

REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

DATE: MARCH 11, 2009

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: GREG RAMIREZ, CITY MANAGER

BY: NATHAN HAMBURGER, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUSINESS TASK FORCE UPDATE

In an effort to reach out to the business community and open lines of communication, the City Council approved the establishment of a Business Task Force in November 2007, which would consist of local business stakeholders. The Business Task Force has accomplished several tasks over the past year and is finalizing the scope of work for the upcoming year. It is staff's intention to provide this information as an update and to receive feedback to insure that the Task Force is working towards the goals of the City Council.

The Business Task Force has been able to provide feedback to the City Council on several different issues that affect the business community as a whole. The first being the City's sign ordinance which resulted in several adjustments being made to the ordinance that allowed for business owners and center managers/property owners to advertise the opening of new businesses and vacant space, but insured that the signs conformed to a look and size that was consistent with the desires of the community. In addition, the Task Force provided feedback and insight for the City Council's concept of temporary banners for local businesses so they could promote their individual products for a limited period of time with the cost of the banner permit being waived. The Task Force members will continue to serve as a sounding board for the City Council on business related issues, especially during the current economic climate the nation is facing.

The Business Task Force has also been able to work with staff to implement several projects and programs that focuses on existing local businesses. The Business Task Force helped develop a phone survey of local businesses that was conducted by a regional survey consultant. The survey targeted the needs of the local business community and how, and in what aspects, the City could assist. As a result of this work, the Task Force recognized the need to promote local businesses and encourage residents to be conscious of where they made their purchases. A Buy Local Program has since been implemented in which a dedicated website was created as an extension of the existing City site, an online business directory was developed, as well as banners and advertisements in local newspapers that have been used for promotion of the program. To kick off the program, Task Force members, City Council members, and staff walked the local retail centers introducing the program and encouraging businesses to display the program window decal to help deliver the message to residents to Buy Local and support their community. The promotion of buying local will continue to be one of the Task Force's main priorities as it looks for new ways to encourage residents to patronize local stores before going outside the City limits.

Over the next calendar year, the Task Force plans to continue to utilize the valuable information received in the business survey to find ways in which local businesses and the City can form partnerships to collaboratively promote the health and success of the local business community. The Task Force will be discussing their work plan further, but has proposed several business roundtables, expanding the Buy Local program, and a plan on how to continually communicate and disseminate information to business owners. It is staff's intention to continue to work through the Economic Development Committee, on a regular basis, for the tasks listed above.

Finally, members of the Task Force will be in attendance to provide the City Council a firsthand update on the group's efforts. Staff encourages the City Council to share their thoughts regarding the Task Force efforts, as well as any ideas they may have pertaining to issues that the Council feels they should be addressing. Based on the feedback received by the City Council, staff can couple it with Task Force discussions and appropriately gauge staff resources necessary for next year's work plan and budget accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended the City Council receive and file this report, as well as provide any pertinent direction to the Business Task Force