SUBJECT: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN (PORTERVILLE JOBS PLAN) UPDATE

SOURCE: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

COMMENT: To bring the City Council up to date on the implementation of the Economic Development Strategic Plan (Porterville Jobs Plan), the following is an overview of the activities that staff is currently involved with and which are consistent with the Plan:

Activity 1: Stakeholders: Stakeholders are those residents, organizations, employers, leaders, and volunteers who have invested in Porterville and Porterville’s future. Stakeholder meetings provide a forum for comment and suggestions regarding the Jobs Plan. Stakeholder meetings continue to be held semi-annually to review implementation actions, new activities, and status of projects.

Activity 2: Partners Network: The Partners Network is comprised of representatives from job development, education, service providers, and government to increase collaboration for efficient delivery of services resulting in new jobs for local residents. Partners meetings allow for agencies to provide information about their organization’s existing activities and to build strong relationships between organizations. The Partners Network continues to meet on a monthly basis.

Activity 3: Retention and Expansion: The existing businesses of Porterville that have contributed to the community’s economic health and quality of life over the long term are the City’s first priority. The Jobs Plan outlines four activities to address retention and expansion of local industry.

Existing Business Call Program: The Jobs Plan describes active Business Calls between City management and business owners/managers to build the business’ confidence in the City, build a relationship between the business and the City, and provide an open forum to discuss issues that are affecting their business. In recent months the Business Call Program has been reactivated with staff committing to meet with at least two businesses
per month. To date, staff has met with eleven employers (this number includes visitations made prior to reactivation).

Business Hot Line: As a commitment to local business, a Business Hot Line was established to assist existing and prospective new business. The Business Hot Line remains a valuable tool for businesses that require immediate assistance, need information, or would like to arrange for an appointment.

Promotion and Marketing: Promotion and marketing of Porterville and the Jobs Plan is provided through the use of news releases, public service announcements, flyers, and brochures. Most recently the Porterville Tourism brochure and “Doing Business in Porterville” guide were produced to attract tourism and business to Porterville. Informational material, including the tourism brochure, is distributed by staff, Porterville Chamber of Commerce, and the Employment Connection.

Business Recognition: The annual Excellence in Business awards banquet provides an opportunity to recognize those businesses that have made an impact in the community. The Excellence in Business awards banquet is also utilized as a business attraction tool when working with prospective businesses to emphasize the quality of existing businesses and the City’s commitment to these businesses. Over 500 people attended the 2002 Excellence in Business event. To date fifty (50) businesses have been recognized.

As part of business recognition, the City formed a Plant Managers group as a forum for managers to advise the City on manufacturing and distribution issues. The City subscribes to the California Manufacturers and Technology Association (CMTA) in an effort to keep abreast of pending legislation that could affect California businesses and disseminates pertinent information to the Plant Managers. Quarterly meetings with the Plant Managers continue with the City providing guest speakers to discuss current topics affecting local business.

Activity 4: Marketing and Business Attraction: Marketing materials to promote and build awareness of Porterville include the newsletter (published three times annually), presentation folder to hold customized proposals, and a customized portfolio to leave as a thank you gift. Recently an updated “Porterville Means Business” video was developed as a joint effort between the City and the Porterville Chamber
of Commerce. In addition, a “Doing Business in Porterville” guide has been developed to outline the City’s policies and incentives for business development.

In summary, the strong relationships built and sustained throughout the community via the Stakeholders group, Partners Network, and Business Call Program continue to develop confidence between the various entities and the City. The collaboration between the participants of the Partners Network has been particularly successful in breaking down communication and operational barriers and has become a model for other jurisdictions. The activities outlined as part of the City’s business recognition efforts provide an opportunity to not only recognize local business for their commitment to the community, but an opportunity for the City to demonstrate to potential business that we fully appreciate our local businesses. The marketing efforts to date have developed quality materials for distribution.

Staff has also encountered challenges in the Economic Development Program. These challenges include an interruption in the business call activity, which has stemmed from the temporary reduction in economic development staff. However, staff recognizes the importance of that program and has reinitiated meeting and staff is currently lining up new meetings with local businesses. A significant tool in the City’s efforts in business attraction and expansion has been the Business Assistance Program funded with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds. With the passage and subsequent implementation of SB 975 (prevailing wage law) in January 2002, the use of this tool was significantly curtailed, not just in the City of Porterville, but throughout the state. Staff is currently seeking ways to address this issue such as the possibility of amending the City’s Business Assistance Loan Program by increasing the threshold of assistance dollars per job from $10,000 to $35,000 to accommodate the added cost of construction under prevailing wage standards. An increase such as that mentioned would bring the City’s program in line with the threshold established by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD).

Staff will also begin the next task of targeted marketing as outlined in the Jobs Plan. Although long in coming, staff is diligently working on improving the economic development opportunities via the internet.

RECOMMENDATION: No action required. Report is an advisory update.