

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Date: July 28, 2009

Agenda Item No.:

Council Action Date: August 3, 2009

To: RICK COLE, CITY MANAGER

From: ALEX SCHNEIDER, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE CITY MANAGER

Subject: MAY 2, 2009 ECONOMIC SUMMIT ACTION ITEMS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Receive the Economic Summit working group reports.

Adopt the attached Economic Summit Community Action Plan (Attachment A), which, among other items, would direct staff to:

1. Initiate a role for both a Development Ombudsman and Business Ombudsman.
2. Join the Economic Summit Coordinating Council (spearheaded by the Ventura Chamber of Commerce) as ex officio members.
3. Draft a policy for green-tech demonstration projects.
4. Pursue downtown directional signage for US-101 southbound.

SUMMARY

On May 2, 2009 the City of Ventura and the Ventura Chamber of Commerce hosted an Economic Summit where a diverse crowd of more than 125 members of the community gathered to chart a new course for growth and prosperity. The severe global downturn has focused everyone's attention on the importance and urgency of taking action to achieve the ambitious goals for "Our Prosperous Community" outlined in the 2005 General Plan and the City's current Economic Development Strategy (2005-10). The primary emphasis in the General Plan is to retain, expand and attract enterprises that provide high wage, high value jobs. The Economic Summit marked a departure from the polarization over "growth" that has often divided our community. It showed a consensus around a compelling set of shared ideas to promote sustainable economic development.

With a focus on "Opening Up Opportunities and Overcoming Obstacles", summit attendees participated in one of five concurrent breakout sessions:

- Improving the City's Bottom Line and Fiscal Health
- Fostering Smart Growth
- Greening Ventura's Economy
- Retaining/Expanding Jobs and Businesses
- Enhancing our Business Climate

Immediately following the breakout sessions, City Council listened to each group report back its findings. A total of 54 action items were identified as possible steps for refocusing Ventura's Economic Development strategy. Council then directed staff to review all 54 recommended action items and prepare a work plan on how to implement them.

Through a working group process, over 40 participants from the Economic Summit, including members of the public, City Councilmembers, and the Chamber assisted staff in forming an action plan that would address all 54 action items. With input from the various groups, the action items were categorized into 24 core objectives based on synergies and overlap.

The work plan being proposed is more than a "to-do" list for the Economic Development Division. It's a Community Action Plan that relies on the capacity of all departments and organizations, Economic Development, Community Development, Public Works, Civic Engagement, Police, Chamber, Downtown Ventura Organization (DVO), Visitor Convention Bureau (VCB), et al, working together in concert with one another.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

On May 2, 2009 the Council passed the following motion:

- (1) Instruct staff to include a review of, along with the Community Development / Economic Development Reorganization: (a) the planning process and flow chart; (b) feasibility of implementing a citywide code, historic survey, and permitting process; (c) establishing a business ombudsman, economic development commission, and reiterating the City's business attraction strategy; and (d) the Westside redevelopment as a goal and control to plan and implement within one year;
- (2) Refer to the Chamber of Commerce the concepts of the: (a) green business certification program; (b) green speakers series; and (c) potential sponsorship of high technology events with City participation;
- (3) Recommend the Ventura Unified School District, Ventura County Community College District, and City Liaison Committee consider the workforce education task force and workforce certification program at their next meeting; and
- (4) Direct staff to review all the breakout session items presented today and prepare a work plan prior to the Council's August break regarding how to incorporate and implement these items.

At the July 20, 2009 meeting, the City Council reaffirmed its support for moving forward with the recommendations of the Summit and unanimously endorsed several actions congruent with the Summit's call to "improve (the) Permitting Process"; "make the planning process more friendly;" "create a business-friendly environment"; and "create a policy to link Economics to the Planning Process." The following were adopted by the Council:

- Provide all applicants a tentative schedule for each project listing all necessary review steps and an expected timeline. For projects with a net public benefit of \$500,000 a year, monthly status reports would be provided to the City Council.
- Initiate fiscal and economic analyses on large-scale projects
- Establish "pre-screen" public review to make sure important issues are addressed up-front rather than at the end of the entitlement process
- Enhance focus on customer service to improve communication, reduce duplications and identify timelines and deadlines
- Limit reviews of project plans to two hearings at any level of review
- Expedite reviews to provide a final determination within six months for projects not requiring environmental impact reports and 18 months for projects that do with the promise to refund all entitlement processing fees if that deadline is not met, unless the applicant requests additional time for making changes to their submission

