

Report from the Thursday, January 6, 2011 Meeting of the Chico Innovation Council

Members in attendance: Jim Walker (Chico City Council), Linda Zorn (Butte College), Rick Hubbard (CSU Chico/Tech Consultant), Joe Wills (Chico State), Mark Holfe (City Planning Director), Fritz McKinley (City of Chico), Lori Hoffman (VP Business and Finance, CSU Chico), Ken Lange (Rio Lindo Dental), Tom Z. Varga (City of Chico), Laura Urseny (Chico Enterprise Record), Mike Donnelly (California Northern Realty), Kate Leyden (Valley Contractors Exchange), Courtney Nelson- Committee Chairman (Bidwell Insurance), Steve Gonsalves- CEPCO Board Chairman (Nichols, Melburg & Rossetto), Annie Rafferty (Butte College), David Burkland (City of Chico), Rick Ellison (Chico State), John S. James (APC), Jim Stevens (Northstar Engineering), Roger Hart (Chico Chamber Education Committee), Ray Block (Wells Fargo Commercial Lending), Kelly Staley (Chico Unified School District), Fred Davis (City of Chico, ret.), Jill Ortega (Recology), Audrey Taylor (Chabin Concepts), Mark Sorensen (City of Chico), Katie Marskey (Oxford Suites), Dori Gladney (Oxford Suites).

CEPCO Staff: Bob Linscheid, Matt Robertson

The first item on the agenda for the Chico Innovation Council was a presentation by Lori Hoffman, VP of Business and Finance at CSU Chico, on the concept and development of the 2nd Street University Parking Structure. The Structure is part of the 2005 Master Plan, which CEPCO has repeatedly endorsed, and couples with the imminent construction of a new Humanities and Fine Arts building at the current Taylor Hall site. That building will include a new performing arts venue, creating what Hoffman described as a “Visual Performance Arts Quadrant.” With the expanded potential for events, and current parking crunch as is, the need for additional nearby parking will become acute. The new facility will reflect this need as well as improving the current parking shortage for University faculty, staff, and students. The facility isn’t just a parking structure- administrative space, headquarters for the University Police, and information kiosks are all part of the design-build components that firms are currently developing to win the bid. As part of the 2005 Master Plan, an Environmental Impact Report has already been filed. The project will be awarded to a regional firm in March, and construction is scheduled to be completed in November of 2012. In keeping with the campus community’s various sustainability initiatives, the final facility will include several solar-powered electric vehicle recharging stations, and motion-sensitive light dimmers to reduce energy consumption.

What exactly is the demand for parking at Chico State? Hoffman put it in perspective: of the 23 CSU campuses, Chico ranks dead last in parking spaces per capita. Chico State has approximately 18,000 faculty, staff and students, all vying for 1,800 parking spaces. Parking permits are commonly referred to as “hunting licenses” and availability at peak demand hours (Tue-Thur afternoons and special events) is non-existent. The new facility will include at least 325 spaces to help alleviate the issue. More structures are planned, but only in conjunction with other building projects (such as College Park) whose funding is yet to be secured.

During construction, 100 downtown parking spots will be out of action. The University is looking to mitigate this by leasing a nearby lot from Chico Unified School District as well as other modes of transport. Officials from the City of Chico are planning to have construction on the 1st/2nd Street couplet completed before major work on the parking structure begins. Hoffman informed the committee that in order to prevent a “building tunnel” on 2nd street, both the parking structure and Humanities Building will feature “stepped back” 3rd and 4th stories. In line with the University’s current parking policies, all spots in the structure will be free and open to the public on weekends, including Fridays in the summer, and hourly parking permits will be available for purchase anytime via automated kiosks.

Courtney Nelson introduced a motion in support of the University’s Master Plan, including the new parking structure, and the motion carried unopposed, further confirming CEPCO’s strong relationship with the University and a shared vision of improving the quality of life for the people of Chico.

The other major topic of discussion was on the Chico Municipal Airport (CMA). Since the departure of Aero Union Corp., a client since the 1960s employing around 120 people, the airport is in dire need of new tenants. CEPCO President/CEO Bob Linscheid characterized the opportunities present as “vast”, but it will be a challenge to find the right clients. Mike Donnelly, a commercial realtor working in conjunction with CEPCO, is spearheading an effort to “get the jobs back” that the community lost when Aero Union left. The process for doing so is multi-faceted and must be community wide:

- A contingent from Chico should attend aviation/avionics trade shows, starting in February at the Cygnus Aviation Industry Conference in Las Vegas. From there we can gauge the needs of prospective clients as well as market and brand Chico as a destination possibility.
- The local user market for these airport facilities is very limited; therefore emphasis should be placed on making the CMA attractive to outside businesses, as that is where the potential clients are.
- The strengths and weaknesses of the CMA will need to be identified and compared with regional competitors such as McClelland Airfield. Participating community members are encouraged to take tours of rival facilities as research.

Recognizing a need to make the airport more visually appealing, Steve Gonsalves of Nichols, Melburg & Rossetto Architects offered a free design consultation to any firm showing interest in renting space at the airport. Avionics and Aviation are highly specialized fields with many certification requirements. Thanks to the large number of former Aero Union employees in town, Chico has the relatively unique situation of being able to offer expert labor upon relocation to Chico. Updates on this project will be forthcoming as discussions on trade show participation and marketing strategies unfold.

Rick Hubbard and Linda Zorn have reached out to the BayTec Alliance and the Chico Chamber of Commerce Education Committee to further enhance the connectivity between area industry talent demands and the educational entities charged with the training of that talent. The Industry-Education task force now has a regional reach, and will promote the creation of a

feedback loop to continuously identify, evaluate, and correct the talent-demand equilibrium. Zorn will work to identify groups based on industry sector that would benefit from involvement in this ongoing initiative.

Bob Linscheid recommended that the Council motion to support AB 29, a bill that would permanently establish the Governor's Office of Economic Development. CEPCO has drafted a letter of support, and the motion carried unanimously.