

Red-hot Roseville reloads

Financially well-off city launches economic development program

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The ambitious city of Roseville kicked off an economic development program this week to expand its existing businesses and lure more high-paying companies to town -- with the goal of making Roseville the "premier city in Northern California."

The new strategy includes ways to help businesses find locations in the city or, if they're already in town, grow where they are. Roseville also wants to form a social network to attract young professionals, seed startups, push for universities and a construction trades school, and is willing to annex land to get a corporate headquarters.

"We're building from a position of strength, sort of like the New England Patriots are right now," said Craig Robinson, Roseville city manager. "We recognize that, but we're not satisfied with the status quo."

Specifically, the well-off and growing city of 102,000 wants to keep or attract:

- high-tech design companies
- regional headquarters
- engineering services companies
- call centers that add value, or supply valuable technical information
- the healthcare industry
- biotechnology
- tourism
- education.

The plan was created with the help of AngelouEconomics, a firm in Austin, Texas, that helped West Sacramento draft its own ambitious economic plan last year.

Most cities want good employers, schools and other items on Roseville's list, but Roseville's business focus and emphasis on "quality of life" might give the town an edge over competitors. The edge has been there this decade.

Aspirations of becoming the best city in Northern California aside, Roseville is financially successful. Its median household income is \$57,637, according to city records, and one household in five takes in more than \$100,000 per year.

5,700 employers

Supporters of the city's strategy credit its careful, pro-business planning of the past few decades -- a kind of Sim City for real.

The planning fostered new, aggressively well-served neighborhoods near well-placed offices, stores and workplaces. The balance of jobs and housing, and a quality of life that includes good schools, executive homes, an ample police force and clean streets, have attracted businesses and workers.

Robinson said Roseville has 5,700 businesses that employ about 73,000 people, and more than half of the employers say they will hire during the next two years. The major job sectors in Roseville include semiconductors, construction, software, financial and business services, and retail and restaurants.

Its big private employers include Hewlett-Packard Co. -- although Hewlett-Packard is shrinking, having cut 2,000 local jobs since 2002 and reduced its local payroll to fewer than 4,000.

To help persuade expanding companies to stay in the city, 40 percent of the city's economic development activity will focus on keeping and nurturing them. The remaining effort will split between luring new companies and incubating startups.

The new plan includes a series of priority moves that will be first out of the gate:

- "Formalize" the Economic Development Department and give it a budget of \$350,000 to \$450,000. The department officially started in January, but consists only of Julia Burrows, deputy city manager, and staffer Karen Garner. The proposed budget would permit a big expansion, Burrows said.

Besides the usual outreach to companies and other economic development groups, the department would foster a team of "Roseville promoters," partly by holding workshops with city staff and private industry.

- Form a team to bring universities and colleges to town, because they would attract high-paying companies, and stress education of workers for target industries.

The effort would include creating a program similar to the Center for Advanced Research and Technology in Fresno. The plan says the center trains students in "entrepreneurial thinking skills."

- Encourage startup companies, working in cooperation with the business incubator at McClellan Park and the Sacramento Area Regional Technology Alliance, a regional group that fosters entrepreneurs.
- Create a Young Professionals Network, a social organization, where younger workers can network. That became a priority during Angelou's research on community preferences. The plan could attract younger professionals to the area -- clearly a primary goal for the plan.
- Designate sites along Interstate 80, Highway 65 and major roads as regional headquarters locations, to lure those high-profile, well-paying operations.
- Make "strategic annexations" to ensure that prime business sites are available. The city currently plans to study expansion of its sphere of influence, or annexable land, as far west as the Sutter County line.

Asking seniors, entrepreneurs for ideas

The overall economic development strategy is also loaded with long-term measures the city would take to foster business. One section deals with creating a better business climate, partly by talking to business leaders to get their ideas on what the city can do.

The city's growing ranks of retired professionals would be asked to advise young entrepreneurs. And the city would push to build a construction trade school, perhaps funded by real estate developers.

Small businesses could be encouraged by waiving fees they now pay. And the state and city might help pay for some of the public works that support company growth. The report points out that when Dell Computer Corp. wanted to expand in Tennessee, the state paid 80 percent of the needed road improvements and Nashville paid the rest.

The report predicts that 70 percent of the city's future jobs will come from entrepreneurs. To nurture that sector, the city would develop its own business incubator operation and teach interested residents how to start a business.

The city would also award seed capital to residents who write winning business plans for proposed ventures. And a city appointed "entrepreneur team" from the city's top entrepreneurs would advise the city on ways to encourage new businesses.

The Angelou plan was due to be unveiled Thursday at the city's Roseville 2005 event.

What? There are two at the top

West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon took amused exception to Roseville's aim to become the north state's "premier city."

"What? There's a second premier city in the region?" he joked.

West Sacramento, he pointed out, was the first municipality in the Sacramento area to develop a truly comprehensive economic strategy, also with Angelou's help.

The city adopted its strategy late last year.

"We have a very healthy rivalry going with Roseville," Cabaldon continued. "We welcome the competition."

He also noted that West Sacramento has used the goal of "premier city" internally for at least a decade, putting the appellation on its letterheads.

"A lot of folks snickered that West Sacramento was shooting awfully high," Cabaldon said. "But I don't think there's any question we've gotten some results that match the aspiration. We're not there yet, but we've made strides."

It's probably good for municipalities, including Roseville, to set high goals, he said.