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Managed by the California Association for  
Local Economic Development (CALED)



# CITY OF PARLIER

## LOCAL ECONOMIC ADVISORY PROGRAM (LEAP)

*Assessment of Parlier's Economic Development Potential and Strategy  
Held on February 16 & 17, 2016*

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## Overview

### THE STUDY AREA AND THE PANEL'S ASSIGNMENT

A 4-person volunteer team visited Parlier February 15 & 16, 2016 to conduct an advisory exercise designed to assess the community's situation, review the City's existing economic development activities, and to help the City develop a full economic development program.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Parlier is a small Central Valley city in Fresno County with a population of about 15,000. Parlier is located seven miles east of Highway 99 along Manning Avenue, a regional thoroughfare. It is difficult for Parlier to develop significant shopping, employment and college opportunities because these are all available in larger neighboring cities such as Reedley, Selma, Fresno, and



Dinuba. In addition, the household median income in the city is low, with about 33% of residents living below the poverty line<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, city officials are optimistic about Parlier's future, and actively seek industrial, downtown and retail development to better meet the needs of local residents.

This project is intended to provide City officials a better understanding of the area's economic future. Specific information being sought includes:

1. A suggested prioritized and practical economic development strategy, which can be implemented over the next 1-2 years.
2. A better understanding of the city's economic development potential within the context of today's economy and growth, competing communities, agricultural and food processing trends, and other factors.
3. The City's industrial park and its potential, including infrastructure needs, potential development funding sources, and other factors. There is significant ongoing work on the park, which the advisory team can build upon.
4. Downtown revitalization, including identifying retail and revitalization opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parlier,\\_California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parlier,_California)

# PARLIER LEAP

## QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED BY PANEL MEMBERS

1. What economic development priorities could and should the city undertake given their limited resources?
2. How does the city's retail recruitment efforts and industrial park development project fit in to these priorities?

## Methodology

The LEAP Team and City staff conducted the following activities:

- Prior to the Event:
  - The Team worked with City staff prior to the event, including discussing the project, preparing the problem statement and reviewing literature relevant to the study;
  - Two members of the team presented a 2-hour "Introduction to Economic Development" program to the City Council on February 3, 2016;
  - City staff arranged the venue and schedule, and invited the participants;
- On February 16, the FIRST day of the event, the Team:
  - Met with City staff and Councilmember Montano for breakfast;
  - Went on a guided site tour of the Downtown with the City Manager;
  - Conducted individual and small group interviews throughout the day;
  - Convened to discuss what it heard and began formulating recommendations
  - Conducted follow-up research to refine its recommendations
- On February 17, the second day of the event, the Team:
  - Conducted three more interviews;
  - Finalized its recommendations;
  - Presented to the City Council at its regular meeting that evening
- After the event, the Team:
  - Conducted remaining follow-up interviews;
  - Gathered additional information;
  - Prepared and discussed the report;
  - Are available to make follow-up presentations to Economic Development Committee and/or City Council.



## Observations

The Team offers the following observations based on all available information, including the interviews:

- Even with very limited resources, the City has a great opportunity to build momentum for economic development and a higher quality of life, and to become a true unified force in the region. This will take a high degree of cooperation, volunteerism, and low-budget program implementation;
- The City has kept its city limits compact. However, this leaves relatively little vacant land for future development. The City should continue its efforts to expand its sphere and city limits in order to plan for the land and infrastructure that will be needed for city growth over time;
- Downtown redevelopment and Manning Avenue development are not incompatible. The businesses that would relocate to Manning did so years ago. Manning is a good location for brand stores and national chains with convenience shopping. The downtown is the place for a theme-based gathering mecca with local shops, but which can attract outsiders to festivals and events;
- City staff have a good reputation as supportive of development, have positive attitudes, work well with local businesses, and do a lot with limited resources. More training about available services and assistance would be useful;
- Local businesses and developers know too little about the permit process and types of available business assistance;
- Local residents and business owners have strong loyalty to the City and want to help it thrive. this is an important positive factor, which can aid in the recruitment of volunteers;
- There is still a lack of coordination between local education and the City, though the alignment between the two is improving. In the past there have been many missed opportunities to collaborate. The Parlier Unified School District is one of the larger employers in the City, and its fortunes directly affect the City's fortunes;
- In the interest of transparency, any City Council members and staff that have property and/or business interests downtown should get clear advice from the City Attorney about when to recuse themselves from votes and other participation;
- Most businesses and interviewees are optimistic about the future of the City and of their own businesses.

