

Katherine Douglas *Public Comment*

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From: mikestoker@aol.com
Sent: Friday, March 7, 2025 9:56 AM
To: sbcob
Subject: The SBCTAC OPPOSES the proposal to increase fees paid to the Environmental Health Department

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"The SBCTAC...Fighting for the Taxpayer and Helping our Business Members Succeed!"

Chairwoman Capps and Honorable Board Members,

You have on your agenda next Tuesday a proposal to raise fees in the Environmental Health Department. These fee increases will cost Santa Barbara County businesses almost a million additional dollars annually. The increase is based on Santa Barbara County's approach to achieve 100% recovery of ALL costs associated with the county agency in serving the county business in regards to the reason the fee is being charged.

With this in mind, on behalf of the over 300 individual and business members of the Santa Barbara County Taxpayer Advocacy Center (BCTAC), we oppose this fee proposal.

The SBCTAC believes that our county's businesses are crucial to the financial solvency of the county. The fewer businesses we have the less money the county has to spend. Consequently, the SBCTAC would strongly encourage this Board to start assessing the cost of doing business in Santa

Barbara County with the cost of doing business in our neighboring counties. If the same business can do the same thing but pays lower fees in neighboring counties for doing the same thing, if this Board cares about our businesses, you should ask the question why?

I am therefore asking this Board to start using 'comparable counties' whenever fee increases are proposed for what businesses and/or the public have to pay when doing business with Santa Barbara County. Whether it is a zoning/land use fee for a development applicant or a restaurant paying environmental health fees for complying with annual inspections, this Board should be aware of what comparable counties pay, especially the counties of Ventura, SLO, and Monterey counties, to our immediate north and south.

This Board uses 'comparable counties' to justify what you pay department heads. Just two weeks ago you used 'comparable counties' to justify for yourself a 48% pay raise and to give your attorneys a raise. If comparable counties make sense for what you use to determine what you get paid, it should also be used to determine what you charge the public and businesses that do business with Santa Barbara County, **IF YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT THE BUSINESSES THAT DO BUSINESS IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY!**

The old saying comes to mind, "*What is good for the goose is good for the gander.*"

Going forward the SBCTAC strongly recommends to this Board that a Citizens Advisory Committee be appointed to review the proposed fee increase for the Environmental Health Department and to review all future fee increases. The Committee will be tasked with comparing other 'comparable counties' for what they charge for the same fees and departments, and, look at any other relevant information and then report back to the Board with their recommendations regarding the proposed fee increase.

Those of us in the business community strongly believe that Santa Barbara County is a much more expensive county to do business than our counties to the north and south. This committee could answer those questions once and for all. Having staff give a biased general statement in their staff report 'claiming' the costs are similar or using certain fees comparable counties charge out of context to justify your proposed fee increase today is no more appropriate than if your salary increase was based on the same kind of assertions. Your salary and the salaries of many other county employees were based on a comprehensive review of those comparable counties. The business community deserves the same courtesy.

The SBCTAC also believes it is wrong to have a policy of 100% recovery of all costs associated with the service being provided. The Citizens Advisory Committee can also report back with their recommendations to the Board on what those comparable counties are doing regarding the policy of recovering 100% of all costs back from the applicant. The SBCTAC does NOT believe those comparable counties are doing the same thing.

The bottom line is this County IF you care about our businesses should work hard to make sure the cost of doing business in Santa Barbara County is no more than the cost of doing business in Ventura, SLO, and Monterey counties. If they can do it for less then it begs the question why does it cost more money to do business in Santa Barbara County? A Citizens Advisory Committee, the same kind of committee that recommended your pay raise, can answer those questions for you as they review and make recommendations in regard to future fee increase proposals.

I want to thank you for your time and consideration of this very important matter.

Best regards,
Mike Stoker
President & CEO, SBCTAC