

Article published - May 28, 2007

BUSINESS JOURNAL EDITORIAL: 'Innovation Council' good step toward economic plan

If the last 10 years of changes to the North Bay economy are any indication of the next 10, it's a blessing that officials are beginning to think strategically about how to respond and shape the future.

The latest major step in that direction comes from the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, which has approved formation of a first-of-its kind Innovation Council.

The 30-member body will be charged with formulating a plan for the economy and reducing local impacts on the environment over the next decade.

"Over the next 10 years, the Sonoma County economy will be faced with a number of formidable challenges and exciting opportunities," said a briefing on the council prepared for supervisors.

"Unprecedented change is expected in several areas including work force demographics, global competitiveness and availability of natural resources, among others. In confronting these new realities, Sonoma County has the ability to seize important opportunities that are emerging that need support for their future success."

The primary drivers behind the proposal are the Sonoma County Economic Development Board, Human Services Department and the Water Agency.

Supervisors have authorized the group to retain an economic consultant to develop a comprehensive forecast for the region that "incorporates fluctuations in work force demographics, shifts in global competition, changes in the availability of natural resources," such as water. The Innovation Council also will examine the potential impacts from Assembly Bill 32, which requires California greenhouse gases be reduced to 1990 levels by 2020.

Sonoma County has had some success with past efforts on economic development.

More than a decade ago, the Economic Development Board undertook an Economic Vitality Project that helped lead to the creation of the engineering sciences program at Sonoma State University, a local economic research effort and the creation of the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau.

All of these programs are reaping rewards today, whether it is supplying talent to local technology companies or creating a tourism marketing campaign to compete with other world-class destinations.

If past is prologue, this latest effort should yield similar results.

Accessed 5/29/07 at:

<http://www.busjrnl.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070528/BUSINESSJOURNAL/70524035/1219>