

City of Buellton
Professional Advisory Service
Delivered by
The California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED)
550 Bercut Drive, Suite G
Sacramento, CA 95811

February 28, 2008

Overview:

On February 28, 2008, the City of Buellton sponsored a CALED Professional Advisory Service (PAS) to provide the community with advice on options for further developing local economic vitality. The PAS team members consisted of: Randy Starbuck, Director of Redevelopment, Pittsburg, California, Wes Ervin, Economic Development Manager, County of Yolo, and Bill Davis, Consultant, CALED.

City staff provided PAS team members with relevant background plans, studies and meeting minutes to review prior to the PAS site visit. At the site visit, City staff and Economic Development Task Force members briefed the CALED team and provided a tour of key components of the community relevant to economic development. The CALED team interviewed over 15 key stakeholders in the community including City Council members and local business owners. The PAS team conferred to compare notes, identify prevalent themes, observations, and findings and to develop recommendations. The main focus of the deliberation was: "in what ways and how should the community organize and move forward to develop sustainable and effective economic development efforts?"

Recommendations:

1. Move the Visitors Bureau out from behind Pea Soup Andersen's and into the Vintage Walk project. Success of the Vintage Walk, the first and latest major private sector investment in the revitalization of the Avenue of Flags is essential to the success of that revitalization. Prominently sign the Visitors Bureau in key locations to capture visitors heading up the Santa Ynez Valley.
2. Establish a Special Assistant to the City Manager position to focus on economic development (including Redevelopment) and other issues that might arise as needed by the Council. This focused energy will help you take the necessary first steps as you move economic vitality efforts forward. This can have a particular impact on the speed with which the Avenue of Flags is improved.

3. Communicate regularly with citizenry. People want to know more in terms of the thoughts, conversations, projects and directions the City is taking to increase vitality of the community. Constant, proactive and regular communication is essential as the City steps out in economic development.
4. Invest in obtaining consensus on the vision for the Avenue of Flags.
5. Incorporate urban entertainment principles into the planning, design and development of Avenue of Flags.
6. Establish your Economic Development and Tourism Strategy:
 - a. Define your economic base.
 - b. Identify industry trends in the region and specific needs (compatibility) of potential target industries.
 - c. Quantitatively Identify tourism opportunities and collectively determine your brand (e.g. "The HUB", "Service Town", "Wine", "Auto" "Gateway" , or various combinations).
 - d. Obtain community consensus (based on but not solely consisting of analytical identification) on targeted industries for the future economic vitality of the community. Develop the infrastructure (utilities, telecom, etc) to meet the needs of the desired industries.
 - e. Establish how multiple partners (City, Chamber of Commerce, Visitors Bureau, businesses, etc.) will organize to implement business retention/expansion plan and business attraction plan. Identify performance measures, assign responsibilities and implement.
7. Identify current and potential absorption for industrial sites. How many years of inventory for industrial property do you have remaining? What is the remaining industrial property suitable for? What size and type of industrial sites are needed for economic expansion/retention and attraction opportunities to diversify economic base.
8. As you think about job creation, think about the workforce for these jobs. Where will they come from? Stagnation is not a realistic or preferred option.

Observations:

The City is in a very strong financial position as a result of good staff decisions and good solid private sector partnerships. The City is in a position to leverage private investment.

The City has in-place one of the best economic development tools: a Redevelopment Project Area in the core of the community.

There is a strong commitment and willingness to move forward in developing the economic vitality of the community. We heard a consistent message and desire for more and better jobs, more diversity in the economic base of the community and the revitalization of the Avenue of Flags.

Success of the Vintage Walk project is critical to promoting future investment on the Avenue of Flags.

The scale and size of the community and its economic development does not warrant a full-time economic development position but it is critical to have a qualified staff person focusing a third to half of their time to moving comprehensive economic development components (strategy) forward.

There are many good ideas for people-friendly uses to fill the space on the Avenue of Flags but not consensus. Civic Center, design district, farmer's markets, annual events, unifying bronze statue theme, shady picnic area, commercial for tourist industry, blend of office and tourism, automobile theme, "Service Town USA", cost effective fuel, motel, auto services, food, supplies, souvenirs, recreation/entertainment, medical uses, bike, specialty grocery,

City Hall with its 16 employees is not a significant driver of visitor traffic. If the library and the sheriff are added you might have something. But, other uses may provide a stronger economic engine. The question is what will draw traffic off the freeway and from around the region.

Highway 101 is a significant barrier between the Avenue of Flags and attractions and visitors on the east side of the freeway. Retain the footbridge easements. This will be an important link in the future.

Signage on US-101 directing traffic to the Avenue and its amenities is an important component, once you have attractions for a draw;

Pea Soup Andersen's is your brand, it is your uniqueness. Renewing that restaurant and its panache will probably take less time and energy than creating a new brand from scratch.

The auto/gas station sign museum would be a unique and interesting attraction. There is space now on the Avenue of Flags to create even a temporary outdoor display that is secure without a major investment.