



Government Relations & Public Affairs Committee

Item #09-6-7
Action

May 28, 2009

SB 715 (Wolk) Williamson Act Reform

Issue: Senator Lois Wolk has introduced SB 715 to address enforcement concerns with the Williamson Act.

Recommendation: That the Government Relations and Public Affairs Committee recommend to the SACOG Board a support position on SB 715.

Discussion: The California Land Conservation Act, or “Williamson Act” of 1965, has been successful in maintaining large amounts of land in agriculture by offering property tax benefits to participants in exchange for long-term land preservation contracts. Recently, the Governor’s office and the Legislative Analyst have argued that the Act is not working efficiently due to abuses by landowners, which has led to attempts to eliminate Williamson Act subventions from the state budget. SB 715 (Attachment A) would reform the Williamson Act to address enforcement concerns by reforming three key elements:

1. It would increase enforcement authority by eliminating the non-renewal protest provision and accelerate property tax increases to market rate when non-compliance leads to a jurisdiction’s determination of non-renewal. Currently, a landowner subject to non-renewal can protect their tax benefits for four years by filing a protest; the bill would reduce this to one year. When a non-renewal is activated, property taxes increase to market rate over the remaining period of the contract.
2. The bill would require proof of agricultural income be submitted to the county assessor for lands under contract. Currently, lands taken out of production still benefit from the Williamson Act and enforcement efforts are cumbersome.
3. The bill would condition the subdivision of land for development if the land is under contract. Currently, some lands under contract are being subdivided for residential uses that are not compatible with the Williamson Act.

The bill is sponsored by Yolo County and supported by the California Association of Counties, the Regional Council of Rural Counties, and the Resource Landowners Coalition. The California Farm Bureau Federation has a position of support if amended. The bill is on the Senate floor pending action.

Approved by:

Mike McKeever
Executive Director

Attachment

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