DISCUSSION

To maintain the momentum following the Economic Summit, five working groups were formed to address the major topics and items that required further discussion on how to move forward. All of the Economic Summit participants were invited to participate in one of the following working groups: Green Economy, High-Tech, Workforce Development, Ombudsman, and Economic Development Commission. Each group met one to three times over the course of June and July to discuss the recommended action items and next steps for implementation. (See Attachments B – F)

In addition to the five working groups, a focus group was convened to address the items relating to the planning process and customer service. (See Attachment G.) The remaining action items were either given increased priority under the existing Community Development work program or they were miscellaneous items that could be started right away.

The Economic Summit was not a single event; it was the beginning of a process for change. The working group reports will continue to serve as an implementation guide

throughout this process. The following are highlights drawn from the working group reports and the resulting Economic Summit Community Action Plan:

Green Economy

The Green Economy Working Group categorized their action items into four core objectives:

- Promote Green Business – The City’s Environmental Services Office (ESO) has begun taking steps toward drafting a green business certification program. The working group recommended that the ESO continue to work towards completion of the program in consultation with the Chamber and other local organizations and business groups. The working group also recommended that the Chamber of Commerce create a “Green Liaison” position at the board or director level tasked with collaborating with organizations such as Ventura College, the Green Building Council, VCCOOL, CAUSE, and other similar organizations to create a Green Speaker Series. This position would be the Chamber’s representative for all things related to green business and education.
- Capitalize on Stimulus Funding for Green Projects - In June, the City submitted an application to the Department of Energy requesting more than \$1 million through the Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant program. The working group recommended that the City of Ventura continue its efforts to obtain as much stimulus funding as possible.
- Green Job Creation and Incubation - The working group recommended that the City of Ventura draft and adopt a policy that would allow pilot programs and demonstration projects for “Green Technology” on City property and in City facilities.
- Promote Green Building and Smart Growth – Work is ongoing and is central to the Community Development Department's mission.

High-Tech

The High-Tech Working Group categorized their action items into two core objectives:

- Sponsor High-Tech Events - The working group recommended that the City do more to sponsor and market themselves at High-Tech conferences as well as attract new events to be hosted in the City. Staff will work with the VCB to identify potential events as well as work with the Chamber to begin planning the next Job Investment Fund (JIF) event for the end of the year.
- Expand Incubator Effort – The Ventura Ventures Technology Center (V²TC) has been operational since January 2009 and is currently incubating five start-up companies. The working group agreed the City should devote more resources towards marketing and expanding the incubator program. Staff is making minor

operational improvements to the program and revamping its marketing and business plan. Conducting a feasibility study to assess the need for incubator wet-lab and industrial space is also a long-term goal.

Economic Development Commission

The Economic Development Commission working group was tasked with establishing the structure for either a City Economic Development Commission, or a private freestanding Economic Development Corporation. After weighing the pros and cons of each, the group proposed that the Chamber take the lead in forming a temporary transitional organization called the Economic Summit Coordinating Council (ESCC). Once formed, this group will begin implementing key strategic action items immediately, while continuing to research the two different options for a permanent organization.

The ESCC will be composed of six members of the public: two Chamber representatives, one VCB representative, one DVO representative, and two members at large. Two City staff members will serve as ex-officio members and the Chamber will invite the members of the ED Ad-Hoc Committee to participate in the meetings as needed.

Workforce Development

The Workforce Development working group was tasked with developing the parameters for a Workforce Education Taskforce. The primary mission and purpose of the taskforce will be to promote and create a culture of awareness among the city's businesses and workforce of the resources available for workforce development. Among other things the taskforce will serve as a vehicle to connect and continuously assure communication between and among businesses and educators.

The Taskforce will meet regularly and report at least twice annually to the ESCC on its progress. The working group report states the taskforce members shall be appointed by City Council (or as nominated or recommended by its economic development commission and Chamber of Commerce). To expedite the nomination process staff recommends that the ESCC both nominate and appoint the taskforce members.

