

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

Meeting Date: 10/15/07		Item Number: <u>J-2</u>	
AGENDA ITEM: A Joint Item with the Redevelopment Agency to Discuss and Comment on the Proposed Business Resource Center.			
Contact Person/Dept.: Kriss Casanova/ CDD		Phone Number: (310) 253-5769	
Fiscal Impact: Yes ☒ No ☐		General Fund: Yes ☒ No ☐	
Public Hearing: ☐		Action Item: ☒ Attachments: ☒	
Public Notification: Master Broker List (9/17/07). Culver City Chamber of Commerce (9/18/07). Master Notification List (10/10/07).			
Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld (10/09/07)		City Manager/Executive Director Approval: Jerry Fulwood (10/10/07)	
Fiscal Impact Review: Marlee Chang (by N. Kimball) (10/10/07)			

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the City Council (the "Council") and the Redevelopment Agency (the "Agency") review and provide input on the proposed Business Resource Center.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION:

At the June Agency budget session, staff introduced the concept of the Business Resource Center ("BRC") as part of the proposed Economic Development '07-08 work program. The project was described as a one-stop permit and information center for new and expanding businesses. As noted during the budget session, starting or expanding a business can be a challenging experience, as the rules, procedures, and policies may seem overwhelming.

The BRC is proposed to be a primary resource available to businesses, developers, real estate professionals, and property owners to assist with the City entitlement/permitting process. The BRC would facilitate business operations and work with businesses to provide information on obtaining permits, licenses, and approvals necessary to conduct business in Culver City. Thus, the BRC would promote economic development by helping businesses open or expand.

The proposed BRC is divided into four components: the Business Assistance Team, Business Info and Publications, Biz Connection, and the Business Hotline. Information will be made available to the business community to help aid them in decision-making regarding development and expansion. The result of this pre-planning will help eliminate future problems before they arise.

In June 2001, Culver City introduced permit streamlining. The revised process has been a success. The timeframe for plan check has been reduced to a five-day turn-

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

around for most building permits. Additionally, in the last year, business tax certificates now include Building & Safety and Fire Prevention sign off to help ensure compliance with City codes. The BRC would complement these efforts.

The concept of the BRC was introduced to the Economic Development Subcommittee, the Culver City Chamber of Commerce, and the broker community. Comments from them have been incorporated and feedback has been positive.

Goals & Objectives

Creation of the BRC is consistent with the goals and objectives of the General Plan Land Use Element¹. The proposed goals of the BRC are:

- Actively promote and preserve the economic strength of the City to ensure that Culver City remains competitive and the preferred location for new, existing and expanding businesses and organizations.
- Apply staff time in the most efficient manner by providing readily available permit and development information to assist the business community, brokers and prospective clients.
- Promote the City's efforts to streamline and make more understandable the business and permit process.
- Coordinate City divisions to act as a liaison to help businesses quickly become operational, thereby saving time, creating significant cost savings, and accelerate collection of sales taxes.
- Assist businesses locating to or looking to locate to Culver City with the site selection process, plan review and permitting process.
- Effectively move project plans through the interdepartmental review and approval process.

THE BUSINESS RESOURCE CENTER

¹ Culver City General Plan Land Use Element:

- Encourage new business opportunities that expand Culver City's economic base and serve the needs of the City's residential and business community.
- Revitalize the physical character and economic well-being of the City's commercial corridors.
- Encourage revitalization of commercial corridors in the City through new development and renovation of existing structures with incentives, which address development standards and the project approval process.
- Allow the development of new regional commercial centers that contribute to the economic health of the City.
- Foster the growth of businesses that increase City revenues by promoting attractive, quality retail establishments that serve neighborhood, community and regional markets.

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

Access to the BRC would be available in person at City Hall, as well as through the City's new Business Web Page and the Business Hotline. It will be possible to "enter" the BRC on the first floor when obtaining a business tax certificate, the second floor when approaching the Building & Safety or Planning Divisions, and the third floor when contacting redevelopment and economic development staff. In appropriate areas, City Hall would be signed with BRC signage alerting business owners, contractors and architects to contact the BRC for assistance as they walk in the door. BRC information and publications would also be available. Promotions for the BRC would also be visible on the City's Business Web Page, where it would be possible to access a questionnaire, obtain information and contact BRC staff.

Business Assistance Team

A staff team approach would be created utilizing staff from various City Departments to convey permit and development information to businesses. The Business Assistance Team (the "Team") would ensure that businesses receive the assistance they need to make their enterprise a success by creating a 'one-stop' shop for agencies and services.

