

CITY OF VENTURA

CITY MEMORANDUM

Date: July 7, 2009



To: Alex Schneider

From: The Ombudsman Working Group participants

Subject: Report and recommendation

ECONOMIC SUMMIT ACTION ITEMS

| 5) Ombudsman Working Group | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------|
| # | ACTION ITEM | TIMEFRAME | BREAKOUT SESSION |
| 1.3 | Designate a City staff member as ombudsman | 90 Day | #1 City's Bottom Line |
| 5.4 | Create Office of the Ombudsman | 90 Day | #5 Business Climate |

Participants: Rob Edwards, John Masterson, Zoe Taylor

Facilitator: Lysa Urban

Staff: Alex Schneider, Sid White

Councilmember: Jim Monahan

Meeting #1 held June 18, 2009 –

Role, responsibilities and vision for the Ombudsman position / office

Meeting #2 held June 23, 2009 –

Finalizing the recommendation to Council, including how the position would be funded.

BACKGROUND

Approximately 125+ community members attended the May 2nd Economic Summit and participated in one of five breakout sessions, tasked with the overall goal of identifying opportunities and obstacles to improve Ventura's fiscal future. In each topic-specific session, participants voiced their ideas and synthesized the discussion into action items assigned to 90-day, 1-year and 5-year work plans.

To help manage the 54 action items that emerged, six working groups were formed, including the Ombudsman Working Group. The Ombudsman action item surfaced from two of the breakout sessions, with both groups prioritizing it under a 90-day timeframe.

Participants of the Economic Summit were then solicited to serve on one the working groups. The Ombudsman Working Group includes the above named participants.

OMBUDSMAN WORKING GROUP

Participants described the current climate for starting or growing a business, development or land use project in the City of Ventura as: “uncertain”, “filled with obstacles and roadblocks”, “inefficient”, “not business-friendly”, “very slow”, “fragmentary”, and “lacking communication between city departments.”

The discussion acknowledged these challenges as stemming from “problems with the process” and that having an Ombudsman wouldn’t, in and of itself, be the complete solution. In fact, having an Ombudsman without addressing the process challenges would be short-sighted, and cause unachievable expectations.

While discussing the Ombudsman role and responsibilities, the participants outlined two distinct positions:

1. **Business Ombudsman**, reports to Economic Development Manager
Authority/Responsibilities:
 - Convene appropriate departments as required to resolve problems
 - Be the point person for any business needing assistance with:
 - Process through city departments
 - Problem solving
 - Coordination with entities outside city jurisdiction, i.e. County departmentsMeasurement of Success:
 - Happy business people
 - Increased revenues from sales tax and/or property tax
 - Ventura being known as a place to do business
 - Savings in city staff time & dollarsSkills:
 - Understands city government process, strong problem-solving abilities, credibility and authority to make things happen

2. **Development / Land Use Ombudsman**, is the Economic Development Manager and reports to the City Manager in coordination with the Community Development Director
Authority/Responsibilities:
 - Meets with developers to determine needs/viability of project
 - Convenes appropriate departments to expedite project(s)
 - Coordinates with CD to assign project manager to each developmentMeasurements of Success:
 - Happy customers
 - Smooth process
 - Saves money for developer & city
 - Increases sales tax and/or property tax
 - Ventura is known as a good place to do business
 - Savings in City staff timeSkills:
 - Understanding government workings, land use, financial opportunities and impacts (both good & bad), has political backing to make things happen.

CULTURE CHANGE

The group identified the need for a culture change, from the top of the organization down, and between departments. Rather than working in “silos”, each division needs better inter-departmental communication, in addition to major improvements of both the business and development processes.

Opportunities for improvements citywide, top-down:

“yes we can” attitude

“Ventura is open for business” theme

“responsiveness”, quicker answers & solutions

“troubleshooter”, “problem solver”

“option to punt” for getting the job done

“shortcut for getting things done”

“clearinghouse” of resources & tools available (ref. successful Tools for Survival Workshop held at City Hall)

“efficient, direct, helpful”

“business minded... not DMV oriented”

“go to, results-oriented person”, “stay with the project until it’s done”

QUESTIONS / CONSIDERATIONS

What is the status of the re-structured Community Development & Economic Development Departments? These changes may impact the Ombudsman role(s) – particularly if this role is added to an existing staff member’s job description.

Many years ago, the City’s Economic Development Manager served as an Ombudsman. But over the years, the E.D. Manager’s responsibilities have diversified and no longer include the ombudsman functions. How will we ensure any newly designated Ombudsman role doesn’t get diluted – especially with the likelihood this assignment will be added to an existing staff member’s job description?

It should be noted that the Ombudsman position(s) should develop and maintain a good relationship and work in partnership with relevant groups such as the Chamber, DVO, Community Councils, key County offices and related agencies.