Ombudsman

The Ombudsman working group report called for two Ombudsman positions to be created, one for developers and one for the general business community. The group was open to the option of using existing City staff to fill these roles. Staff agrees with most of the group's recommendation, however disagrees with the group's suggestion over where the positions should be housed within the City organization. The following is staff's summary of the roles and responsibilities and the organizational hierarchy for both positions.

Development/Land Use Ombudsman

Appoint existing personnel to serve as Development/Land Use Ombudsman reporting directly to the Community Development Director. The Development Ombudsman will perform the following responsibilities:

- Participate in meetings with potential developers to explain the City's development review process (including Planning Commission, Design Review Committee and Historic Preservation Committee (where applicable)) and development potential of subject properties;
- Provide guidance, in concert with current planning project managers, to potential developers to ensure a complete submittal package;
- Lead the Development Advisory Committee (DAC) meetings to provide comments on pending development projects;
- Convene appropriate City departments to resolve conflicts and ensure clear direction to developer applicants as to anticipated City conditions of approval and project modifications;
- Coordinate with Town Designer and Design Review Committee; and
- Coordinate with Economic Development staff to ensure the economic value of proposed development is clearly understood by City staff and decision-makers.

The Development / Land Use Ombudsman will maintain strong positive working relations with all relevant City staff and work closely with the Economic Development Manager.

Business Ombudsman

Create a new position to serve as the Business Ombudsman reporting directly to the City Manager. The Business Ombudsman will perform the following 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 departments;

To improve interdepartmental communication, the Business Ombudsman will carry out these responsibilities by holding a citywide version of the Downtown Action Team, a committee dedicated to collaboratively problem-solving issues and projects in the downtown cultural district. All cases will be tracked on My Ventura Access.

It is not expected that the Business Ombudsman's duties will use an entire full-time position. The remainder of the new hire's work program will be dedicated to implementing other areas of the Economic Summit Community Action Plan, such as staffing the ESCC and spearheading the business outreach effort.

Customer Service and the Planning Process

The City's new Community Development (CD) Director, Jeffrey Lambert, met with the Customer/Service/Planning Process focus group, which consisted of developers, project managers, and a Planning Commissioner.

In conjunction with the actions from the Council's July 20th Subcommittee Report, additional steps are being taken to engage the development community (starting with members of the Customer Service Focus Group) on improvements to the Planning Process by forming an ad-hoc advisory group to the CD Director. This group will serve as a sounding board as the CD Director develops a wide range of potential improvements to the Planning Process that may include:

- Redesign of the Development Advisory Committee (DAC) to ensure complete and timely comments, full engagement by all relevant City staff; invite the applicant to attend DAC meetings to review and discuss potential technical issues; increase participation from Economic Development staff;
- Arrange planning staffing to ensure case planners operate as Project Managers;
- Reevaluate the Planning Commission (PC) and Design Review Commission (DRC) process to ensure a comprehensive and timely review of pending applications that avoids significant rework based on conflicting comments from each body; ensure applicants have the opportunity to review draft conditions of approval prior to completing staff's recommendation to the PC; clearly define the parameters of authority for each body;
- Implement clear leadership in the CD Department that ensures a culture of balance and accessibility;
- Maintain a high level of CD staff technical knowledge by implementing a comprehensive training program;
- Implement Citywide coding (where applicable) to ensure General Plan and code consistency and clear development potential to prospective developers; and
- Insist on early and frequent engagement by developers with Community Councils.

Community Development Work Plan Priorities

The participants in the Economic Summit identified several key priorities for the Community Development Department. The following is a brief summary of the expected progress for each work effort.

- Westside / North Avenue Plan/RDA – The Westside/North Avenue is a clear priority for the next significant community plan/redevelopment effort. Staff anticipates bringing a work program to the City Council for consideration in the Fall 2009. This

effort would include provisions for North Avenue Brownfield remediation. Staff is also considering a “non-contiguous” redevelopment project area that could incorporate other areas of the City.

