



July 21, 2006

**Statement to the Joint Policy Committee  
Bay Area Regional Position on CEQA Reform**

The League of Women Voters has long supported the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it provides for citizen participation in the development process as well as providing documentation and disclosure of a projects' impact on the environment. We believe that CEQA needs to be used more effectively, rather than to be "reformed" or diverted.

**LWVBA agrees with the ABAG and MTC principles** indicated in staff report, because they recognize the key components of CEQA: meaningful community input and community support, promoting quality development consistent with local plans and protecting the environment and/or not resulting in significant environmental impacts.

**We oppose further exemptions.** What exemptions have been provided to date to traditional CEQA requirements are enough to give some options within certain infill areas. They haven't been used often, and we are not sure why not. We do not favor any expansion of exemptions.

**We favor the tiered approach, with some concerns about community input and funding**  
LWVBA agrees with the tiered planning approach that would move to "What do we want" rather than "what can we oppose". This would come more from the use of specific area planning/master EIRs than through the traditional project EIR process. We do note that, recently, diverse groups have come together to endorse projects rather than oppose them within the EIR process. We are hopeful that the Station Area Plans being funded through the MTC TOD grants and the ABAG-MTC Corridor planning efforts will show that this process works, as well.

The downside of specific plan or master EIRs is that they can be so general and vague as to their particular impacts as not to get the attention of, or to not be understood by, the neighborhood interests. Also, the identified impacts of the larger area plan may lose their "shelf life" if the proposed project is presented after a substantial time delay.

A second concern is that area plan/master EIRs are only funded by the public agency (or hopefully state agencies) Project EIRs on the other hand are paid for by the applicant (normally performed independently by city/county administered consultant) The substantial reductions in funding for general planning both by city and county governments, due to budget cutbacks, and also the elimination of any funding or mandate reimbursement by the State government is a factor in considering this option. So, there is not an easy trade-off between the funding of an EIR by a developer and a city/county planning process which relies on general funding.

**Regional planning is critical and we supported the funding component that was in SB 1024.** This funding is really important to achieving a true regional vision on the ground and to have some measurement of how local plans and projects comply with these regional plans.

Linda Craig, President

**League of Women Voters of California**  
**Letter to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, June 24, 2005**  
**Support of California Environmental Quality Act**

The League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) has long supported citizen participation in the political process as well as efforts to protect and improve our physical environment. The LWVC is on record as supporting the proper application of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a tool to achieve these two goals, and we reiterate our position in this letter. In recent months, California Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman has led a review of CEQA to consider whether it can be improved to meet current needs for development while enhancing environmental quality. The LWVC believes that what is needed is for CEQA to be used properly.

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 requires state, regional and local agencies to identify the significant environmental impacts of their actions and to avoid or mitigate those impacts, if feasible.

The League of Women Voters of California supports CEQA because we believe:

- Growth management decisions should relate to and protect the overall quality of the environment.
- In carrying out land use planning and regulation, and throughout the growth management process, government must provide for:
  - involvement of citizens in the earliest planning and regulatory stages;
  - adequate funding of the public information process; and
  - development of mechanisms to minimize conflict of interest on the part of persons who make land use decisions.

CEQA is critical in assuring:

- full disclosure of a project's significant adverse impacts on the environment
- adoption of all feasible mitigation measures and alternatives
- public participation in the development review process
- protection of the environment consistent with providing safe, decent and adequate housing for all Californians
- integration of transportation and land use planning and regulation to reduce vehicle travel and facilitate use of mass transit and other transportation alternatives
- recognition of the interrelationship of regulation and decision making for air quality, energy, land use, waste management and water resources.

The issue of "streamlining" CEQA has been discussed at public meetings around the state sponsored by the CEQA Improvement Advisory Group convened by Secretary Chrisman. The LWVC believes that CEQA already allows for a streamlined approach to project evaluation. We stated this in 1996 in a letter on then-pending legislation. That letter went on to say, as we noted above, that what was needed was for CEQA to be used properly. The League feels that this is still true in 2005.