

2. OUR PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY

Our goal is to attract and retain enterprises that provide high-value, high wage jobs; to diversify the local economy; to increase the local tax base; and to anticipate our economic future in order to strengthen our economy and help fund vital public services.

Adapting in the 21st Century

Great communities are prosperous communities. A successful city brings people, institutions, ideas, and capital together in creative ways that enrich the lives of those who live and work there. In today's global economy, high-wage high-value jobs are the foundation of the prosperity that instills a city with the financial resources necessary to provide high quality of life and excellent community amenities.

Ventura has been blessed with a history of prosperity, thanks in large part to success in harnessing the area's natural assets for economic benefit. For most of the 20th Century, Ventura was sustained largely by its role as the hub of the region's oil and agriculture industries. These two sectors not only provided a stable source of jobs and business opportunities, but also helped to shape Ventura's role as the legal, governmental, and cultural center of the County.

In the 21st Century, however, Venturans can't take continued prosperity for granted. Competition occurs regionally, nationally, and globally for innovative businesses, top talent, and

good jobs. The community must build on its resources and constantly be on the lookout for new economic opportunities.

County government will likely remain the city's largest employer, providing an important element of economic stability, but government employment is not likely to grow significantly. Oil and agriculture will continue to be important, but their roles are diminishing. While Ventura is a regional center for healthcare, that industry will continue to face intense pressures to reduce costs. Still, the City of Ventura is positioned to move into an era dominated by innovation and reliant on emerging technologies. Cities and regions that excel in the "New Economy" promote high tech industries and boast a high quality of life. Likewise, to remain competitive, Ventura must continue to support economic development, but also create a more attractive living environment, including by providing appropriate housing for all segments of the local workforce. Efforts to boost economic development must be supported by a high quality of life, including a thriving cultural arts scene, award winning schools, and an engaged community. Tourism is also a strong market for Ventura. The beaches, museums, downtown, harbor and the nearby Channel Islands National Park attract more than 1.5 million visitors a year.

The policies and actions in this chapter seek to identify business niches that can thrive locally to diversify the economic base and ensure future community prosperity.

Economic Challenges

Ventura faces a variety of interrelated challenges to continued economic vitality, including:

1. Capturing a share of high-value job markets, such as biotechnology, computer software, communications, entertainment, multimedia, education, and business and financial services.
2. Diversifying the local economy to reduce dependence on the service, retail, and government sectors.
3. Building on the success of the tourism, manufacturing, business, and financial services sectors through marketing and job training programs that will ensure retention and attraction of these enterprises.
4. Finding appropriate locations for commercial and industrial land, including through revitalization opportunities in the Westside and Downtown and possibly via annexations of sites in the North Ventura Avenue and 101 Business Corridor areas.
5. Expanding the retail base, because sales tax represents a major City revenue source.
6. Providing housing for the full range of workforce households at all income levels.
7. Providing adequate infrastructure and financing resources.

Meeting all of these challenges in an integrated, strategic manner will be necessary to achieve long-term economic stability and success. The City must endeavor to identify the businesses most likely to remain and grow in an area that has very high costs – especially for housing – but also has outstanding community amenities, including good weather, a spectacular natural setting, and a safe and desirable community fabric.

The *Ventura Vision* calls for targeting industries that demonstrate the greatest promise for long-term community prosperity by:

- Providing high-wage, high skilled jobs,
- Possessing a local competitive advantage in the global economy,
- Being committed to local responsibility,
- Growing from local ownership, control or management,
- Practicing environmental leadership in their markets, and
- Strengthening the community's creative, cultural identity.

The *Vision* also offers principles for the City to pursue in charting future strategies for economic development:

- Encourage a broad range of high-quality employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Encourage private economic prosperity that can support public services and quality-of-life amenities.

- Develop a vital, prosperous, and stable economy while maintaining a “small-town” flavor.
- Encourage the public and private sectors to work together to achieve prosperity.
- Participate constructively in regional economic development efforts.

Implementing these strategies will not be simple or easy. For one reason, California’s current tax system contains provisions that result in some of the lowest-paying economic sectors providing the city with the most tax revenue, and vice versa.

Pillars for Prosperity

Community prosperity is not something that a city government can create by itself. Any successful economic development effort requires the participation of many partners, including community-based business organizations, educational and training institutions, venture capitalists, individual entrepreneurs and business owners, networks of suppliers, and other government agencies that have a mission to enhance prosperity.

Together, the City and its economic partners must ensure that the building blocks for community prosperity are in place. These foundations include organizations and institutions that can coordinate local economic development efforts, as well as land and other economic infrastructure required to make Ventura an attractive business location.

This organizational infrastructure is evolving in Ventura. Business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Ventura County Economic Development Association (a countywide group) are already active, but a wider network is needed to assemble the resources and capacity of entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, educators, and other stakeholders in building a healthy business climate. Greater synergy is needed among the area’s higher education institutions – including California State University Channel Islands, Ventura College, Brooks Institute, and satellite campuses of other colleges and universities.

