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## No tears for loss of East County advisory group

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Members of a long-standing group that advised the county on land-use matters in parts of East Contra Costa County are not mourning its impending demise.

East County Regional Planning Commission will cease to exist Oct. 6 after 23 years of making recommendations to the county Board of Supervisors on land-use decisions affecting unincorporated areas.

"There's no planning going on — it's foolish to have a meeting when the only people who show up are the board members," said Bob Doran, who represents Discovery Bay on the five-member board.

The commission's workload has dropped off significantly in recent years: From 2005 through 2008, 48 percent of its monthly meetings were canceled because there simply wasn't enough business on the agenda — a situation exacerbated by the troubled economy and the shrinking amount of acreage in East County available for development.

And as the gaps between meetings increased, commissioner Ed Stevenson, of Bay Point, said he noticed himself taking longer to read and analyze bulky documents.

"I just don't feel sharp. It's like any other practice whether it's a teacher, mortgage broker or

accountant — if you don't practice, you get rusty," he said.

Established in June 1986, the commission is charged with reviewing projects that would be exceptions to the county's zoning regulations, which specify the type of structures that may be built in a particular area.

If a parcel is zoned for agricultural use but a builder wants to put a single-family home on it, for example, the matter first would go to the regional planning commission.

Members in turn pass on their recommendation to the county board of supervisors.

They also hear appeals by people who disagree with the county zoning administrator's decisions on whether to issue land-use permits to groups such as churches and large day care centers that want to operate in an area not zoned for those activities.

But Doran understands the county's need to save money wherever possible.

Although he and the other commissioners aren't paid, the meetings routinely require county employees to attend — sometimes as many as four at a time — to offer their expertise, he said.

And then there's mileage reimbursements, the cost of renting Antioch's City Council chamber, along with the blizzard of faxes, reports and copies of agendas that meetings generate.

"When you see the amount of money that's spent FedEx-ing things to us " ... it's just a terrible waste," Doran said.

The Board of Supervisors also decided last week to allow the San Ramon Valley Regional Planning

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Commission to expire, although members of that commission were opposed to the move.

The Contra Costa County Planning Commission in Martinez will now handle the regional commissions' business in addition to its own.

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