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## INDUSTRIAL PARK

- The Parlier industrial park's first phase appears to be doing well, and has significant developer interest. In 5-10 years Phase 1 of the park could be fully occupied. The City should develop the remainder of the park as soon as practicable;
- Food processors and suppliers to food processors are excellent prospects, especially mid-sized and small processors;
- The park is centrally located, and is a good candidate for smaller or regional distribution facilities.

## MANNING AVENUE CORRIDOR

- Manning remains competitive as a place for travelers to stop during their commutes east and west;
- Manning can attract more gas stations and fast-food establishments;
- Manning needs traffic calming features (e.g. median, left turn lanes, etc.) to encourage easy on-off access, especially during commute hours;

## DOWNTOWN PARLIER

- The downtown suffers from neglect and lack of economic activity.
- Good steps have started, including some streetscape. These need to continue;
- Renovated building façades, cleaned properties, paint, plantings and color are good additions;



## RETAIL RECRUITMENT

- It is important to optimize sales tax and property tax generation in order to ensure continued growth of the City's economic development capacity;
- There is leakage in most retail categories, indicating an opportunity to recruit one or more stores in a number of categories, including building materials, grocery, clothing, sporting goods, department stores, general merchandise and fast food;

## Recommendations

Parlier's citizens can be proud of their traditions and their city. They greatly benefit from all the services the City is providing -- with very limited resources. The City has heart. Local leaders should celebrate Parlier's heritage and should proudly pronounce its strengths throughout the region.

The recommended activities in this report need not be big expensive projects. They also can and should be conducted daily as time and resources allow -- by City staff, elected officials, and the other involved entities. Daily attention in small ways will achieve amazing results and will move many of these recommendations forward incrementally. The City should, however, take advantage of any opportunity to obtain grant and other funding to help fulfill its goals.

The Team has formulated the following recommendations based on all available information:

1) Continue and expand **downtown revitalization**.

- a) Find inexpensive ways to develop the downtown as an easy and attractive venue for social gatherings, festivals, etc. They will become catalysts for investment, will generate civic pride, and will bring business to downtown merchants.
  - (1) Identify and prepare meeting space for civic gatherings;
  - (2) Develop signage and marketing to draw interest;
  - (3) Support festivals and events through financial and in-kind City support, such as traffic control, security, water, first aid, etc;
  - (4) Work with the schools and encourage their participation;
  - (5) Organize volunteer cleanups, paint parties, etc.;
  - (6) Existing events to support include the Thanksgiving dinner, Roundup, Christmas Parade, and Farmers market;
- b) Support the formation of a downtown merchants association to help organize various activities and improvements, including hospitality training,
  - i) Not immediately, but over time as momentum builds, consider creating a Main Street or similar program with staff and budget;
- c) Retain and recruit key establishments that bring locals in the downtown, including the Post Office, City Hall, Library, a good hardware store, banks and ATM's, schools, gathering places, local restaurants, health clubs, etc;
- d) Consider making a commercial kitchen available to caterers and the cottage food industry;

