

**CITY OF ALBANY  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA  
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: April 20, 2009

Reviewed by: BP

**SUBJECT: Economic Development Working Group Final Report**

**REPORT BY: Beth Pollard, City Administrator**

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**WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION**

That Council approve the attached recommendations to encourage an economically healthy business community.

**BACKGROUND**

In December, 2008, the City Council established an Economic Development Working Group consisting of Mayor Atkinson, Vice Mayor Wile, representatives of the Solano Avenue Association (Allen Cain, Executive Director) and Chamber of Commerce (Tod Abbott, President), City economic development consultants (Neil Mayer and Darlene Rios-Drapkin), and City staff members. The purpose of the working group was to engage in review and discussion about current conditions, activities and strategies, and report back to Council within six months with recommendations.

The working group has met twice a month since January at meetings posted and open to the public. Subgroups have additionally met to work on specific tasks to report back to the working group on topics such as recruitment and retention, the redevelopment zone, and branding/identity.

**DISCUSSION**

The members of the working group exchanged information and ideas about challenges to and opportunities for enhancing the vitality of existing businesses and to lay the foundation for attracting new businesses to Albany. From these hands-on discussions emerged a variety of ideas, ranging from specific items to general goals. Attached is the range of recommendations developed by the group, designed to support a healthy business environment for existing and potential businesses. As shown in the attachment, the recommendations are categorized by: Recruitment, Retention & Physical Improvements, Identity/Branding, Entryway and Gateway Signage and Treatment, and Banners.

## Recruitment, Retention & Physical Improvements

The proposed strategies in this category cover areas such as maintenance, public art, communication with existing and potential businesses and property owners, landscaping, holiday lights, and street furniture and infrastructure. The physical improvements are identified by short-range, medium-range, and long-range projects.

Several of these items are already underway and can continue to be implemented by staff, some areas request advice from City commissions, while others involve business associations, businesses/property owners, and volunteers. One area in which Councilmembers can be helpful is in communicating with existing, new, and potential businesses and property owners. Albany is small enough that one-on-one conversations are useful in identifying obstacles and opportunities for the business district, and alerting staff and the business associations about follow up. A particular effort is recommended for the Redevelopment District, located on Cleveland and Eastshore Avenues, especially with the potential for green business development as part of or to complement the East Bay's Green Business Corridor.

## Identity/Branding

There have been various recognitions of the advantages to the City to create a current-day and forward-looking identity for Albany, which can be used to market the city as an attractive place to do business as both a customer and a merchant. The working group had the advantage of advice from an Albany resident/volunteer, Brian Phipps, whose profession is helping organizations create an identity or brand.

The recommendation is to take advantage of the Fern Tiger "Voices to Vision" process, which will identify some common themes and values to use in developing an Albany identity/brand. This identity/branding would then be applied to develop signage, art, outreach, and other business attraction mechanisms.

## Entryway and Gateway Signage and Treatment

Placement of welcoming and directional signage and gateways would help route visitors to the business community. The recommendation is that the Traffic & Safety Commission be asked to advise on location of the signs and directions contained within those signs. Once the identity/branding process is complete, those results can then be incorporated into the design of the signage and gateway treatments, although there may be some signs that are simply directional and can proceed nonetheless. Other entryway ideas to be referred to the Traffic & Safety Commission for advice is renaming Buchanan to Marin and Cleveland to Jacuzzi to simplify access and directions. Attached is a memo that describes the various signage and gateway issues for referral.

## Banners

The working group recommends that banners are a means of providing a beautifying and cohesive feel to commercial districts. There are various overlapping interests concerning

banners that hang on light poles on Solano and San Pablo Avenues and Buchanan Street. The working group is recommending that the City set the stage for encouraging banners to be hung, while recognizing that banners may need sponsors to provide financial support, and that the longer the banners are displayed, the greater the community interest. Staff is encouraging efforts between business organizations and the Arts Committee to develop guidelines, protocols, and ideas to advance a banner program that is attractive, timely, and cost effective.

### **ANALYSIS**

Much of the proposed efforts focus on communication with businesses and property owners in an effort to keep the commercial district active with successful businesses, providing a clean and attractive environment for customers, identifying what makes Albany a desirable place to do business, and helping visitors to navigate their way to the commercial districts. There are no land use or other policy changes identified at this time, but those may emerge as efforts continue.

While the Economic Development Working Group will sunset, with approval of the City Council, efforts will continue on the recommended work plan from the group. Various commissions and committees, Councilmembers, business organizations, community organizations, volunteers and the general public will be engaged on subject matters as staff moves forward with implementation.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT**

Successful local businesses often support community organizations and also provide opportunities for residents to shop locally.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Overall, the recommendations are designed to support the local economy.

In December, Council authorized the expenditure of \$7,000 from its discretionary funds on efforts to promote local business during the holiday season. Because of the shortness of time, those funds were not needed for the 2008 season, but instead a portion are recommended to prepare for the 2009 holiday season as well as to support costs associated with implementation of the recommendations. For example, approximately \$1,200 would help augment donations being raised to install holiday lights on street poles in the business district.

### **Attachments**

1. Economic Development Working Group recommendations
2. Request to Traffic and Safety Commission Review and Advise on Directional Signage and Street Name Changes
3. Physical Improvements Matrix



