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- Legal Counsel:**
- Law Offices of Nancy Kierstyn Schreiner

July 27, 2015

Chris Stephens, Director
 Resource Management Agency
 County of Ventura
 800 South Victoria Ave. #1700
 Ventura, CA 93009

Re: Encouragement for Including an Economic Development Element in the County General Plan Update

Dear Mr. Stephens,

This letter is to urge the County's favorable consideration for including an Economic Development Element in the update of the County's General Plan.

We are aware that Economic Development Elements, per the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, are optional, so we appreciate the County does have the discretion not to include such an element.

That discretion noted, as part of the statewide network of local economic development organizations, we recognize that Economic Development General Plan Elements have increasingly become a best practice for forward looking communities.

We also appreciate that given Ventura County's strong history of land use practices for directing commercial and industrial development to within urban boundaries, the County's general plan is limited in its direct guidance for much of the region's private sector economic investment. We see that as true in a limited sense, and counter that the direction and priorities articulated by the County have extraordinary influence over the larger environment of regional land use policies and priorities and thus over the decisions by private sector enterprises. As goes the County, so goes the local economy.

Given the leadership status of County government, we believe it would be both pragmatic and far-sighted to include economic development considerations—as a distinct set of goals and policies—in the General Plan guiding the County's next 20 plus years of evolution.

An Economic Development Element would serve the County by:

1. Assuring that decisions in policy and practice incorporate a deliberative consideration of economic impact. This is consistent with the County's current course of evaluating how County department actions contribute to community and business economic vitality or hindrance.

- A broad goal might be to promote efficiency of interactions with business interests, toward improved predictability and clarity in process. A specific policy item, for example, might be for continued investments in lean operations and training for County staff in operational efficiency.
2. Assuring that decisions in policy and practice incorporate a deliberative consideration of how they affect a triple bottom line outlook, relative to economic prosperity, environmental balance and social equity.
 - A broad and explicit goal might be to promote an assets or strengths based approach to regional economic development. Specific policy items might be for retaining and enhancing Ventura County's regional competitiveness, as defined by an inclusive definition of quality of life, including: communities with distinct identities, separated by green belts and tight urban boundaries; high-end rankings in public safety; strong fiscal stability; well-maintained infrastructure; a prepared workforce and quality education pipeline.
 3. Assuring that decisions in policy and practice consider and strive for an optimal jobs/housing balance, such that residents enjoy ample opportunity to live and work in their home County.
 - A goal might be to maintain and reduce commute times. Specific policy items might include promoting transit-oriented development and assuring that infrastructure investments effectively connect concentrations of residents and of jobs; to work with the cities to maintain an inventory of available real estate for commercial and industrial development, as well as for housing; reducing commute trips and vehicle miles traveled; promoting a mix of housing types and prices aligned with regional labor market jobs and compensation.
 4. Assuring that decisions in policy and practice contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of our infrastructure that supports a strong economy.
 - The goal might be to prioritize investments in the infrastructure that contributes to regional economic competitiveness. Specific policy items might be to enhance our transportation system for jobs/housing balance (as noted separately); for broadband/communication technologies; and stewardship of water resources.
 5. Assuring that decisions in policy and practice contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of Ventura County's extraordinary diversity of industry sectors.
 - A goal might simply be to retain and enhance industry sector and cluster diversity. Specific policy items might be to enable agriculture to remain economically viable; to preserve and promote our natural landscapes for healthy hospitality and tourism, arts and culture sectors; to promote strategic investments in education and workforce training responsive to industry demand for skilled workers; to facilitate the networking of industry clusters toward improving business expansion in good times and resilience in down times.

6. Assuring that decisions in policy and practice contribute to our regional capacity to retain and attract businesses that pay quality wages and benefits.
 - A goal might be to contribute to sustained efforts in business retention and expansion, attraction, and in the workforce skills demanded by local industry. Specific policy items might be to retain and support partnerships with the Workforce Development Board of Ventura County, Economic Development Collaborative-Ventura County, and others as scoped in the development of the General Plan.

These are offered only as examples, though they are consistent with Economic Development Elements in other counties' General Plans. These examples are of course at this stage more in generalities, to be added to or replaced by more specific policies, relating, for example, to the retention and support of Naval Base Ventura County and other regional economic drivers.

Summary: For long-range thinking consistent with the purpose of a General Plan, we know that a strong regional economy is essential for a healthy government and vice-versa. The two domains, public and private, are mutually reinforcing.

Preparing an update of the General Plan creates extraordinary opportunity for the County to embrace this dynamic, to articulate the County's leadership goals, policies and priorities for the benefit of our businesses, entrepreneurs and workers.

At EDC-VC we stand ready to support the County in the scoping, convening and development of the General Plan. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to support this important effort.

Should you have any questions, we would be happy to discuss them at your convenience.

Sincerely,



BRUCE STENSLIE
President/CEO

C: EDC-VC Board of Directors
County Board of Supervisors