



SUSTAINABLE JOBS IN SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIES: Opportunities for Fresno

Report from the Evening Discussion at Fresno State University on January 21, 2016

The Fresno region – and the San Joaquin Valley more broadly – has the potential to benefit from California’s climate policies and programs in terms of jobs, income and economic growth. At an evening discussion at Fresno State University on January 21, 2016, Governor Jerry Brown’s senior advisor Ken Alex and members of the Fresno nonprofit, labor and business communities gathered to assess the opportunities. They recommended actions that both state and local leaders can take to better position regions like Fresno to take advantage of the opportunities. This report summarizes the key recommendations.

Encourage more infill development within existing urban boundaries

More infill development can provide high-skilled, higher-income construction jobs and economic revitalization of the urban core. It can also preserve open space and farmland from development and reduce per capita water and utility bills and transportation costs.

To take advantage of the opportunity, **local leaders should:**

- Apply for existing state funds from high-speed rail implementation for **station-area planning for infill**.
- Develop **specific plans for infill areas** in key downtown neighborhoods, which would allow infill projects consistent with those plans to be exempt from environmental review under Senate Bill 743 (Steinberg, 2013) amendments to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- Encourage more infill projects to receive **streamlined environmental review under SB 743** reform to the transportation impacts analysis under CEQA.
- Assist eligible infill affordable housing and associated transit projects to **apply for greenhouse gas reduction funds** under the state’s Assembly Bill 32 (Nuñez, 2006) cap-and-trade program.
- Utilize state-provided **on-line general plan assistance**, such as digital mapping tools, to lower the costs of local planning for infill.
- Direct existing transportation dollars toward **infrastructure and transportation projects that bolster infill** and urban development.

State leaders should:

- **Pool and simplify state funding programs** to encourage more cash-strapped local governments to apply, given the often complex processes for applying for these funds.
- **Fund local climate adaptation projects that have the greatest economic development potential**, in order to achieve the twin goals of resource protection and conservation and job growth.
- **Develop a special fund for catalytic infill projects**, apart or in conjunction with greenhouse gas reduction funds, to revitalize neighborhoods through targeted investments in pioneer projects.

Preserve farmland

The Fresno and San Joaquin Valley farmland is some of the most productive and valuable in the world. Yet this agricultural and economic resource is under constant diminishment from development pressures. More development focused toward the urban core would help preserve this land for generations to come.

To preserve farmland, **local leaders should:**

- **Apply for Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program funds** from the Strategic Growth Council to support agricultural preservation easements.
- **Invest in infill and urban infrastructure and transportation** projects by redirecting existing funds away from projects that threaten farmland.
- **Participate in state discussions on Williamson Act reform**, to ensure the goals of this program (to protect prime farmland) are met through improved funding and policy changes.
- Plan for and **encourage renewable energy development on “least-conflict” lands** identified by agricultural, energy, ranching and conservation stakeholders through a digital mapping process housed at Conservation Biology Institute’s Databasin Gateway program.

State leaders should:

- Develop **funding programs and ease permitting for compost projects** that can sequester carbon on farm and ranch lands.
- **Bolster the Williamson Act** to improve funding and local policies that protect prime farmland from development.
- **Ease permitting and encourage financing for biomass projects** that generate renewable energy and biofuels, to provide a new income stream for farmers and more low-carbon energy for California.

Improve Energy Efficiency of Existing Buildings

Leaky windows, poorly insulated walls, and inefficient lighting are just some of the factors that lead to significant economic losses for building owners and ratepayers. Fixing these inefficiencies will save money over the long-term and typically cover the upfront costs of the retrofits within a few years.

To encourage more energy efficiency, **local leaders should:**

- **Encourage and allow independent financing for energy retrofits**, such as through the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) model, in which building owners repay third party investors via property tax payments over time.

State leaders should:

- **Target existing efficiency incentives to inland, hotter parts of the state** such as Fresno, where efficiency dollars yield higher economic savings.

Conclusion: Monitor and Report the Economic Wins

State and local climate investments promise to bring significant benefits for residents, businesses and labor in Fresno, as well as yielding environmental and public health improvements. State and local officials and advocates should monitor the direct and indirect job benefits and economic growth from improved wages and household savings from these sustainable investments. The data will help make the case for bolstering and improving these programs at both the state and local levels. The result will be a more sustainable, equitable and profitable economy for Fresno and beyond.

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