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By Signal Editorial Board

## **Real stimulus for Santa Clarita — city and valley**

People tend to focus on their elected leaders - the president, the school board, the City Council - when things are going well or going wrong, and shower them with the commensurate praise or blame.

Sometimes, though, it's the hired staff - the worker-bees in the government offices - who deserve the attention.

Such was the case last week when City Manager Ken Pulskamp presented a comprehensive economic development plan to the City Council.

It wasn't the first Really Good Idea to emanate from City Hall. It was the hired city staff's idea to bring the Cowboy Festival and the Amgen Tour of California to Santa Clarita.

But Pulskamp's 21-point "Business Plan for Progress" is the most sweeping and quality-of-life-changing idea we've seen in a long time. Fully implemented, it would dramatically affect the way business is done in Santa Clarita - for the better - and those effects would trickle down and throughout the whole community.

It's not just a one-time deal, either. The job-creating, "shovel-ready" public-works projects are a big component, but they don't tell the whole story.

As approved by the council on Tuesday, Pulskamp's plan is designed to leverage Santa Clarita's share of federal stimulus dollars to get the most bang for the buck, but to do so in a way that creates long-term sustainability for economic growth.

Some things will be obvious, and you'll ask yourself why they didn't do that before - such as signage on the roads to direct out-of-towners to the Westfield Valencia Town Center and the Auto Mall.

We always say we want outsiders to shop and drop their sales-tax money here, but then they get here and our non-grid road system makes it all but impossible for them to find our retail centers.

Other, bigger programs won't be quite so visible to the public, but they should reshape our local economy.

The city intends to partner with the SCV Chamber of Commerce, Valley Industrial Association, College of the Canyons and other economic drivers to form an economic development corporation, or EDC.

In other successful communities, EDCs act as umbrella economic planning bodies to determine what businesses should go where, and then go out and recruit those

businesses and create business clusters around them.

Think of it this way. When The Newhall Land and Farming Co. was creating Valencia, it didn't just build homes. It built a community. It found the right place for a hospital, two colleges, a county government center, industrial parks and neighborhood shopping centers.

The rest of Santa Clarita didn't have that type of planning. Things sprouted up "wherever." Now that Newhall Land is essentially done planning Valencia, we need an EDC to do that type of economic planning for the entire Santa Clarita Valley.

And that's one thing that really differentiates Pulskamp's plan from any other. In the spirit of One Valley, One Vision, it's designed to encompass and improve business conditions throughout the SCV.

That fact was driven home in the debate over the marketing mantra "Think Santa Clarita" versus "Think Santa Clarita Valley." It was never a question of whether the goal was to aid the city at the expense of the outlying communities, as in the past. This time around - hopefully now and forever - the city's goal is to benefit the businesses and residents of the entire valley.

The argument over nomenclature was really just a question of what's most marketable outside our valley. What slogan would best attract the attention of corporate executives in greater Los Angeles so they'll think about business-to-business activity involving the SCV, and even locating their headquarters here?

Around town, "Think Santa Clarita Valley" will remind residents and businesses to put "community first" when shopping, hiring employees or soliciting services. At the Burbank Airport, the frequent business-class flyers will see - and think - "Santa Clarita."

Beyond simply thinking happy thoughts, Pulskamp's 21-point plan makes tangible changes to existing programs and policies intending to make Santa Clarita more business friendly, as well.

The city will reach out to more businesses and teach them how to take advantage of the economic development zone (EDZ) tax breaks. Only 5 percent have taken advantage so far.

The city will subsidize film-permit fees to attract even more film production to our already-film-friendly city, and see if it can get the OK to rebate half of the bed tax for film-related hotel stays.

The city will provide micro loans to small businesses that don't qualify for SBA loans and offer financial assistance to turn around foreclosed homes more quickly.

The city will cut permit fees for businesses that produce quality jobs and create a one-stop development permit shop so applicants won't have to search all over City Hall for the right staffer.

The city will increase the "local" allowance in the bid process from 5 percent to 10 percent, so a Santa Clarita business can win a city government contract even if its bid is 10 percent higher than the lowest out-of-town bid.

The city will rebate half of the use tax for businesses that direct their use-tax revenues to Santa Clarita. (Use tax is like sales tax charged on out-of-state transactions.)

The city will create another façade improvement program for Old Town Newhall, like the one that helped create the look of the El Trocadero restaurant and neighboring businesses.

There's more, but you get the idea. While other California cities and the state itself are floundering around, wondering what will happen to them next, Pulskamp and his team of leaders behind the scenes at City Hall decided they weren't going to be in that position.

They've taken the bull by the horns and laid out a plan for sustainable, community-building economic growth.

This is the change we need.

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