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Report to Mayor and City Council

Tuesday, September 19, 2023

Discussion

SUBJECT:

CONSIDER ADOPTION OF THE CITY'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN (CITY COUNCIL)

I. SUMMARY

Over the past year and a half, the City and the four-firm consultant team consisting of RRM Design Group, The Natelson Dale Group, HVS, and Catalyst Environmental worked on developing the City's first ever Economic Development Strategic Plan ("EDSP") (Exhibit No. 1). As part of the process, numerous technical studies were prepared, and community feedback and input were received from dozens of key stakeholders including small local businesses, real estate developers, major employers, property owners, public agencies, City commissions, elected officials, and other economic partners. This extensive effort resulted in an EDSP document that includes eight (8) "Gamechangers" and twenty-one (21) Strategies/ Programs to transform Carson into a place "Where Creativity Comes to Live, Work and Play." In summary, these "Gamechangers" include:

- a. Marketing & Branding Initiative
- b. Creating "Destination Worthy" Downtown
- c. Establishment of Live Entertainment District

- d. Reinvigorate Retail
- e. Most Business-Friendly City Reputation
- f. Incentivize Land Use with High Job-Creation and Placemaking Value
- g. Leader in Technology Start Up
- h. Training Center of Excellence.

The EDSP is intended to guide Carson's economic development programs and policies over the next five to ten years. It does not rely on short-term initiatives but rather provides a holistic view and comprehensive approach to economic development and is supported by numerous technical studies, involvement with community and economic partners and ongoing input and participation from city leaders. If approved, the City will implement the EDSP over the next several years using the phased/ prioritized action approach as described in detail in the document.

II. RECOMMENDATION

1. **APPROVE** the City's Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP).
2. **DIRECT** Staff to proceed to the Implementation Phase of the EDSP.

III. ALTERNATIVES

TAKE another action the City Council deems appropriate.

IV. BACKGROUND

The Eight Gamechangers and Twenty-One Strategies

The vision of the City's first Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) is to transform Carson into a place "*Where Creativity Comes to Live, Work and Play.*" To accomplish this, the EDSP contains eight (8) "Gamechangers" and twenty-one (21) Strategies/ Programs, described below in greater detail:

1. **Gamechanger #1: *Marketing/branding initiative*** to position Carson as a center of innovation, creativity, and resilience leveraging Carson's rich industrial legacy and unmatched location in Southern California

Strategy 1.A: Design and implement comprehensive economic development marketing program.

Strategy 1.B: Promote expanded tourism/visitation ("Stay Carson" program),

leveraging regional attractions and tourism-promotion organizations and building on existing, unique assets.

Description: The launching of a new marketing program specific to city-wide economic development will increase the City's exposure to targeted industries, raise public awareness of the City's competitive advantages, promote development opportunities and placemaking initiatives, and attract tourism and visitation to support local businesses.

2. **Gamechanger #2: Create "destination worthy" downtown** (anchored by repositioned Carson Events Center, additional hotels, new housing)

Strategy 2.A: Promote Events Center reinvestment/rebranding

Strategy 2.B: Pursue placemaking investments in Downtown Carson and connecting corridors (namely Carson Street and Avalon Boulevard).

Description: Here, the potential recruitment of a new additional hotel located at the Civic Center coupled with the rebranding of the Carson Events Center are recommended as one placemaking initiative to create a "destination worthy" downtown. In addition, linking the Civic Center to existing and future developments and destinations along the Avalon corridor with transportation infrastructure (walking, biking, dedicated shuttles) would further amplify the placemaking impacts to create a "destination worthy" downtown and City.

3. **Gamechanger #3: Create live entertainment district(s)** (restaurant, retail, hotel, mixed-use housing)

Strategy 3.A: Create live entertainment district (restaurant, retail, hotel, mixed-use housing)

Description: The creation of live entertainment district is another placemaking initiative that could be located in one or more areas in Carson. Its purpose is to capture the potential economic value of Carson's visitor venues at one or more sites through restaurant, retail, hotel, and mixed-use housing development. The potential locations are primarily along Avalon Boulevard and include the proposed Carson Country Mart on the 157-Acre Site or areas walkable to Dignity Health Sports Park (DHSP) and California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH).

4. **Gamechanger #4: "Reinvigorate Retail" initiative** (shore up stronghold centers with support for retail attraction; facilitate the improvement of business skills of existing retailers; promote cooperative marketing and promotion within business districts; and support market-based reuse of underutilized commercial properties to expand housing and industrial development capacity where such reuse has a positive economic impact)

Strategy: 4.A: Implement "Reinvigorate Retail" initiative

Strategy: 4.B: Implement retail/restaurant tenant recruitment campaign (part of Strategy 1.A)

Description: The City would play a vital role in revitalizing or redeveloping commercial centers city-wide. One action, for example, includes evaluating the City's Commercial Façade Improvement program and recommending its continuation as a long-term commitment. The other component of this initiative involves recruiting and attracting targeted retail and restaurant tenants to fill up vacancies in suitable locations.

5. Gamechanger #5: Transform Carson into “the most business and development friendly” city in Los Angeles County by streamlining all its development, permitting and entitlement processes.

Strategy 5.A: Establish comprehensive business retention and expansion (“BRE”) program including direct outreach, contact management and linkages to business assistance resources.

