
SANTA BARBARA REGION CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

TO: SALUD CARBAJAL, CHAIR
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FROM: KEN OPLINGER, PRESIDENT/CEO, SANTA BARBARA REGION
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

SUBJECT: SANTA BARBARA COUNTY ECONOMIC VITALITY TEAM

DATE: APRIL 2, 2014

On behalf of my colleagues Lynda Lang at the Carpinteria Valley Chamber, Kristen Miller at the Goleta Valley Chamber, Ken Ostini at the Lompoc Valley Chamber, Kathy Vrelland at the Buellton Chamber, Sue Moualim at the Solvang Chamber the Santa Maria Valley Chamber, I am writing today regarding our desire to form a Countywide Economic Development entity for Santa Barbara County, the Santa Barbara County Economic Vitality Team (EVT).

As we look at economic development in our corner of California, Santa Barbara County is handicapped by the lack of a countywide economic development organization. Like the Economic Development Collaborative Ventura County (which runs the Small Business Development Centers in Santa Barbara County) and the San Luis Obispo Economic Vitality Corporation, the Santa Barbara County EVT will provide us with our first private economic development organization seeking to grow jobs and investment across the region.

There are a number of negative impacts to our lack of a countywide organization, and the lack of any economic development activity at all in our county seat. These include:

1. Businesses outside the area have no central point of contact when looking for information on locating in Santa Barbara County. While site selectors often perform their own research when assisting businesses looking to relocate or expand, nothing beats a single point of contact for information about a region.
2. Local businesses have no way to easily look at expansion in surrounding communities. For a business in Santa Barbara looking to build a bigger facility for their growing company, it's easier to explore options in Orange County than it is in Buellton, since Orange County has a countywide economic development entity and Santa Barbara does not.
3. Local jurisdictions do not work together to retain businesses. Many communities would see a business moving from Santa Barbara to Buellton as a good thing, since the jobs and economic impact would remain in the region.

Santa Barbara County communities have not always worked together in this manner in the past, something that can be rectified through the EVT.

4. Information for start-up companies, or even entrepreneurs with a great idea, is fractured and hard to find. There is a tremendous need not for someone to provide these services, but for someone to be the one link to all of them. The EVT can be the link between SCORE, the SBDC, WIB, GEM, Allen Hancock, SBCC, UCSB, and every other organization, program or educational organization helping grow businesses in our County.
5. No clear voice from the community about overall economic development needs. The EVT will bring local economic development organizations together to develop long-term strategic plans for the entire County. This will ensure everyone is pulling in the same direction, and funding is used efficiently and effectively.
6. Funding for economic development is limited to local government expenditures. Through the EVT, a true public, private and non-profit partnership can be formed to help fund our economic development efforts. There is a strong feeling that creating three equal paths of funding for these efforts will ensure the County is not saddled with the full burden of paying for economic development efforts.

For these and many other reasons, the seven Chambers of Commerce have come together, for the first time, to agree in principle on the creation of the EVT. The logistics surrounding the EVT are being finalized, but key principles include:

1. The Santa Barbara Region Chamber of Commerce will house the EVT, and will retain fiduciary control
2. The EVT will be owned by the participating organizations, which will be the local Chambers of Commerce across the County.
3. The EVT will have a Board made up of equal representation from the northern and southern parts of the County, and the Chair will rotate between the north and the south as well.
4. The EVT will engage in at least the following activities:
 - a. Create, approve and oversee implementation of a regional economic development strategy for Santa Barbara County. The strategy will include marketing outreach, in-market business support and entrepreneur support.
 - b. Screen applicants for new economic development funding from the County and provide assessment to the Board of Supervisors.

- c. Coordinate leads developed at local, state and national levels amongst all communities in the county.
- d. Develop relationships with surrounding EDCs and EVT's in order to address broader infrastructure issues (ie, telecommunications, energy, transportation, etc.)

In order to begin this effort, the seven Chambers are asking the Board of Supervisors to provide a one-time, start-up grant of \$150,000. This grant will allow the organization to hire one economic development professional, finalize the creation of the EVT, and work with the local businesses and foundations to create a stable, long-term funding source. The EVT would be happy to provide regular updates on our progress, both to individual Supervisors and to the full body as a whole, and to engage with you on other activities you feel would be suited to the EVT's unique role.

Finally, let me thank County Administrator Chandra Wallar for her leadership on economic development issues, and her openness to this idea. She has been a tremendous help in crafting this proposal.

On behalf of my colleagues, I look forward to your response, and to this important new project that will allow the business community and the County to work together in a constructive, meaningful way.