

# **Economic Development Observations and Recommendations**

**THE CITY OF LOMPOC**

**July, 2010**

**The California Association for Local Economic Development  
Professional Advisory Service**

# **The California Association for Local Economic Development Professional Advisory Service City of Lompoc**

## **Final Report: Observations and Recommendations**

### **BACKGROUND**

In early 2010, the City Council and staff of the City of Lompoc requested the California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED) to conduct a Professional Advisory Service (PAS) to assist the city in developing policy to guide the City's future role in economic development.

In response, CALED assembled a team of 4 economic development professionals with decades of experience in a wide range of public, private and non-profit economic development practices. Because CALED is the state's premier association of economic development practitioners, it has the unique ability to access a rich resource of expertise and experience. For 30 years, CALED has conducted PAS projects for cities, counties and non-profit economic development organizations throughout California to help them better understand their opportunities and to identify strategies and practices for their optimization. A list of the City of Lompoc PAS team members is attached to this report.

The team met in Lompoc on the afternoon of Wednesday, July 28 and conducted a briefing at a public meeting for the Lompoc City Council and senior staff on current economic development trends and practices. Throughout the following day, the team conducted confidential interviews with 19 economic development stakeholders from Lompoc and the surrounding area, community leaders and local policy makers (an additional interview was subsequently held by telephone). A list of those who participated in the interviews is attached to this report. On Friday morning, July 30, the PAS team presented its preliminary observations and recommendations to the city council.

This final report is intended to provide some general observations, impressions and common themes arising from the interviews and to share some recommendations for the City based upon what the team learned. It's important to remember that the input provided to the team by the various stakeholders, whether or not totally objective or accurate, represents the perceptions of key stakeholders and as such require the thoughtful consideration of the City as it deliberates its future role in economic development.

## OBSERVATIONS

- Lompoc is blessed with a wonderful climate and a stunning setting in one of California's most desirable regions. The people with whom we had contact were friendly and open.
- The city has more opportunities going for it than most cities of its size.
- Lompoc is blessed with several unique economic development opportunities both existing and proposed that could greatly enhance both its economy and job opportunities for its citizens. The opportunities shared with the PAS team include:
  - The proposed California Space Center adjacent to nearby Vandenberg AFB
  - The Public Safety Training Center at Allan Hancock College
  - The "Wine Ghetto" and the growing presence of artisan vintners in the area
  - The revitalization of "Old Town Lompoc"
  - A proposed wind farm nearby
  - The potential that Vandenberg will continue to enjoy mission growth through the ongoing BRAC process
  - As a municipal utility, Lompoc enjoys advantageous electrical rates
  - There is a very large fiber optic line running through the city that could, with a point of presence, provide a strong incentive for high growth, high value enterprises
  - The potential for the development of a veterans cemetery close by
- All those with whom we met shared a concern for the future direction of the city. Most also agree that economic development is clearly a priority. However, how best to organize and implement an economic development effort lacks any broad consensus.
- A small but vocal few with whom we spoke share a more negative opinion of the city's prospects pointing to the following in support of that opinion:
  - Poor outcomes in K-12 education
  - The city's negative image as a struggling suburban commuter town
  - The city is disproportionately influenced by those resistant to new ideas and change
  - Lompoc is geographically isolated
  - Other cities in the region always prosper at Lompoc's expense

- Some of the city's perceived negative image may more a problem of poor self-image.
- The City can do a better job of communicating with the broader community about economic development issues, including its accomplishments, positive developments and potential opportunities.
- The City lacks a vision and goals for its future. Without a focused and broadly supported plan, two elements dominate policy discussion; those with uninformed and unrealistic expectations and those who defend the status quo. As a result, without a firm platform for action, local policy makers can only react.
- There has been a lack of economic development expertise within the City which has probably caused it to miss some opportunities. The City needs its own entrepreneur.
- There isn't any clear accountability or useful metrics with which to evaluate economic development progress.
- The City staff believes that for the most part its permitting process is fair and efficient. However, many whom we interviewed feel the City needs to significantly improve its customer service, citing frequently inconsistent requirements, misinformation and delays in the permitting process.
- Lompoc has a more than adequate reserve of experience and expertise within the community to move its economic development efforts forward.
- The lack of an economic development vision and effective organizational structure represents a tremendous opportunity for the City to provide leadership at this very pivotal time.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

➔ **90 Day Focus:** The PAS team recommends that within the next 90 days the City of Lompoc take the following actions:

1. Adopt a “Jobs First” resolution stating that economic development is a top priority.
2. Immediately begin the process of finding and hiring an experienced economic development professional to fill the new position of Economic Development Director who will report directly to the City Administrator. The director should be in place by the time any strategic planning begins.
3. Recognizing that a new economic development program may necessitate a reallocation of available funding, the City should review how its economic development funds are currently deployed to determine their ROI to the City.
4. Begin to enhance its communications with the community at large through the issuance of frequent news releases, op ed pieces and the use of its utility billing mailers to distribute a City newsletter. The content of communications should regularly include positive testimonials from employers about doing business in Lompoc.
5. Begin to build a powerful internet and social media presence for the City. Redesign the City’s website to include a more dynamic presentation of Lompoc’s attributes, a more business-friendly look and “feel” and specifically:
  - Improved speed and functionality
  - Useful demographic and econometric data to serve prospective business investors and community
  - Clear schematics of the most expeditious way through the City’s processes
6. Explore economic development “best practices” from cities with similar size and challenge.
7. Identify the steps and define the process necessary to develop a Strategic Plan for Lompoc’s future.