- Hospital District - The Community Memorial Hospital (CMH) Master Plan is well underway. This master plan includes not only the CMH property but also City property (existing surface parking lots and a parking structure) and commercial property fronting on Main Street. Additional application materials were submitted the week of June 29th, and the project went in front of the Development Advisory Committee (DAC) on July 16th. With DAC comments, staff anticipates kicking off the CEQA analysis and proceeding to advisory bodies’ review and recommendation by the end of 2009.
- Housing Element - The Housing Element was submitted to the State of California Housing and Community Development Department (HCD). HCD provided a lengthy review and comment of this draft Element and staff is working to answer each of the comments. This response has been elevated in priority since the Economic Summit. Staff anticipates completing the draft HCD responses in August and reviewing these responses with various community stakeholders before bringing this report to the City Council in September. With City Council direction, a revised Housing Element will be forwarded to HCD for their review and certification.
- Prepare Citywide Code – Upon the adoption of the 2005 General Plan, the City has embarked on coding for several key communities in the City: Downtown, Midtown, Wells-Saticoy, etc. Staff continues to prioritize key potential development areas for further coding (such as the Westside/North Avenue) to continue to expand to a citywide code. In addition, based on the City Council’s consideration of the View Protection Task Force’s recommendation, staff is implementing a “light touch” approach to view protection and solar access in its review of all pending development projects.
- Prepare Citywide Historic Survey – The City’s Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) presented its recommendations to redesign the HPC process for CEQA review and landmark designation at a joint City Council/HPC meeting on July 6th. In addition, it is anticipated that an historic survey will be a key component of the Westside /North Avenue planning project.
- Enhance General and Coastal Plans – City staff are pursuing Coastal Commission approval of the Downtown Specific Plan.
- McGrath Green Eco-Park – As the property owners and potential developer have terminated their deal, this project is on hold until new economic terms can be negotiated. As soon as a new deal can be made, City staff is ready to move forward with the planning of this property through a contract with the City’s Town Designer.

Miscellaneous Action Items

Staff is making notable progress on several other action items:

- Increase Tourism - Action Item 1.1 called for wayfinding signage that, based on the meeting notes, would encourage freeway users to come to Ventura. Staff is working with Caltrans on adding overhead signage in the southbound 101 freeway near the 101/33 interchange that would direct visitors Downtown. The proposed new sign would read "Downtown Ventura next exit" and provide some much needed clarity for southbound travelers.
- Expand Public/Private Partnerships - Action Item 2.4 called for expanding public/private partnerships for Community Development Projects. RDA engages in many public private partnerships to further the potential for catalyst projects such as the WAV. The Economic Development Manager, in coordination with the Community Development Director, will continue to focus on proactive real estate transactions to further catalytic projects in the Downtown and the Westside. In addition, the newly created Community Development Town Designer will work proactively with property owners and potential developers, particularly those in the Westside, to design developments that further the City's new urbanist goals and provide clarity and "certainty" to improve entitlement outcomes.
- Expand Farmers' Markets – Staff is in preliminary discussions with a developer who specializes in permanent open-air farmers' markets and is currently researching potential locations.
- Downtown Public Safety – Staff recently secured RDA funding for downtown foot patrol on Friday and Saturday nights. Staff and DVO will continue to assess portions of the potential downtown parking meter and/or Property Based Improvement District (PBID) revenues as a permanent funding source for two police officers dedicated to the downtown area.

COUNCIL ADVISORY GROUP REVIEW

In addition to several council members participating in the working groups, the ED Ad-Hoc Committee met with the ED Commission working group and has been given regular updates on the progress following the Economic Summit.

FISCAL IMPACTS

The majority of the action items can be achieved through a combined effort of interdepartmental City staff and partner organizations without significant additional resources. Other action items will require a sizeable increase in staff capacity and funding. The success of the Economic Summit Community Action Plan will be enhanced by the

creation of four new staff positions, including one position to implement the Green Economy work program, one for the Business Ombudsman position, and two for the downtown police officers. For these and other items that will require additional resources, staff will return to Council with funding recommendations.

ALTERNATIVES

The City Council may reject or modify any of the core objectives or corresponding action items in the Economic Summit Community Action Plan.

Alex Schneider
Special Assistant to the City Manager

Reviewed as to fiscal impacts

Jay Panzica
Chief Financial Officer

FORWARDED TO THE CITY COUNCIL

Office of the City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Economic Summit Community Action Plan
- B. Green Economy Working Group Report
- C. High-Tech Working Group Report
- D. Workforce Development Working Group Report
- E. Economic Development Commission Working Group Report
- F. Ombudsman Working Group Report
- G. Customer Service/Planning Process Focus Group Report