

Fresno County, city leaders aim for top-level cooperation

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Fresno County board Chairman Andreas Borgeas on Tuesday will try to convince his fellow supervisors it's time for the county and city of Fresno to work together to regulate medical marijuana, among other issues.

But success at the Hall of Records and City Hall may require a change in human nature, if past attempts at such cooperation are any indication.

Borgeas plans to ask the board to support a joint meeting on March 11. The three-hour gathering would be held in downtown Fresno's Council of Governments headquarters and focus on three issues:

- Marijuana cultivation.
- Sewer connections.
- Shopping carts.

"There are some historical grievances between the two entities," Borgeas said. "The purpose of this is to take a step to overcome them."

City Council President Steve Brandau agrees.

"This community needs the city and the county to come together and accomplish something, even if it's just low-hanging fruit," Brandau said. "That will lead to the day when we can accomplish something bigger."

What the legislative bodies might do with the three topics is unclear. Borgeas and Brandau say county and city rules are either slightly out of kilter or a potential source of friction. They want uniformity in the name of public safety.

The jurisdictions already appear headed toward similar destinations.

The county and the city take a skeptical view of marijuana cultivation of any kind. The supervisors recently banned all cultivation, California's first county to take such an action. There were 20 incidents of violent crime linked to marijuana farming operations in 2013.

Fresno County and City Hall have long wanted to protect groundwater by eliminating septic tanks within metropolitan Fresno. The challenge is allocating the cost of hook-ups to the city sewage system.

Shopping carts have found their way from retail parking lots into the hands of the homeless or marooned on side streets. The problem for government has been sustaining its concern in the face of higher priorities.

City and county officials at levels below the board and council have a history of picking up the phone and calling each other. For example, it happens routinely with construction of bicycle lanes through city and county islands.

However, city-county cooperation at the elected level has a dismal history. There was a board-council meeting in 2006 aimed at law-enforcement issues. Time and turf wars doomed the resolve. The two governments in the past several years have battled over regional planning.

Borgeas said his proposed meeting's agenda is flexible enough to include bigger topics.

Supervisor Henry R. Perea said it's too early for him to judge, saying he's not sure "where Supervisor Borgeas is headed."

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