SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Audit Report

PROPERTY TAX APPORTIONMENT AND ALLOCATION SYSTEM

July 1, 2007, through June 30, 2014

BETTY T. YEE

California State Controller

April 2015

BETTY T. YEE
California State Controller

April 28, 2015

James P. Erb, CPA, Auditor Controller, Treasurer,
Tax Collector
San Luis Obispo County
1055 Monterey Street, Suite D290
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

Dear Mr. Erb:

The State Controller's Office audited the methods employed by San Luis Obispo County to apportion and allocate property tax revenues for the period of July 1, 2007, through June 30, 2014. The audit was conducted pursuant to the requirements of Government Code section 12468.

Our audit disclosed that the county complied with California statutes for the allocation and apportionment of property tax revenues for the period audited.

If you have any questions, please contact Elizabeth González, Chief, Local Government Compliance Bureau, at (916) 324-0622.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

JEFFREY V. BROWNFIELD, CPA
Chief, Division of Audits

JVB/gj

cc: Jody Martin, Principal Consultant
Joint Legislative Budget Committee
Peter Detwiler, Staff Director
Senate Local Government Committee
Elvia Dias, Committee Assistant
Senate Local Government Committee

Dixie Martineau-Petty, Secretary
Assembly Local Government Committee
Gayle Miller, Staff Director
Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee
Oksana Jaffe, Chief Consultant
Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee
Neil McCormick, Executive Director
California Special Districts Association
Jim Hamilton, Assistant Auditor Controller
San Luis Obispo County
Barbara Godwin, Property Tax Manager
San Luis Obispo County
Aaronne Livingston, Accounting Technician
San Luis Obispo County

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Audit Report

Summary

The State Controller's Office (SCO) audited the methods employed by San Luis Obispo County to apportion and allocate property tax revenues for the period of July 1, 2007, through June 30, 2014.

Our audit disclosed that the county complied with California statutes for the allocation and apportionment of property tax revenues for the period audited.

Background

After the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, the California State Legislature enacted new methods for allocating and apportioning property tax revenues to local government agencies and public schools. The main objective was to provide local government agencies with a property tax base that would grow as assessed property values increased. These methods have been further refined in subsequent laws passed by the Legislature.

One key law was Assembly Bill (AB) 8, Chapter 282, Statutes of 1979, which established the method of allocating property taxes for fiscal year (FY) 1979-80 (base year) and subsequent fiscal years. The methodology is commonly referred to as the AB 8 process or the AB 8 system.

The property tax revenues that local government agencies receive each fiscal year are based on the amount received in the prior year, plus a share of the property tax growth within their boundaries. Property tax revenues are then apportioned and allocated to local agencies and schools using prescribed formulas and methods defined in the Revenue and Taxation Code.

The AB 8 base process involved numerous steps, including the transfer of revenues from schools to local agencies (AB 8 shift) and the development of the tax rate area annual tax increment apportionment factors (ATI factors), which determine the amount of property tax revenues to be allocated to each jurisdiction.

The total amount to be allocated to each jurisdiction is then divided by the total amount to be allocated to all entities to determine the AB 8 apportionment factor (percentage share) for each entity for the year. The AB 8 factors are computed each year for all entities, using the revenue amounts established in the prior year. These amounts are adjusted for growth annually, using ATI factors.

Subsequent legislation removed revenues generated by unitary and nonunitary properties, regulated railway companies, and qualified electric properties from the AB 8 process. These revenues are now allocated and apportioned under separate processes.

Other legislation established an Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) in each county. Most local government agencies are required to transfer a portion of their property tax revenues to the fund. The fund is subsequently allocated and apportioned to schools by the

county auditor according to instructions received from the county superintendent of schools or the State Chancellor of Community Colleges.

Revenues generated by the different types of property tax are apportioned and allocated to local agencies and schools using prescribed formulas and methods, as defined in the Revenue and Taxation Code. Taxable property includes land, improvements, and other properties that are accounted for on the property tax rolls maintained primarily by the county assessor. Tax rolls contain an entry for each parcel of land, including the parcel number, the owner's name, and the value. Following are the types of property tax rolls:

- *Secured Roll*—This roll contains property that, in the opinion of the assessor, has sufficient value to guarantee payment of the tax levies and that, if necessary, can be sold by the tax collector to satisfy unpaid tax levies.

- *Unsecured Roll*—This roll contains property that, in the opinion of the assessor, does not have sufficient "permanence" or have other intrinsic qualities to guarantee payment of taxes levied against it.