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- e) Pick a set of buildings with potential and a willing owner(s) and encourage façade improvement, building renovation, etc. consider in-kind support such as providing pressure washing equipment, paint, sidewalk repairs, etc;
  - f) Continue developing streetscape as possible. Seek grants from USDA, CDBG, and others to fund streetscape, and a façade &/or building renovation loan program;
  - g) Develop City property compatibly with downtown revitalization and with drawing shoppers and other visitors;
  - h) Support the Chamber through cooperative events/festivals, Consider some funding and a contract with the Chamber to conduct mutually beneficial activities;
  - i) Create a master downtown development plan. Seek a grant and the technical support necessary to accomplish this. The process should include significant citizen and local business participation. It should identify a common theme and street design features which can guide new development and redevelopment. Candidate grant sources include USDA, CDBG, PG&E, and Fresno State Economic Development;
  - j) For events/festivals held at other venues in town, use downtown and Manning Avenue resources to create related food opportunities and activities to give visitors alternatives to leaving town. For instance the upcoming Kendo tournament is an opportunity to provide food and festivals, martial arts films, picnics, headquarter meeting spaces for organizers, etc.;
- 2) Create a **City Economic Development vision and a sense of place**, with clearly stated goals and priorities. This set of recommendations is a start, but only a start. Share the vision with the community, including all segments, and get feedback before final adoption.
- a) Study the “Strong Cities<sup>2</sup>”, “ABCD<sup>3</sup>” and “Lighter, quicker, cheaper<sup>4</sup>” approaches to citizen/neighborhood involvement and community development;
- 3) Actively **support existing top employers and local businesses**:
- a) Actively retain existing large employers, including the Bank of the West, Maxco, Sunwest, USDA and UC research centers, the UHI health clinic, and supermarkets;
  - b) Conduct a business visitation program, which includes:
    - i) Identifying individual and business climate issues;
    - ii) Seeking volunteers from the Chamber to help with visitation;



<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.eda.gov/challenges/sc2challenge/>

<sup>3</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asset-based\\_community\\_development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asset-based_community_development)

<sup>4</sup> Found at Project for Public Spaces [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org) . See <http://www.pps.org/reference/11steps/> for the eleven principles for creating great community places.

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- iii) Starting an official business recognition program;
  - iv) Coordinating with the Fresno EDC on their program;
  - c) Work with schools and colleges on training programs that directly support the needs of local businesses;
  - d) Arrange technical assistance and training in groups and individually through the SBDC, the SBA, SCORE, Reedley College,
  - e) Continuously reinforce to citizens the importance of thriving local businesses;
  - f) The School district is also a large employer. The City should do all it can to support District activities, to improve school performance, and to better serve students and teachers;
- 4) **Recruit desired new businesses;**
- a) Create attractive, content-rich recruitment marketing materials in two versions – one tailored to industrial prospects and one tailored to retail prospects. Post on the city’s Web Site, along with permit application requirements and fee schedules;
  - b) Continue existing brand store and locally owned retail recruiting to Manning, the Downtown, and other designated lands. Work with land owners and developers. Annex and re-zone as needed;
  - c) Form a “Red Team” approach to business permits, including conducting pre-application meetings that include all agencies and departments who will be reviewing an application. Publish requirements in advance. Existing materials are good. They should be posted on the city’s Web Site;
- 5) **Develop the second half of the industrial park.**
- a) Sell remaining industrial land to those who will quickly build on it. We understand the City discourages land banking by requiring development within a year of purchase;
  - b) Punch through the access road to Academy as quickly as possible;
  - c) Because of the City’s central location with excellent access, recruit smaller and mid-sized distribution facilities such as Amazon, Dollar General, etc.
- 6) Work with developers along Manning to **recruit a flag hotel** of about 100 rooms which can house business travelers.
- a) Enact a Transient Occupancy Tax to prepare for your first lodging place. There are lots of steps in the TOT enactment process, so start now;

## First Steps

City staff asked the team to suggest first steps – the priorities to begin first, and expand as opportunity presents:

