

NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND BLIGHT REDUCTION PROGRAM!

I am thrilled to announce the creation of a Renewable Energy Neighborhood Enhancement Wind Business Investment Zone, or RENEWBIZ, in concert with the creation of a blight reduction program countywide! Both of my proposals were approved by the Kern County Board of Supervisors at our December 11, 2012 meeting. I want to invest some of the increase in property tax dollars from renewable energy back into the communities that are the most impacted by these industries, thus creating a direct local benefit. At the same time, with an improved financial picture at the county, as a result of our vibrant energy sectors, I believe it is incumbent upon the county to do all it can to reduce blight in areas where it is hampering economic recovery.

The boundary for the RENEWBIZ incorporates most of the Second District including the communities of Boron, Mojave, Rosamond, and the unincorporated areas of Tehachapi and California City. With the assistance of the Kern County Planning and Community Development Department, I initiated a community visioning plan for Rosamond in 2011, for Mojave this year, and plan one for Boron in 2013. Community visioning plans have identified multiple projects that are eligible for funding under the RENEWBIZ program. The projects identified through the visioning process will enhance the quality of life within the Second District and create new economic development opportunities.

Unincorporated communities within the RENEWBIZ boundary will benefit from a portion of the incremental property tax growth from the base year of 2012 generated primarily from the renewable energy industry. Currently, it is estimated that as much as \$1.5 million dollars annually could be available to support important projects identified by residents of the Second District through the visioning process. Some projects that will be up for consideration include infrastructure improvements, like roads, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and multi-use trails that contribute to completion of a community road system, and other streetscape amenities: benches, lighting, trash cans, signage, improvements to public buildings, parking lot repair, and landscaping improvements.

Also approved this week, at my request, was the development of a county-wide blight reduction program. This program will add a dedicated county staff member who will reach out to communities disproportionately affected by blight. This new staff member will proactively engage community groups and individuals, and work with them along with various county departments including Code Compliance, Adult and Child Protective Services, Environmental Health, Planning and Community Development, and law enforcement, as well as non-profits to revitalize not only the look and feel of the community, but also its physical and emotional health.

The unincorporated communities of East Kern have suffered from blight for too long. I am so pleased that this new dedicated staff member, working with all these county departments and my office, will be able to make a difference in the lives of everyone in East Kern. Kern County is in a unique position in this down economy to have two new programs like these. I am committed to appropriately and fairly reinvesting our tax dollars back into our communities.

I also proposed, and the Board approved on December 11th, a countywide Economic Development Taskforce designed to create a strategic plan to address long term issues that affect economic development throughout the county. Some of the areas to be addressed through the taskforce include county-wide collaboration, workforce readiness, infrastructure, access to financing, transportation, quality of life, business climate, regulatory issues, marketing/branding, and innovation. Recognizing the county-wide need to provide not only job growth, but also higher wage jobs, the only way to effectively grow Kern County's economy is to take a strategic and holistic approach to economic development. We need to have everyone at the table working together toward common goals to provide improved employment opportunities for Kern County's residents.

Implementation of these programs is set to begin in early 2013.