Appropriate and sufficient land will also be necessary to ensure continued economic prosperity over the next 20 years, even as we seek to protect open space and combat sprawl. Demand for land to support retail and office development is likely to outstrip current supply unless allowable building intensities are significantly increased. While some increased density is likely, and some older industrial land may be recycled for new business uses, the City must take care to reserve sufficient land for these purposes – especially in an environment where short-term pressure is likely to encourage conversion of land to commuter housing.

Thus, the strategy for community prosperity must be coordinated with area-specific planning efforts, especially on the Westside (where industrial land is likely to be recycled), Downtown (which must stress office, studio, and retail business growth as well as an emerging residential component), and in the 101 Corridor between Mills Road and

Johnson Drive (where most of the city's business activity now takes place). The City will advance on a set of defined focused areas:

Auto Center – efforts over the short term will focus on making the area a regional retail destination. The City will strengthen its partnership with Auto Center dealers to realize beautification projects and facilitate land use entitlements for additional dealerships.

McGrath Property – the 76-acre site provides Ventura with the very best opportunity to attract new industry with high-value, high-wage jobs. The City and property owners will work on securing project entitlement approvals and recruiting desired tenants. The objective is to attract targeted industries and provide the impetus for initial site development over the short-term.

Westside – the feasibility of establishing a redevelopment project area will be considered by the City and Westside citizens. Such legal designation would provide the resources needed to leverage and implement planned initiatives in various Westside plans. Brownfield reuse efforts will also continue to secure funding for much needed site assessment and remediation activities.

Upper North Avenue – the objective is to transform this area from an oilfield industrial area to a dynamic economic engine. Development efforts will address reuse of the former USA Petroleum site, including and evaluation of the

site's potential to emerge as a component of a campus expansion opportunity for Brooks Institute. Keys to this effort are site remediation, compatibility issues, and future annexation to the City.

Downtown – proposed initiatives include well defined design standards in the updated Downtown Specific Plan, enhanced efforts to market the Downtown Cultural District, formation of a downtown management entity, and attracting uses that create “around-the-clock” activity.

Anticipating Our Economic Future – Ventura's economic growth is built on a foundation of concerted efforts that fuel innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning. The focus will be on attracting high technology and knowledge-based businesses including biotechnology, non-durable manufacturing, and business and financial services. Continuous learning opportunities for job seekers, workers, and employers will acknowledge demographic pressures and rapidly changing skill needs. Through specific strategies, the community will develop leaders for tomorrow, and attract and retain new graduates and skilled employees. Critical players will include the Workforce Investment Board, Ventura College, California State Channel Islands, and the Brooks Institute.

The policies and actions in this chapter attempt to provide the means to support these targeted efforts to achieve a stable and balanced economic base.


Policy 2A: Establish a clear economic strategy.

Action 2.1: Track economic indicators for changes that may affect City land resources, tax base, or employment base, such as terms and conditions of sale or lease of available office, retail, and manufacturing space.


Action 2.2: Prepare an economic base analysis that identifies opportunities to capture retail sales in sectors where resident purchasing has leaked to other jurisdictions.

Action 2.3: Maintain and update an Economic Development Strategy to implement City economic goals and objectives.

Policy 2B: Make the local economic climate more supportive of businesses investment.

Action 2.4: Map priority locations for commercial and industrial development and revitalization, including a range of parcel sizes targeted for high-technology, non-durables manufacturing, finance, business services, tourism, and retail uses. 

Action 2.5: Share economic and demographic information with organizations that may refer businesses to Ventura.

Action 2.6: Encourage intensification and diversification of uses and properties in districts, corridors, and neighborhood centers, including through assembly of vacant and underutilized parcels. 


Action 2.7: Partner with local commerce groups to recruit companies and pursue funding for business development and land re-utilization.

Action 2.8: Carry out Housing Element programs that provide housing to all segments of the local workforce.

Action 2.9: Expedite review for childcare facilities that will provide support to local employees.


Policy 2C: Encourage niche industries.

Action 2.10: Expedite review of the entitlement process for installation of infrastructure necessary to support high technology and multimedia companies.


Action 2.11: Allow mixed-use development in commercial and industrial districts as appropriate. 


Action 2.12: Allow uses such as conference centers with resort amenities on appropriately sized and located parcels. 


Action 2.13: Market the city to businesses that link agriculture with high technology, such as biotechnology enterprises.


Action 2.14: Partner with local farms to promote farmers markets and high quality locally grown food. 


Policy 2D: Expand tourism opportunities.

Action 2.15: Provide incentives for use of waterfront parcels for recreation, visitor-serving commerce, restaurant, marina, and fishing uses. 

Action 2.16: Work with the State to create year-round commercial opportunities at the fairgrounds. 

Action 2.17: Partner with the Harbor District and National Park Service to promote Channel Islands tours and develop a marine learning center. 

Action 2.18: Prioritize uses within the Harbor master plan area as follows: (1) coastal dependent, (2) commercial fishing, (3) coastal access, and (4) visitor serving commercial and recreational uses. 

Action 2.19: Partner with hotels and the Chamber of Commerce to promote city golf courses. 

Action 2.20: Promote outdoor recreation as part of an enhanced visitor opportunities strategy. 