September 28, 2017

Kim Prillhart
Planning Director
Ventura County Planning Division
800 S. Victoria Ave.
Ventura, CA 93009

RE: 2020 General Plan Update Vision and Guiding Principles

Dear Director Prillhart,

As part of CoLAB's engagement with the 2020 General Plan Update process, we have been reviewing the Draft Vision and Guiding Principles. We would like to offer a few suggestions that will help improve this document and allow it to better reflect the diverse array of social and economic activity within the county.

Vision Statement

We share the enthusiasm for living in Ventura County expressed in the Vision statement. However, we feel it has the unintended effect of emphasizing the experience of the well-to-do, home-owning classes while ignoring the challenges faced by less advantaged communities. Its references to “exceptional quality of life” and “talented residents” does not reflect the fact that quality of life varies widely in our county depending on income level.

The Vision statement unfortunately gives the reader the impression that all is well for everyone and that the only thing needed is to stay the course. We feel that the Vision statement could be significantly improved by the inclusion of a commitment to increasing economic opportunities for those without the privilege of already owning their own home or running an established business. The Vision statement would also benefit by recognizing the county’s rising crime rates or the fact that business growth is nearly at a standstill due to burdensome local regulations.

The Vision statement’s promise to address needs in a “sustainable manner” should also be replaced with language that supports goals reflecting the pressing needs of our diverse communities in the county.
We recommend adding language to the Vision statement that more closely matches these realities, recognizing the diverse needs of our county and including more specific language to support goals the County will be pursuing. We include below a suggested rewording of the Vision statement that reflects these priorities:

“Ventura County is a remarkable place to live, work and play. Our quality of life and economic vitality is rooted in the stewardship of our cultural and natural resources including world class beaches, fertile agricultural soils, scenic mountains, and diverse communities. The General Plan reflects the County’s ongoing commitment to collaborate with Ventura County’s residents, cities, businesses, and non-profit organizations to address our environmental, social, and economic needs, to improve public health and safety and create opportunities for all communities to thrive.”

Guiding Principles

Below we have included some suggestions for the Guiding Principles which we think will serve to emphasize the important issues we discussed above.

- **Land Use and Community Character:** We recommend it include mentions of farmworker housing and processing in order to reflect the unique land use needs of our agricultural sector.

  “Direct urban growth away from agricultural, rural, and open space lands in favor of locating it in cities and unincorporated communities where public facilities, services and infrastructure are available or can be provided with the exception of farmworker housing and processing.”

- **Economic Vitality:** The wording in this section implies that quality of life is something to be balanced against economic vitality. Rather, it should be reworded to reflect that economic vitality *enhances* the quality of life of a community.

  “Foster economic and job growth that is responsive to the evolving needs and opportunities of the County’s businesses and work force, to enhance our quality of life while promoting environmental sustainability.”

- **Agriculture:** This is a strong and positive statement about the importance of the agricultural economy in our county. However, it would benefit from language emphasizing the importance of water and farmworker housing to the industry.

  “Encourage the long-term viability of Ventura County’s agricultural economy by supporting a diverse and globally competitive agricultural industry, through the availability of water, land and farmworker housing.”
• **Circulation/Transportation/Mobility:** This is an excellent statement, however we should recognize how unrealistic it is given the difficulties in providing transportation to a suburban county with large undeveloped distances between cities.

• **Housing:** Ventura County has a housing crisis with a significant impact on low-income families. We believe that this section should include language acknowledging that reality and commit the county to solving it.

  “Support the development of affordable and equitable housing opportunities by increasing the existing housing supply and supporting diverse new housing types.”

• **Conservation and Open Space:** There are many different priorities that need to be balanced with natural resource management, such as private property rights, and public safety concerns. This section should acknowledge those tradeoffs.

  “Manage the County’s natural resources, such as soils, water, air, minerals, and wildlife and its habitat to enhance our quality of life while respecting private property and ensuring public safety.”

• **Water Resources:** It is more important than ever that we prioritize the development of water resources and ensure that we are balancing the needs between water users.

  “Manage and develop water resources in a manner that addresses current demand without compromising the ability to meet future demand, and balances the needs of urban and agricultural uses and healthy ecosystems.”

• **Public Facilities and Services:** This is an excellent statement and we recommend no changes.

• **Health and Safety:** We recommend a simple change of the word “risks” to “impacts.”

• **Climate Change and Resilience:** There is some uncertainty about which mandated targets the statement is referring to, as there are significant differences between the approaches of the federal and state governments.

  “Reduce Greenhouse gas emissions to achieve mandated targets by federal, state and local regulatory agencies, and increase resilience to the effects of climate change.”

• **Healthy Communities:** We recommend rearranging the priorities listed in the statement, as well as adding education and recognizing other fitness activities to present a more holistic approach. We also recommend removing the term “into the built environment”.
“Promote economic, social, and physical health and wellness by promoting access to healthy foods, education and the arts, encouraging fitness activities including walking and biking, and integrating Health in All Policies.”

We want to thank you and your staff for your proactive and open approach to soliciting public comment on the County’s 2020 General Plan Update. We hope to continue to work closely with you and the Planning Division to help craft this important planning document for the future of Ventura County.

Sincerely,

Lynn Jensen
Executive Director
Ventura County Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business