Strategy 5.B: Establish branded development streamlining program (“Streamline Carson”) extending beyond Building & Safety into other development approval processes

Strategy 5.C: Focus law enforcement resources including cameras, automated license plate readers, and officers in neighborhoods/corridors/districts where most needed and communicate those efforts back to the business community.

Strategy 5.D: Focus City resources and coordinate with partners to prioritize infrastructure investments (including broadband) that support targeted economic development.

Description: BRE is recognized as an essential element of a robust economic development program. BRE can also significantly enhance a city's reputation for “business friendliness” - which, in turn, makes a community more attractive to both existing and prospective firms. Expedited business permitting and clarification in development approval process helps promote economic activity. Public safety and the reinforcing the perception of Carson as a low-crime city is also integral to this mission.

6. Gamechanger #6: Incentivize land uses with high job-creation and placemaking value

Strategy 6.A: Pursue Dominguez Channel improvement concepts with focus on adjacent development

Strategy 6.B: Determine the potential for The Links at Victoria Golf Course redevelopment (with possible recreation/open space uses plus non-recreation uses including housing)

Strategy 6.C: Identify opportunity sites for professional office development and implement policies/incentives to attract office development

Strategy 6.D: Support recruitment of manufacturing tenants and provide incentives to maximize creation of quality jobs in existing and future industrial buildings

Strategy 6.E: Partner with property owners to assess, investigate, and clean-up contaminated sites, establishing Carson as a "national best-practices leader" in brownfield remediation and redevelopment.

Description: This initiative is intended to cover land uses and geographic subareas not specifically addressed by the other gamechangers. For each strategy under this Gamechanger, the City would need focus city policies and resources as well as partner closely to key stakeholders including LA County, private property owners, and the industrial community to achieve the goals.

7. Gamechanger #7: Technology start up leader

Strategy 7.A: Address entrepreneurial/small business development either locally (in house) or with linkages to regional business assistance and small business lending resources

Strategy 7.B: Strengthen linkages to innovation (e.g., through collaboration with CSUDH)

Strategy 7.C: Launch public/private industry cluster initiative.

Description: Here, the City would pursue clean tech activities in response to the inevitable transitioning of fossil fuel. The focus areas would potentially include electric vehicle (EV) technology, hydrogen, water/land recycling technology, and best-practice leadership in remediation and redevelopment of brownfield properties. Also related to this effort is the potential capture of the technology cluster market from nearby "Silicon Beach."

8. Gamechanger #8: Training center of excellence

Strategy 8.A: Coordinate workforce development within the local and regional available assets, augmenting as appropriate

Strategy 8.B: Establish "showcase" workforce development program focused on employment opportunities in construction and related industries

Description: The final gamechanger involves linking workforce development programs to staffing and training needs of emerging industries to ensure the local workforce are quickly trained and matched. The EDSP target industry study also identified the construction cluster (including construction services and manufacturing of construction materials) as a potential strategic target. As such, Carson residents skilled in construction trades can benefit from construction industry growth (and related occupational opportunities) both within and outside Carson.

In summary, more examples and details of each of these Gamechanger and Strategies are described in the EDSP. Also contained within the EDSP document is a list of action steps broken down by year the City would take to achieve the objectives the plan. In addition,

leading, supporting and partnership roles with among city departments and/or external entities are identified. Finally, milestones are identified to track EDSP progress.

Technical Studies & Research

To ensure the EDSP holistically addresses economic development, the multidisciplinary team that put together the study consisted of four consulting firms (“EDSP Consultants”), each with unique technical expertise and specialization:

- RRM Design Group (overall project management, design, and physical space issues)
- The Natelson Dale Group (economic research and analysis, retail and industrial strategies)
- HVS (tourism, arts, entertainment, sports)
- Catalyst Environmental (brownfields and other environmental issues)

The EDSP Consultants prepared the following analysis and deliverables, which are incorporated into the EDSP:

- SWOT Analysis (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunity, Threats)
- Organizational Assessment
- Commercial/Retail/Office Development (Real Estate Study)
- Housing Market (Analysis)
- Destination Worthy Downtown
- Tourism & Arts Development, Entertainment and the Visitor Economy (HVS)
- Small Business Assistance, Entrepreneurship & Incentives
- University Partnerships and Programs
- Location & Infrastructure
- Conceptual Renderings of Façade Improvement Projects & Marketing Materials.

In addition to the above analysis, an interactive web based “Story Map” will be created and showcase the EDSP to the public after its adoption.

Process and Input from Local Community, Economic Partners, and City Leaders

Throughout the process, the City and its team engaged the local community, key economic partners and city leaders in the development of the EDSP. These meetings include:

- Various individual meetings with stakeholders including CSUDH, DHSP, Porsche Experience, Double Tree, and more
- Economic Summit (3 Dates) with public and private stakeholders: October & December 2022 and January 2023

- EDSP City Council Presentation Update: February 7, 2023
- City Council One-on-One Sessions: March through April 2023
- Economic Development Subcommittee: August 16, 2023
- Economic Development Commission (w/ Planning Commission and Chamber of Commerce Invitation): September 7, 2023

Tonight's recommended action to approve the EDSP is the final step to formalize the adoption of the document for implementation.

V. FISCAL IMPACT

There is no immediate fiscal impact associated with the approval of the EDSP. However, some Gamechangers and Strategies identified in the EDSP may require additional programmatic funding, which would be proposed under separate action at a later time.

VI. EXHIBITS

1. EDSP (pgs. 8-192)

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