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## City Branding Campaign to Sharpen Community Identity

By Andrea Alegria - 10/26/2009

San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

In shaky economic times, Glendale civic leaders are looking to develop a cohesive urban brand that reflects the city's identity and helps recruit businesses and attract visitors now and, perhaps more importantly, once things recover.

"[This branding effort] is very important and it's part of an overall business plan to try to encourage more companies to relocate to the city of Glendale and especially to our two redevelopment zones: our Downtown Redevelopment Zone and our San Fernando Road Redevelopment Zone," said Glendale Mayor Frank Quintero, who largely spearheaded the effort.

In the San Fernando Road Corridor area where Disney, KABC 7 and DreamWorks act as existing media anchors, the city is looking to create a thriving Media and Design District and a branding campaign could help attract those types of businesses.

Already 36 percent of the 732 businesses there can be considered creative industries, according to a Redevelopment Agency report presented September 8.

A successful branding campaign would also make residents outside of Glendale more aware of the city's shopping opportunities in both retail and automotive, said Quintero.

"We hope to move forward with this as quickly as we can," said Philip Lanzafame, Director of Development Services, adding that staff solicited proposals from consultants for the citywide branding and marketing campaign and will be recommending a consultant firm to the Redevelopment Agency for selection next week.

"This will be important during the recession and the recovery. It will be the first step of what could be a long term promotional campaign for the city," he said.

The strategy has already been embraced by a multitude of municipalities including Austin, Texas, Santa Rosa, Cal. and Lancaster in the Antelope Valley, where the city recently began implementing a branding campaign centered on "It's Positively Clear".

"It's important for cities to be understood the same as one would a product," said Karen Kaigler-Walker, Assistant dean of the School of Business at Woodbury University.

"Almost everything in our society is somehow branded and so people associate a certain lifestyle, or a certain political leaning just like they would a brand of an automobile. It's important that cities stand out in some way in the eyes of the public."

The approach has gained traction in the economic recession.

Don McEachern, CEO of North Star, a Nashville firm that specializes in community and city branding, said his company has seen the number of requests for proposals from municipalities double from last year.

"Cities are paying attention to their reputation," said McEachern, whose firm submitted a proposal to Glendale. "It's about being as competitive as they possibly can be and managing their reputation."

But it takes more than a catchy slogan and logo to have a successful branding campaign, he said.

“For this to be effective it has to be connected to a strategy that connects to policy, development, investment, diplomacy... all kinds of things that city touches,” he said.

“The goal is to bring this about in a three dimensional way, where different initiatives leverage and support that strategy. Once you can get past the discussion of logos and lines and get to the work of bringing that strategy to life and wearing it like a second skin in your community, that’s when branding can really make a big difference.”

In Glendale, where office vacancy rates have climbed to 20 percent, a branding campaign could help attract commercial tenants, but only after the market recovers, said Bill Boyd, senior managing director at the Charles Dunn Co., the largest commercial real estate firm in Glendale.

“When the market and the economy recovers there will certainly be a benefit in the marketing of available office space in the city but the best branding campaign will not dictate or cause companies to require more office space. You can have the best fishermen in the world, but if he’s fishing in a lake with no fish it won’t matter,” he said.

According to research from real estate firm Grubb & Ellis, as of July of this year, the Pasadena, Burbank and Glendale office market had more than 77,000 square feet of negative absorption of office space, led by Glendale with 55,000 square feet.

“A marketing campaign will help get the word out to new tenants when the market turns about Glendale’s outstanding convenience and accessibility,” Boyd added.

Mayor Quintero said the city has embarked in branding and marketing campaigns in the past, but ‘dropped the ball’ after a short while.

“I want this to be a long term sustainable endeavor. I don’t want to do this for six months and then we forget about it. You have to continue to do this over a period of years,” he said.

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