

South County visioning effort gets feedback

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By [Allison Sampite-Montecalvo \(/staff/allison-sampite-montecalvo/\)](#) 12:56 p.m. Dec. 3, 2013

SOUTH COUNTY — An effort by a local nonprofit organization to get feedback from 4,000 residents and business members in the South County on significant economic development projects in the region has exceeded its goal.

"We've received more than 4,400 surveys," said Cindy Gompper-Graves, CEO and president of the South County Economic Development Council. "I'm very grateful that so many people took time out of their busy schedules to tell us what they think."

Data from the surveys, which gauged participants' opinions on topics they think are vital for the region's development, was sent to consultants Estolano LeSar Perez to analyze and create a profile of what South County looks like.

Launched in July, the goal of the organization's effort is to develop a five-year strategic plan for the region by coming up with action items to connect the region's major economic engines.

To get people involved, the team gave presentations at civic meetings and in some cases solicited opinions from pedestrians.

The process has three phases, including a public input period, a marketing and messaging meeting to find out what it is the organization wants to communicate, and an economic strategy that will result in ways to capture economic opportunity.

About 80 people attended five workshops in October to provide feedback on five major industries and how they relate to development projects in South County's pipeline.

"Now is the time because so many of the projects we've been working on for so many years are breaking ground," Gompper-Graves said. "We don't want to miss any opportunities for synergy."

Gompper-Graves said once the organization receives its strategic plan it will look for groups to champion efforts to ensure they stay on track.

The 14 Visioning Oversight Committee members chosen to push the effort have demonstrated an interest in South County, donated at least \$5,000 and agreed to participate along the way.

"Their role is to provide the oversight and input we need to make sure we end up with the product that we want," Gompper-Graves said.

One significant South County project is the Chula Vista bayfront, that supporters hope will become a world-class destination with residential and commercial zoning, hotels, a conference center and more than 240 acres of parks and open space.

Another is the state Route 11 and Otay Mesa East Port of Entry project expected to improve border wait times and improve traffic, and allow goods to cross between the United States and Mexico via a toll road.

Bikeway Village is an eco-tourism project that caters to bikers and walkers in Imperial Beach near the Bayshore Bikeway. Plans are to convert existing warehouses into a two-story, 50-bed hostel, commercial retail/cafe, bike shop, public restrooms and community room on a 2.12-acre site.

"These are the job generators," Gompper-Graves said.

Scott Parker, chairman of the South County EDC board and CEO of Chula Vista's Vibra Bank, and Nathan Cadieux, who represents The Corky McMillin Companies, are leading the task of tying all these projects together.

"It's an opportunity to be on the front end and try to incorporate as much coordination and input as we can for projects on the table," Parker said.

Cadieux said in this economy, collaboration is the key to success and this project will bring South County together to understand its strengths and opportunities.

"Having everyone around the same table is critically important," he said. "South County EDC is doing a great job in making sure that everyone's heard and that we're armed with the same unified message."

Funding for the project is about \$150,000 and was provided by the San Diego Foundation, county of San Diego, the city of San Diego, South County EDC members and others.