

NEW COLLEGE IN CHULA VISTA?

For years, Chula Vista has tried to entice a four-year university to the South Bay, setting aside a 383-acre plot of land for the campus. Now it is on a short list of cities that could get a new state university. Below, the head of South County Economic Development Council and the head of an organization called San Diego Tax Fighters offer opposing views of the effort.

BY CINDY GOMPPER GRAVES

South County holds the key to the San Diego region's thriving economic future. With thousands of acres of undeveloped land and 40,000 housing units on the horizon, South County is poised to become the next employment hub. According to the San Diego Association of Governments, nearly 90,000 people leave South County each day for their morning commute. Why? Quite frankly because South Bay residents love the quality of life they experience in South County, but the jobs are not yet located in the same communities in which they live. However, these employment centers will start to shift south in the near future.

A key element to meeting the region's expectations is the creation of a vibrant, talented workforce. Opportunities for a larger workforce exist with South County's population projected to grow by an additional 85,000 people by 2025. However, there must be adequate learning opportunities to empower them to become the employees of the future. Overcrowding at local universities has hampered our ability to do this and, as a result, the region is stifled and will not reach its full potential. In 2019 there were

94,142 undergraduate applications for San Diego State University's fall semester. With an acceptance rate of 34%, it is evident we need to increase capacity in our higher education system. This situation is not unique to SDSU as 22 of the 23 CSUs are currently designated as impacted. Should these current trends persist, California will face a staggering shortfall of college graduates of about 1.1 million graduates short of economic demand by 2030. We need a new four-year university and we need it now.

Chula Vista has taken this "university challenge" seriously for decades. In preparation for a new four-year university, the city has assembled and now owns more than 383 acres of undeveloped land located midway between the cities of San Diego and Tijuana for a university and innovation district. A college in this unique location would offer a tremendous opportunity to create a binational, bicultural campus to educate students on conducting business, research and studies on issues experienced on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. This educational component is critically needed to support the growth of our export-focused companies, address environmental concerns that do not stop

CHULA VISTA IS BEST CHOICE FOR
NEXT FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

at a binational border and tackle public policy issues in this ever-changing world.

Encouragingly, the traditional barriers to building this new university are now in the rear-view mirror. Chula Vista completed full entitlements of the university land in No-

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ember 2018, including a master plan for the site and an environmental impact report — the site is truly shovel-ready without any impediments to development. To further support this effort, the city of Chula Vista and HomeFed Development Corp., the landowner of adjacent University Villages 9 and 10, are exploring a public-private partnership to develop the university site with a flexible overlay zone.

The city has created a balanced plan for developing the university site that proposes enterprise development opportunities to significantly reduce the financial burden the state would typically be forced to bear, further proving feasibility and ongoing sustainability of the future campus. The city's and HomeFed's combined entitlements now boast a collective offering of over 1,000 acres, over 9,000 housing units and 11.5 million

square feet of commercial space for the university-innovation district and surrounding University Villages. This partnership would allow for expedited development, greater access to capital, rapid response to university users and land transfers which would allow the future university user the flexibility to enjoy adjacency to State Route 125 for increased access and visibility.

Earlier this month, consultants working with the California State University's chancellor's office met with local stakeholders to conduct an outreach event as they research the need for a potential CSU in Chula Vista, Concord, Palm Desert, San Mateo and Stockton. At the event, stakeholders shared information in small group discussions about local education initiatives, the regional economy, present and emerging industries, workforce talent and needs, and the university and innovation district's unique siting and entitlement attributes.

The San Diego region's and California's economic futures both look brighter, more prosperous and sustainable with a four-year university in South County. We have the will, the need and distinct opportunities to ensure the university is an economic engine for the entire region.

Gompper Graves is president and CEO of the South County Economic Development Council.



U-T FILE PHOTO

California State University San Marcos is a public university founded in 1989 as the 20th campus of the CSU system. Chula Vista is working to get its own campus.