1. Continue existing community development and economic development efforts and take advantage of all possible grant opportunities. Involve citizens as much as possible;
2. Support the formation of a separate, informal downtown merchants group. Ask them to develop an ABCD program, a list of initial projects, and a large volunteer pool. Support this effort with a small amount of initial funding. Ask them to invite experts for more advice;
3. Support and promote all sizes of festivals and events in the downtown, especially those sponsored by others. Encourage a regular farmer's market/flea market on J Street between Fresno & Tulare, and utilize the parks frequently for gatherings and events;
4. Seek a grant or arrange other funding for downtown façade improvement loans;
5. Visit large and mid-sized employers on a regular basis. Understand their needs. Encourage expansions;
6. Expand/improve relations with local commercial developers and brokers. Actively support their projects;
7. Designate someone on city staff as the business and permit ombudsperson – someone who can help businesses find training and financing, and who can help expedite permits;
8. Continue recruiting new businesses to Manning and the industrial park;
9. Support development at Manning & Academy, including major retailers and a hotel, and expand the city limits if needed;
10. Take initial steps to enact a TOT tax;
11. Complete access to Academy in the Industrial park;

## Persons Interviewed

### City of Parlier

Juan Montano, City Councilperson  
Yolanda Padilla, City Councilperson  
Israel Lara, Jr., City Manager  
Jasmin Bains, Finance Director  
E. Shun Patkin, Community Development Director

### Stakeholders

Adam Avila, Avila Apartments  
Mathew Peters, Bank of the West  
Dean Thonesen, Sunwest  
Greg Paboojian, Developer  
Alice Yamamoto, USave  
Alvina Talavera, Hugs & Mugs Coffee  
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Victor Bribiesca, Fresno Small Business  
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Joe Reyna, Consolidated Mosquito Abatement  
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Humberto Gomez, Resident  
Dean Van Patten, Asbury Environmental Services  
Shawna Glazener, Fresno County EDC  
Michael Dozier, Fresno State Economic  
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Erica Mello, Office of Congressman David G.  
Valadao  
Amy Wu, Parlier Post  
Jim Simon, RSG Group  
Antonio Mariscal, Palm Cabinets  
Edgar Pelayo, YCA  
Lupe Valdes, USDA

Special thanks to Jasmin Bains, Finance Director, and the City staff for the great work organizing the event and inviting the participants.

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## The Advisory Team

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## About the Local Economic Advisory Program

A LEAP is a one- or two-day long event that helps community leaders and other stakeholders understand their local economy, learn about economic development, and build consensus for action. LEAP events are customized for each community's specific needs. Each LEAP team is built from CALED's database of experienced professionals from outside the community who can provide advice on the specific problem, whether it be economic development strategies, recruiting new businesses, downtown revitalization, industrial park assessments, and much more.

## About the California Academy for Economic Development



The California Academy for Economic Development (Academy) is a center devoted to Economic Development training, education, and research. By emphasizing innovation as well as tested methods, we strive to educate economic developers and communities on the best ways to grow healthy, vibrant communities. We are a 501(c)3 non-profit, managed by the California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED).

### **Our mission:**

- Educate economic development professionals, officials and others about the critical processes and strategies needed to improve California's communities so they can succeed in the global economy.
- Provide new business information and resources to local economic development professionals so that they, in turn, can pass this information on to entrepreneurs in their communities.
- Conduct supportive research, data development and analysis.
- Strengthen the link between economic development and educational institutions.
- Make economic development professionals more productive by bringing new technologies to the field.

## Contact Information

### **California Academy for Economic Development**

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APPENDIX A

PARLIER COMMUNITY PROFILE 2015

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APPENDIX B

Local Economic Development Power Point Presentation

Presented to the City Council February 3, 2016

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APPENDIX C

LEAP Recommendations -- Power Point Presentation

Presented to the City Council February 17, 2016

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## APPENDIX D

### Web Links to Relevant Documents

Parlier City Web Page <http://parlier.ca.us/>

City Council Meeting Agendas regarding this LEAP <http://parlier.ca.us/agendas/> . Open agendas of December 2, 2015, February 3, 2016 and February 17, 2016;

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