

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

Livable Communities Working Group

Wednesday, February 15, 2012

2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Torrance Civic Center Library

Agenda

I. Welcome & Introductions

Attendees: Stacey Kinsella (PVE), Eric Haaland (MB), Otis Ginoza (Lawndale); Christopher Palmer (Hawthorne); Rebecca Cutting, Jeff Gibson, and Fran Fulton (Torrance), Leza Mikhail (RPV), Grieg Asher (SCAG) Jacki Bacharach, Jeremy Hyde, David Magarian, Wally Siembab & Rosemary Lackow (SBCCOG)

Jacki welcomed all, then announced that the SBCCOG will be hosting an Open House in its new office on So. Western Avenue in Torrance on March 22 - look for an invite, and reminded that the General Assembly is Friday, February 24, 9 am – 2:00 pm and everyone is encouraged to attend.

II. Minutes: January 18, 2012 – Received and Filed

III. Economic Development in Torrance: Status and Prospects

Fran Fulton, Economic Development Manager
City of Torrance

(Powerpoint presentation is available on COG website: www.southbaycities.org – Livable Communities page February meeting date)

After brief comments from Jeff Gibson, Development Director, Fran Fulton proceeded with her PPT presentation, noting she works out of the City Manager's office and has been with Torrance for 14 years. Torrance does not have an Economic Development Commission or special ED Department. The City's approach is to maintain a staff team representing various departments – that meets monthly, with the goal to work proactively with businesses and especially to address their concerns. Typical concerns might include fixing potholes, permit processing, and the like. Importantly, the team makes sure the businesses know that they are highly valued by the City.

Torrance is known as a “balanced” city – with a mix of land uses, (e.g. residential, commercial, industrial). Businesses have not only expanded (e.g. hospitals, manufacturing) but they have consolidated and in some cases, downsized. City programs include: an annual business recognition event, “one-stop” permit center, and expanded on-line services. Almost 15k businesses, including 350 international

headquarters and Torrance draws more Japanese companies than any other city in LA County.

Key geographic areas include Del Amo Mall and Downtown. Re: Del Amo: new strategies have been proposed to upgrade the mall – there will be a public meeting 2/28 to discuss. Re: Downtown (Old Torrance): improvements made include: lighting, signage, and new uses and special events (farmer's market) Strategy is to draw foot traffic to increase vibrancy. They see vacancies in downtown as opportunities for new small businesses and restaurants.

Transportation: Regional Transit Center: in the works for a regional hub, and a stop for Metro Green Line. Del Amo Blvd: where dead ends at Mobil refinery will connect Crenshaw and Hawthorne – this will help traffic flow east/west.

Special projects were noted:

1. So Bay Entrepreneur Center – a business "incubator" is being created - place for entrepreneurs to get training, marketing support, networking, have meetings etc. Ideally this will attract people from entire South Bay and enrich the area, eventually providing jobs.

Q. Did you (the city) actually incubate the incubator?

A. Yes, we went to them, started at a Torrance Chamber event and got interest, got support from Torrance City Council in way of seed money – hopefully this will be the catalyst. Plan is for incubates to eventually pay rent to support the center.

2. "Discover Torrance" - a 501 c 6 (nonprofit hotel group) to encourage tourism. The hoteliers agreed to pay into this and it was formed by council action. Guests are charged a 1% tourism fee – which is put into a special fund that the nonprofit draws on to pay for marketing the City. A general benefit to the City as a whole: it brings in money through tourism. It's a slow process but has been successful. The City has about a \$500k budget for the Tourism Business Improvement District.

3. Honda Electric Vehicle Demonstration Program

Torrance is participating with Honda - City is helping Honda by providing real world use data generated by fleets (providing feedback on how these vehicles fit into their fleet, and looking at how to improve e-charging infrastructure). The program works with residents who are purchasing e vehicles. This has been real exciting to work directly with the Honda engineers and be a part of emerging alternative fuel technology. Torrance has quite a few alternative fuel technology participants in the City

4. Torrance Centennial

Special events include creating a Centennial Plaza in Old Torrance at El Prado Park. For \$150 a person can have a personalized brick in the plaza, and there will be a time capsule, along with the railroad bridge highlighted as an icon. The centennial culminates in October with a City birthday party.

Regarding status of their Redevelopment Agencies, Fran explained that Torrance had 4 defined areas that are now dissolved and absorbed by City. Very little staffing was funded by RDAs but many questions still remain. They will see that the impact will be on the City. For example, a building façade improvement project that was funded by RDA may not be able to proceed, funding is uncertain during the current transition period.

Q. What's the major source of funding for economic development activities?

A. General Fund Utility users tax, transient occupancy tax, and retail. A small amount of CDBG funding (700k to be used for disabled access at bus stops).

Q. (Jacki) Seems like the COG should look for opportunities to work with Torrance on e-vehicle issues: cited the infrastructure study – we need to talk.

