

# county of ventura

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August 7, 2012

Board of Supervisors  
County of Ventura  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009

**SUBJECT:** Receive and File Our Plan for Promoting Economic Vitality in Ventura County

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Receive and file our plan for promoting economic vitality in Ventura County.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item.

**DISCUSSION**

The County's mission is:

"To provide superior public service and support so that all residents have the opportunity to improve their quality of life while enjoying the benefits of a safe, healthy, and vibrant community."

Consistent with that mission, and in response to a sustained recession, a key focus over the past year has been to enhance the economic vitality of our County. Through a healthy local economy, residents have access to jobs and economic opportunities, thus minimizing dependence upon government services to meet their basic needs and freeing them to take advantage of the natural beauty and diversity of our community.

The path to a healthy economy, however, is neither direct, nor is it attained by the actions of any one organization or entity. It necessitates being attentive to community needs, collaboration, and finally constant evaluation and refinement. What follows is a brief synopsis of these efforts; a more comprehensive summary can be found in our plan for enhancing economic vitality (Exhibit 1).

### Attentiveness and Response

A key step in making our County customer-friendly is being attentive to community needs. In this vein, most County agencies have or are developing surveys, feedback tools, and performance measures to ensure high quality public services. Such attentiveness does not stop with our direct consumers, but includes our economic development partners who are frequently the initial contact by prospective or current businesses considering relocating or expanding businesses in our communities. Through participation on the Economic Development Roundtable of the EDC-VC and other direct feedback from collaborative partners, County agencies have enhanced community outreach, improved responsiveness to public input and improved business practices, all of which strengthens the foundation for a healthy local economy.

In this era of economic and financial uncertainty it is imperative that we, as government entities, remain nimble to the ever-changing landscape. What we've learned during this prolonged economic downturn is that the historic methods of stoking the local economy do not work. With the dissolution of Redevelopment Agencies, coupled with dwindling discretionary government funding, jurisdictions do not have access to traditional incentives used to lure and retain businesses in their communities. Furthermore, lending markets are tight, and with sustained high unemployment, businesses are reluctant to expand and/or relocate when consumer spending is constrained.

Locally, government operations are being streamlined, becoming more responsive and customer-driven – thereby giving our businesses the transparency and predictability they need for favorable consideration when expanding and/or locating in Ventura County. While Ventura County cannot compete with low priced land and lucrative financial incentives of other states, it is the quality of life, educated workforce and diverse economic base that distinguish our region. However, disjointed government relationships, inconsistencies, and inefficiencies can drive businesses away despite these benefits.

In response, County agencies have instituted new initiatives including speakers' bureaus, centralized permitting, and online access to many things that used to require visits to the Government Center. Just last week, RMA was heralded by COLAB for the way in which they handled the Coastal Zoning Ordinance Amendment, carefully listening to, and resolving, their concerns about the amendments.

### Collaboration and Partnerships

There are numerous partners who share the County's focus on economic vitality, each with unique contributions to the overall objective. Some organizations, like the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), emphasize job training and job placement while others, like the Economic Development Collaborative of Ventura County (EDC-VC) provide direct business assistance. There are other organizations, like the Ventura

County Economic Development Association (VCEDA), that provide business advocacy and still others, like the Ventura County Lodging Association (VCLA) that promotes tourism and the hotel/hospitality industry.

The County has and continues to build on these partnerships, demonstrating our commitment through collaboration, financial support, and adjusting business practices when warranted. The County's mission presumes a healthy economy and in many respects, local governments provide the foundation for success as the gatekeepers for regulatory compliance. But it is the expertise and knowledge of these organizations that nurture and facilitate continued growth and prosperity as they work directly with businesses, industry, and allied interests.

Recognizing these challenges, the WIB funded "Grow Your Business, Live Your Life" campaign has been endorsed by the EDC-VC, the Ventura Federated Chambers of Commerce, and the Economic Development Roundtable, that includes representatives from the County and all 10 cities. This campaign strives to reach businesses already based in California while marketing our community's high quality of life, open space, and our broad economic base. The County, with support of our City partners in the Community Development Block Grant Program, allocated CDBG funding to the EDC-VC earmarked for technical assistance and small business loans to facilitate new start-ups and business expansions as they take risks during these turbulent economic times. These examples of unprecedented collaboration are but a few depicting of our region's ability to come together in new and unique ways to meet continued challenges.

#### Refinement and Continued Progress

Notwithstanding dramatic progress, many efforts are underway and, to the extent resources allow, may be undertaken to enhance local efforts. Simple things – like updating the County's website to be business-friendly - are being done now. Other things, like subscribing to a new online service where permits can be downloaded for specified industries by jurisdiction, require funding to implement. Strategies large and small are constantly being evaluated and considered individually and collectively to enhance the economic vitality of our community. Suggestions come from collaborative partners, through the County's Service Excellence Program, the public, and employees themselves.

#### Summary

The County's commitment to economic vitality includes continued emphasis on internal strategies and extends to maintaining and enhancing our collaborative partnerships. Our efforts reflect a cultural shift that incorporates the application of economic and business principles (as documented by Lean Six Sigma, for example), maintaining and improving public service (through constant customer feedback and follow-through), and providing our workforce the tools they need to do their jobs (being open to new ideas

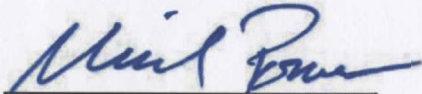
and strategies from those closest to issues). While we've been operating under fiscal constraints due to the struggling economy, changes have been made that not only enhance the County's bottom line but more importantly, advance our mission of providing economic opportunities within our community. Furthermore, such opportunities are greater than those available in most of our peer counties as evidenced by our relative financial stability and sustained service levels.

We are committed to bringing you periodic updates at least twice a year regarding our progress and to highlight new initiatives as they develop. As always, your suggestions and recommendations are both welcome and appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Christy Madden", written over a horizontal line.

CHRISTY MADDEN  
Deputy Executive Officer

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Powers", written over a horizontal line.

MICHAEL POWERS  
County Executive Officer

Exhibit 1 – Plan for Promoting Economic Vitality in Ventura County  
Exhibit 2 – Power Point Presentation