



**BOULDER CREEK**

*Downtown*

# The Boulder Creek Business Association

President ..... Justin Acton  
 Vice President ..... Hallie Greene  
 Treasurer ..... Abigail Rohrbough  
 Secretary ..... Ann Marie Conrad  
 Eric Hammer  
 Tamara O'Kelly  
 Chris Currier  
 Sher Leclair  
 Joe Maggio

P.O. Box 611, Boulder Creek, CA 95006 - [www.bcba.net](http://www.bcba.net) -

The Boulder Creek Business Association is regarding the draft of the Economic Vitality Strategy as a consequential document affecting those who conduct business in the San Lorenzo Valley. We are enthusiastic about the recent efforts by the county to compose this broad and multi-topic report, and we share your desire for a bright economic future for everyone. After discussing the report with our membership, representatives from the San Lorenzo Valley Chamber of Commerce, and business owners in the SLV area, we decided to provide some comments on the report before the final draft is accepted. Our comments relate to how the report addresses vitality in the San Lorenzo Valley. Many of these comments are interconnected, and need to be addressed in the aggregate for them to be effective.

While there are many ideas that could be explored in attempt to augment economic success, the economies of the San Lorenzo Valley are being hindered by lack of infrastructure. Without significant investment in the area, existing business will have a hard time remaining viable, while new businesses will be deterred. Specifically, sewage, Internet, road maintenance and parking concerns should be addressed in the EVS report.

**Implementation of a sewer system serving businesses along HWY 9 corridor.** Having an environmentally responsible, reliable, clean, and affordable solution to our ongoing waste concerns would eliminate the hurdle that many businesses face with septic systems. There is no existing sewer system, and all businesses are on aged septic systems. Lodging is a top concern for maintaining a strong local economy in the valley. The report addresses lodging possibilities, but it neglects to address the difficulty of running such operations on a septic system. Old septic systems cause pollution to the watershed and hinder attractive businesses from taking root in the valley. Water intensive industries such as medical clinics, restaurants, lodging, and other industry would be more feasible if a solution for sewage was addressed. Further, tourists visiting the area are not provided public bathrooms, reducing the time they spend in the downtown areas. Public bathrooms are feasible with a sewer system.

**High-Speed Internet.** There is a high-speed fiber optic internet line that runs down the valley on Highway 9 to UCSC. The beauty of the area attracts educated and skilled high-tech workers to live here, and even open up businesses from their homes and small offices. Unfortunately, the requirements of internet bandwidth to run these businesses is dramatically increasing, and the existing internet options are not keeping up with current standards. Fast internet would help the valley stay relevant to our neighbors in the silicon valley.

**Road Maintenance.** The report suggests that the County work with CalTrans to maintain the corridors. This has been a source of frustration in the valley. Many projects that have been discussed for years, yet are not advancing at a detectable pace. Our roads (both highways and county) throughout the area are in poor condition and not being maintained. Fire fighting is a top concern in the valley, yet many roads are in poor shape to serve large emergency response vehicles. Money needs to be allocated in budgets with a greater emphasis on road repair and maintenance.

**Parking.** Lack of public parking in the San Lorenzo Valley has derailed growth and success of business. There is not enough public parking to accommodate and entice the many visitors to spend time and money in the area. The county needs to invest in parking to spur tourist and local dollars to land in the area. Many tourists pass through the local downtowns on busy weekends when parking spots cannot be found along the highways. They leave without shopping in our downtowns. Most residents of SLV commute to the Silicon Valley. Many of these local residents shop near their workplaces, because parking in SLV is limited. Solutions can come in the form of many options, ranging from very

inexpensive to greater capital investments. Simple acts of pouring of pea-gravel into degrading roadsides and painting parking spots would alert people to spots that would otherwise be looked over. There are numerous lots owned by private parties that could be purchased and purposed for parking.

**Tourism and hospitality.** In addition to addressing parking, there needs to be greater emphasis on how to capture the dollars that come with the tourists. This is our biggest opportunity for a strong local economy. Hundreds of thousands of people visit Henry Cowell and Big Basin state parks annually, yet most are forced to lodge in Santa Cruz. The San Lorenzo Valley has a unique forest environment which attracts visitors. There is a booming yet expandable wedding industry in the mountains. The problem with adding more wedding venues, as the report indicates, is the lack of lodging options. There needs to be effective and diligent efforts to attract and retain quality lodging operators. With more lodging rooms in place, we can convert the valley into a unique destination apart from Santa Cruz attractions. Assistance for lodging operations is key to increasing tourism dollars spent in the valley. The report suggests the county force closure of current unpermitted lodging and wedding venues. Until sufficient lodging is available, eliminating the few places in the valley that serve as alternative forms of lodging and venues would be counterproductive. Rather, the county should come up with a set of guidelines and rules that can be applied fairly across the various operators of wedding venues and bed and breakfast operations. There should be efforts made to turn unpermitted operations into regulated businesses. This would enable the county to collect tax revenue, ensure public safety and attract more people to the area.

**Public Safety.** The valley has experienced tremendous growth in the population of transient offenders. These offenders hurt the downtown area by deterring shoppers, polluting the river and contributing to crime. There is inadequate sheriff presence to patrol the problem, as we need more deputies on the streets. Response time to calls is too long. Boulder Creek needs a sheriff satellite office. Sheriff office representatives should walk the corridors and speak to business owners to hear concerns on a more regular basis. Efforts made by sheriffs are derailed as they do not have support from the court system to ensure proper consequence for criminal activity, which has led to our expanding population of transient offenders.

**Branding.** Main-street-like programs, heritage marketing and branding efforts for the valley would spur increased tourism in the local downtown areas. We already have the traffic going to the state parks, we just need the traffic to stop in the towns as they drive through. The report is vague on how partnerships with state parks and business can be achieved. The CVC promotes the valley, but does not work to give it the individual branding and attention that we need to attract additional tourists. There are grants available to fund historical downtowns. Perhaps a committee of grant writers could apply for funds that could be purposed for tourism growth. Having a professional branding effort would be helpful for marketing purposes.

**New Taxes.** The report suggests explorations of Business License Taxes, at modest levels, to ensure public safety, infrastructure and public services. In most areas, including the San Lorenzo Valley, additional taxes will hinder business from coming into the area. Creating additional taxes does not effectively convey the message that Santa Cruz County is "open for business". Most areas of Santa Cruz County have historically received greater public safety, infrastructure, and public services investments. Unfortunately, the valley has had components of basic infrastructure neglected for decades. Taxes and fees have been collected from business in the valley yet services are scarce, particularly when compared to the rest of the county. We do not want to see additional taxes on businesses without clear explanations of how that tax money will be reinvested in this area.

In short, the EVS report addresses some excellent possibilities for brightening the valley's economic future. Our letter serves as commentary and suggested additions from organizations in our community. We hope it can influence the final draft, and help to augment meaningful projects for our area. The valley's natural resources, proximity to the Silicon Valley and historical background make for tremendous economic potential. The Boulder Creek Business Association looks forward to responsible growth for our economy through long-term and focused efforts from our county. We are appreciative of the opportunity to work in partnership with other valley organizations and the county to continue dialogue on economic planning.