A. Yes, the City is very interested in seeing what the COG is working on in this area.

Jacki additionally observed that it is interesting that where Torrance is collaborating with the private sector on this subject, the COG is working with public sector - it would be great if we can pool our resources. Fran agreed that there is a lot of tie-in between what Torrance and the COG are engaged in.

Q. (Wally) Where are other car dealerships (other than on Hawthorne Blvd)?

A. Pacific Coast Highway.

Q. (Wally) Does the City have an inventory of large vacant commercial sites?

A. Yes, 3, but all under negotiation currently.

Q. Is the zoning restrictive for other uses?

A. No, but users like to keep the Conditional Use Permits active because these entitlements are add a lot of value to the property.

Q. What roughly are the sizes of these sites?

A. Not sure off hand. The Audi site, for example, is going to be multiple dealerships. (check tape)

Q. Are there toxic issues when uses are vacated and replaced?

A. There are some issues.

Q. What are the changes proposed for del Amo?

A. To make overall more welcoming from Hawthorne Boulevard, and to add more amenities, possible the addition of conference and/or meeting spaces.

Wally noted that one thing being recommended in such situations elsewhere is to have more business density meaning that while keeping the same site area and footprint, the number of businesses is increased. More variety is attractive to people. Fran agreed, noting they are looking at more variety of services and stores. Also, it has been said that if a center is not a traditional rectangular oriented parallel to the access street access - this design aspect seems to make a center more successful, perhaps by creating interesting view corridors.

Q. Is there any chance that Torrance will allow big bold billboard sized signage? (example: remodeled Westfield Center in Fox Hills?)

A. Fran: not sure yet - owner may introduce use of LED lighting into signs or buildings.

Q. How about putting alternative vehicles in showrooms? Miles in Santa Monica would like to fit in somewhere in the South Bay. How would we make that happen?

A. Such as adding a variety of vehicle brands to a dealership? – should come and talk to us at City.

Q. What is the square footage of the Entrepreneur Center?

A. Now just a couple thousand, but the site we are interested in for future growth is the former Epson site with 3 buildings and up to 60,000 sq. feet. We are working to secure a lease in a portion and eventually grow, and bring in synergistic uses. Want to start small and grow.

Q. In Old Torrance are you trying to attract tenants in existing buildings, or looking for developing of new buildings?

A. More interest in revitalizing existing structures. It depends on the project and what's available.

Q. How do you handle the international market?

A. We have those meetings face to face, to let them know how things work. We have at least 2 executive office suites and those operators have said they are an entry point for foreign investors especially Japanese. Recently Torrance has talked to various manufacturers about exporting. Chinese delegations have come to learn, the German Consulate went on a tour of businesses. They are interested in making links with companies and educating visitors, generally creating an environment where international businesses can feel comfortable.

Q. Should we re-create former South Bay networking group(s)?

A. Fran: she was involved in SBDP which created networking and sharing opportunities – perhaps not necessarily re-creating that, but maybe for networking perhaps a “round table” - would be helpful.

Q. Is there much interaction between the City Community Development Department and the development side as to planning for older buildings?

A.. City just formed a team, apart from the Economic Development team. After updating the General Plan and Strategic Plan, work groups have formed to figure out how to accomplish goals. They are trying to become more proactive, but it's a challenge, they have started a dialogue.

Q. How can the COG access that dialogue?

A. The City can share with COG—need to be more strategic in this area.

Wally noted the COG has some models on this and can share with the City. Jacki noted the background for the recent Enterprise Rent-a-Car press release regarding leasing e-car came about after discussions with Edison about problems with charging stations for e-cars especially in older buildings. This is an important issue. Jacki will call Fran to set up a meeting.

In closing Fran noted trends: re:auto dealerships, while they have lost some, others have come in (Audi which is going to a larger site). They are hoping to see dramatic change in auto dealer vacancies in next year or so. With retail grocery, there is a return of smaller stores (e.g. Super K on Hawthorne, being replaced by three stores). If you drive down Lomita Boulevard, you will see hospital expansion, an optimistic sign.

IV. Draft Regional Transportation Plan – Formal Comments

Wally Siembab
SBCCOG

The EIR is available and includes a set of mitigations. This is a vehicle to comment on the Plan. Orange County commented that the forecast should be at County, not city level. SCAG trying to do at city level. Concern is: this doesn't give any wiggle room especially in area of the RHNA.. One EIR comment was there's a lot of "shalls" in the document – should be a menu of options not set of requirements – not much flexibility (e.g. reporting requirement for congestion management).