- *State-Assessed Roll*—This roll contains public utility, railroad, and qualified electric properties, assessed as either unitary or nonunitary property by the State Board of Equalization.

- *Supplemental Roll*—This roll contains property that has been reassessed due to a change in ownership or the completion of new construction, where the resulting change in assessed value is not reflected in other tax rolls.

To mitigate problems associated with the apportionment and allocation of property taxes, Senate Bill 418 was enacted in 1985 requiring the State Controller to audit the counties' apportionment and allocation methods and report the results to the California State Legislature.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our audit objective was to review the county's apportionment and allocation of property tax revenues to local government agencies and public schools within its jurisdiction to determine whether the county complied with Revenue and Taxation Code requirements.

To meet the objective, we reviewed the county's procedures for apportioning and allocating property tax revenues used by the county auditor and the processes used by the tax collector and the assessor.

We performed the following procedures:

- Conducted tests to determine whether the county correctly apportioned and allocated property tax revenue.

- Interviewed key personnel and reviewed supporting documentation to gain an understanding of the county's property tax apportionment and allocation processes.

- Reviewed apportionment and allocation reports prepared by the county showing the computations used to develop the property tax distribution factors.

- Reviewed tax rate area (TRA) reports to verify that the annual tax increment was computed properly.

- Reviewed county unitary and operating nonunitary reports and Board of Equalization reports and verified the computations used by the county to develop the unitary and operating nonunitary property tax distribution factors.

- Reviewed redevelopment agency (RDA) reports prepared by the county and verified the computations used to develop the project base amount and the tax increment distributed to the RDA.

- Reviewed successor agency Recognized Obligation Payment Schedules (ROPS) and county apportionment and allocation reports addressing the Redevelopment Property Tax Trust fund (RPTTF).

- Reviewed property tax administration cost reports prepared by the county and verified administrative costs associated with procedures used for apportioning and allocating property tax to local government agencies and school districts.

- Reviewed ERAF reports prepared by the county and verified the computations used to determine the shift of property taxes from local agencies to the ERAF and, subsequently, to public schools.

- Reviewed Sales and Use Tax (SUT) and Vehicle Licensing Fee (VLF) reports and computations used to verify the amount of ERAF transferred to counties and cities to compensate for the diversion of these revenues.

We conducted this performance audit under the authority of Government Code sections 12468 and 12410. We did not audit the county's financial statements. We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. The audit covered the period of July 1, 2007, through June 30, 2014. Our audit scope was limited to:

- Reviewing operational procedures and significant applicable controls over the apportionment and allocation process;

- Examining selected property tax apportionment and allocation records; and

- Reviewing related property tax revenue data used to determine the apportionment and allocation computation process.

A property tax bill contains the property tax levied at a 1% tax rate pursuant to the requirement of Proposition 13. A bill may also contain special taxes, debt services levies on voter-approved debt, fees, and assessments levied by the county or a city. The scope of our audit is concerned with the distribution of the 1% tax levy. Special taxes, debt service levies on voter-approved debt, fees, and assessments levied by the county or a city are beyond the scope of our audit and were not reviewed or audited.

We limited our review of the county's internal controls to gaining an understanding of the transaction flow in order to develop appropriate auditing procedures. We did not evaluate the effectiveness of all internal controls.

In addition, we tested transactions used to apportion and allocate property taxes and performed other procedures deemed necessary. This report relates solely to the method used by the county to apportion and allocate property taxes.

Conclusion

Our audit disclosed that the county complied with California statutes for the allocation and apportionment of property tax revenues for the period audited.

Follow-up on Prior Audit Findings

Our prior audit report, issued October 17, 2008, included no findings related to the apportionment and allocation of property tax revenues by the county.

Views of Responsible Officials

We discussed the audit results with county representatives during an exit conference held on February 11, 2015. Jim Hamilton, Assistant Auditor Controller; Barbara Godwin, Property Tax Manager; and Aaronne Livingston, Accounting Technician, agreed with the audit results. Mr. Hamilton further agreed that a draft audit report was not necessary and that the audit report could be issued as final.

Restricted Use

This report is solely for the information and use of the County, the California Legislature, and the SCO; it is not intended to be and should not be used by anyone other than these specified parties. This restriction is not intended to limit distribution of this report, which is a matter of public record.

Original signed by

JEFFREY V. BROWNFIELD, CPA
Chief, Division of Audits

April 28, 2015

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