santee

If the East County region is concerned that I am appointed to a committee, El Cajon Deputy Mayor Steve Goble can be the primary to Planning and Jack Shu can be the primary to Public Safety.

Alternatively, if the Chairwoman is not comfortable making these appointments, the City of El Cajon requests that appointments be postponed until the entire SANDAG Board of Directors has an opportunity to decide on how sub-regions can make decisions in the event of a tie. In brief, El Cajon proposes that sub-regions look toward the system that SANDAG has in place with proportionate voting, only to be used in the event of a tie.

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In summary, it is inconceivable that the voice of the sixth largest city in the County and the largest city in East County be silenced by not participating in SANDAG's committees. Mayor Vasquez and Councilmember Shu's exclusive view and focus on party politics result in no El Cajon representation on a SANDAG committee, which flies in the face of "equity and inclusion." We find this wholly inconsistent with fair and equitable representative government and in direct contradiction to spirit of AB 805. Appointment of representatives to committees should, first and foremost have as its primary goal, appointments based on city population in the region in which they are located—exactly in keeping with AB 805 principles.

As stated above, the City of El Cajon requests that the Chairwoman consider the City of El Cajon's fair, equitable, and balanced solution to committee appointments, or alternatively, postpone appointments until an equitable process for tie-breaking be established for East County cities.

Sincerely,



Bill Wells
Mayor
City of El Cajon

cc: Hasan Ikhata, SANDAG Executive Director (via email)
Mayor Racquel Vasquez, Lemon Grove (via email)
Mayor Mark Arapostathis, La Mesa (via email)
Mayor John Minto, Santee (via email)