If anyone is interested in the comments of Orange County Council of Governments, contact Wally. Grieg Asher noted all comments and responses to comments are on the SCAG website. SCAG is obligated to respond to all comments. Wally noted the South Bay COG comments indicate concern for the "legacy language" in the Plan – our position, is that it relies more on assumptions that are meaningful exclusively for gas vehicles. For example, VMTs (vehicle miles traveled) become a bad control element if EVs will become more common. Also, he noted the issue that gas tax will be reducing if EVs become more common: how can we protect the gas tax trust fund? They (SCAG) are aware of this. We have spent a lot of time developing a strategy for the South Bay unique for it, but the RTP plan is so very much related to public transit – oriented development. The COG wants to see mention of neighborhood oriented development in addition. Jacki noted a practical incentive for getting language into the plan regarding our alternative strategy is that guidelines for funding grants are related to the plan. We are now recommending what language we want to see, and SCAG might include some of this – later we can cite this in applying for a grant.

Wally said the COG will email its RTP comments to the Livable Communities group.

V. EVSE Strategy

Wally Siembab and David Magarian

Wally referred to puzzle handout – that graphically illustrates our the mobility component of our South Bay Sustainability Strategy. For EV readiness, all these projects are coming together. For example, at first Ecotality seemed like great news - that they would contribute towards a chargeport, but it turns out that while Ecotality gives you money up front, starting a year from this July, there will be an access charge of \$2.00 per "connect hour" - too expensive. Also how do other vehicles that have access to charge plug know when it's available? Also there are other operational issues: Ecotality has its own way of paying, you register with them and they give you a password for access, But

each charge provider has their own way of paying and registering – they are not cross operational. Also, at the COG level, concern is how do we get people together on this? Got to back off of Ecotality, because of the fee thing and now we are working on vendors and a set of questions to figure out what are the hidden charges, perhaps have a workshop of these providers. We want to lay out what each vendor is doing, and we may want to start to talk to cities about placing stations in certain locations. Lesson: cities should hold off in dealing with companies – talk first to the COG.

Suzy S. noted she is investigating an e-vehicle for purchase. Auto manufacturers should take the lead on this. Fran: it has got to be a partnership- manufacturers are very interested in this issue. Need to look at holistically. David M noted most people will be charging at their home, but multifamily homes are problem in that folks may want to be able to charge at their work site due to access difficulties at home. Whether you use a 110 or 220 outlet- this will affect how fast the charge takes. Jacki pointed out that people normally never drive around with full tank of gas, either.

Wally emphasized the COG is working on a strategy that will coordinate interests. Even aesthetics are being considered. .

Also Wally noted they had a meeting with AQMD regarding the extension on the LUV project. It got extended but the fleet composition was changed after the end of 2012. AQMD discussed the longer range battery vehicles. The COG after presenting a budget, got a commitment to meet again in March to discuss scope of work. Bottom line: we have AQMD support. There will be further discussions with AQMD, about many components (e.g. hydrogen fuel component and car sharing). Wally's issue is that you need to recognize that such components have different effects and are not comparable solutions. His concern with full range battery cars: how to handle the class 2 charging issue, and the length it takes to charge. However this is a great opportunity to look into this, perhaps we can use some homes as a test and find out what to do. For example, can someone use an adaptor to upgrade to 220 if 110 is not tolerable and are there differences in the 220 outlets?

VI. Updates

Caltrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grants – the SBCCOG applied last but was not selected. Caltrans encouraged us to apply again this year and we plan to do so.

Press Conference – Enterprise in Torrance renting Leafs – report on event

SCAG Compass Project - will be ready to go by April. (Marine station, Gardena, Lennox and PCH in Hermosa Beach).

BEV AQMD Proposal (meeting January 20 report). Wally spent all day at SCAG interviewing consultants hired UCLA Luskin Center (experts and cutting edge). By policy SCAG does not disclose contract amount when they advertise for proposals. But, the

budget turns out to be 200k, and every proposal came in at 400k or more – so have selected consultant(s) but now have to get them to downscale to meet budget

To the group: any question / comments on BEV puzzle handout? Suzy: would be great to have showrooms in the South Bay- so people can view vehicles and be directed to dealers. Wally: this is one of our puzzle pieces. Eric : Is it a good idea to require wiring to garages when built/remodeled? David M: pre-wiring and providing an outlet both are good. Christopher: noted cities that are passionate about this are enacting ordinances.

ESC's Climate Action Planning. Jeremy going around to diff cities Will be meeting with Hawthorne, needs to set up meeting with Lawndale. He is still working on target setting, mitigation strategies. He has done a lot on a template for strategies – these will be going into Climate Action Plans.

LUV Extension (see above comments)

Charge Port Infrastructure Planning

Wally Siembab, David Magarian, Jeremy Hyde (see above comments)

VII. Other Business

Wally: Announced on March 12, a Complete Streets Workshop, will attend at UCLA. The Luskin Center has a Complete Streets manual on line. Greig Asher: Toolbox Tuesdays: can go to SCAG website – complete streets is one of these. Greig also noted he works with EVs and sharing (bikes and cars) - can call him for info on these subjects. Wally noted he turned in his own personal comments on the RTP on telecommuting would be happy to share. Eric noted he saw the local news featured the Enterprise story.

VIII. Adjourn 4:30 pm