⇒ **The Strategic Plan:** The PAS team recommends the City consider the following in its development of a Strategic Plan;

1. Include the following key elements in the City's Strategic Plan:
  - Vision & Goals
  - Targets of Opportunity
  - Action Plan & Implementation Strategies
  - Time Lines
  - Roles & Responsibilities
  - Measurements
2. Begin the strategic planning process with Community Visioning that brings together a broad representation of the community. This will insure the process is inclusive of all stakeholders and establish community ownership of the plan. Consider using an outside facilitator for this phase.
3. Stress regional cooperation. Lompoc needs to increase its leverage of state, regional and local economic development actors and resources. The following represents a partial list of whom the City might include in its strategy planning committee or task force:
  - Colleges and Universities (inc. UCSB & Cal Poly)
  - Lompoc Chamber of Commerce
  - Lompoc Unified High School District
  - Vandenberg AFB
  - Workforce Investment Board
  - The County
  - SBCAG
  - California Space Authority
  - State & Federal legislative representatives
  - Hospitals/Medical Centers
  - Local industrial & commercial employers
  - Neighboring residential areas
  - The Record
  - Federal Prison
  - Chumash leadership
  - Vintners group and agricultural interests
  - Commuters
  - College and high school students
  - Citizens with knowledge and expertise in economic development
4. The new Economic Development Director should be responsible for managing the strategic planning process.

⇒ **Other Recommendations:**

1. The majority of the City's economic development efforts should focus on existing businesses.
2. Explore the possibility of establishing a "point of presence" for Lompoc on the Level 3 fiber optic line.
3. Establish policy guidelines for the use of electrical rates as an incentive for industrial and commercial businesses.
4. Establish an emphasis on economic development across city departments.
5. Consider creating an Economic Development Commission following the adoption of the Strategic Plan.
6. Begin a thorough review of the City's permitting processes. Regardless of who is wrong and who is right in this ongoing debate, there is enough of a perception that the process needs improvement that the City needs to take a closer look. The City should consider the creation of a "concierge" or "ombudsman" model to provide a single point of contact to guide projects through the City's permitting process.
7. Explore how the City can encourage the establishment of commercial incubators to accelerate the development of a food and wine cluster.
8. Explore how the City can assist existing and new home businesses.
9. Strengthen the relationship with Vandenberg to better identify opportunities for city businesses and jobs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Observations and Recommendations in this report should not be construed as a comprehensive, in-depth review of the City of Lompoc's economic development practices and prospects. They represent the initial impressions and thoughts of a team of economic development professionals following a relatively brief visit to the City. However, it is hoped they will lay the groundwork to assist the City to better define its role in the economic development of Lompoc and to become more effective in its implementation.

The PAS team was unanimous in recommending a focus on leadership, communications and planning. Lompoc enjoys both the assets necessary for successful economic development and a high level of community interest and urgency to drive and guide the effort. It can move from frustration to effectiveness for a modest investment in staffing and support. The key will be developing an economic development plan that is widely understood and supported, passionately implemented and credibly measured.

It is important to remember that any effective economic development strategy is a long-term commitment of years rather than months. The outcome will be better served if the City and its constituents understand this.

The team looks forward to following the City of Lompoc's progress as it moves forward. Finally, we want to thank the City Council and staff for their hospitality and candor.

## **CALED Professional Advisory Service**

### **Interview Schedule**

**Thursday July 29, 2010**

#### Team No. 1: (Mundy & Dozier)

9:00 a.m.: Bob Lingl, City Councilmember  
10:00 a.m.: Ann Ruhge, City Councilmember  
11:00 a.m.: Tony Durham, City Councilmember  
1:00 p.m.: Kate Griffith, Planning Commissioner  
1:45 p.m.: Jack Rodenhi & Nick Gonzales, Planning Commissioners  
2:30 p.m.: Laurel Barcelona, City Administrator  
3:15 p.m.: Ben Hernandez, Community Member  
4:00 p.m.: Alice Milligan, Community Member

#### Team No. 2: (Yount & Carney)

9:00 a.m.: Denny Anderson, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director  
10:00 a.m.: Mike Siminski, Mayor  
11:00 a.m.: Cecilia Martner, Councilmember  
1:00 p.m.: Ron Fink, Community Member  
1:45 p.m.: Jason Reynolds, Chamber of Commerce President  
2:30 p.m.: Tim Harrington, Community Member  
3:15 p.m.: Rick Rantz, Allan Hancock College  
4:00 p.m.: Bill Prenot, VAFB  
By phone: Justin Ruhge, Community Member

## **CALED PAS TEAM MEMBERS**

**Sarah Mundy**, Assistant Director  
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