The core Team would be comprised of division designees from the following City divisions: Planning, Building & Safety, Fire Prevention, Redevelopment, Economic Development, Treasury, Code Enforcement, and Public Works. For special circumstances, staff from other disciplinary areas may also be asked to join the Team.

Business Info & Publications

To make the process of opening a business in Culver City as straightforward as possible, the BRC is designed to help businesses understand the City's regulations. The following information would be available to help businesses understand and navigate through the City standards applicable to their business. Prototypes of informational materials are attached for reference:

- ***Quick Guide to Opening a Business in Culver City (Attachment No. 1)*** The guide provides a quick directory to the different City Divisions and the permits or procedures needed to open or grow a business in Culver City. The directory includes a brief summary, phone numbers, the location of the different City divisions and other agencies that a new business may need to contact.
- ***Frequently Asked Questions (Attachment No. 2)*** - This document provides answers to common business questions received from businesses considering relocating to or expanding in Culver City. Such questions relate to economic development incentives, business licensing, zoning, and building requirements.

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

- **Flowchart (Attachment No. 3)** - This flowchart helps familiarize businesses with the City's regulatory process.
- **Forms and Applications (Attachment No. 4)** – City forms and applications would be made available in one central location and on the web (where possible).
- **Construction Permitting Guidelines (Attachment No. 5)** – This document, as well as approximately 25 others that have already been created by the Building & Safety Division, will be promoted by the BRC. This referenced document geared towards businesses provides construction permitting guidelines for businesses moving into existing buildings.
- **Advertising (Attachment No. 6)** – Signs and flyers promoting the services of the BRC would be made available to the public on the first, second, and third floor of City Hall. Promotions of the BRC would be highly visible on the City's new Business Web Page. Additionally, staff will work with the Culver City Chamber of Commerce to send an email blast to their members announcing the launch of the BRC and make information available at the Chamber.
- **Decision Trees** - These question forms will help determine which requirements are appropriate for certain types of businesses.

Biz Connection

BizConnection is a web-based tool designed to help businesses succeed in Culver City. The website features 24-hour access for businesses by providing them with an efficient web interface that will reach the Business Assistance Team online during City Hall business hours. Businesses will have immediate access to staff, and the City will be able to reply and address issues in a timely manner.

- **Business Web Page (Attachment No. 7)** - The new Business Web Page will provide information on business resources and assistance in Culver City. This site will connect to information that is needed to help streamline various areas, including permits, zoning, financing, etc.
- **Business Assistance Request Form (Attachment No. 8)** - A customized Business Assistance Request Form has been created to help staff better understand business' goals and immediate needs, as well as concerns, suggestions or questions relative to the process or a project. The public would also have access to an on-line questionnaire that will identify types of assistance needed for new or existing businesses.

The form will also include a site selection section which will address land

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

specifications and needs. If this portion of the form is filled out, then an Economic Development representative will respond to assist businesses searching for new or additional site(s).

It is expected that this web function will be used in conjunction with the City's Citizen Request Management system.

Business Hotline

For those who want to start a business but don't know where to start or need answers quickly, the Business Hotline (310-253-5765) is available to help. The Business Hotline, similar to the Planning Hotline, will provide rapid help to existing and prospective businesses requiring immediate information or assistance. To establish a presence similar to the public counter, the BRC will provide a phone on the 2nd floor that can be used to call the Business Hotline or other City divisions. Staff will monitor calls by inputting them into the tracking system, via the business assistance request form. Redevelopment support staff will assist in this process.

PROCESS

When an interested company contacts economic development staff through the Business Hotline, the Business Web Page or in person, economic development staff will determine if such requests are minor or major. Minor requests refer to basic code questions, while major requests refer to division-head decision making or an interdivisional or interdepartmental coordinated response. Through the Team, rapid responses for questions and concerns will be available, minimizing trips to City Hall. The request form database will track all inquiries for staff follow-up. This process should help make it much easier to do business in Culver City.

Minor Requests

For basic inquiries made on-line, applicants will be asked to select the appropriate division that pertains to the request. For inquiries made in person, over the phone, or for those who there are unsure about their request, economic development staff will determine the responsible division. Once a request is made it will be emailed directly to the appropriate division designee, as well as an economic development representative who will monitor requests. For minor requests, team representatives will be responsible for responding within three business working days. Such questions may involve: outdoor dining requirements, business licenses, zoning, plan check status, parking standards, signage and redevelopment incentives.

Major Requests

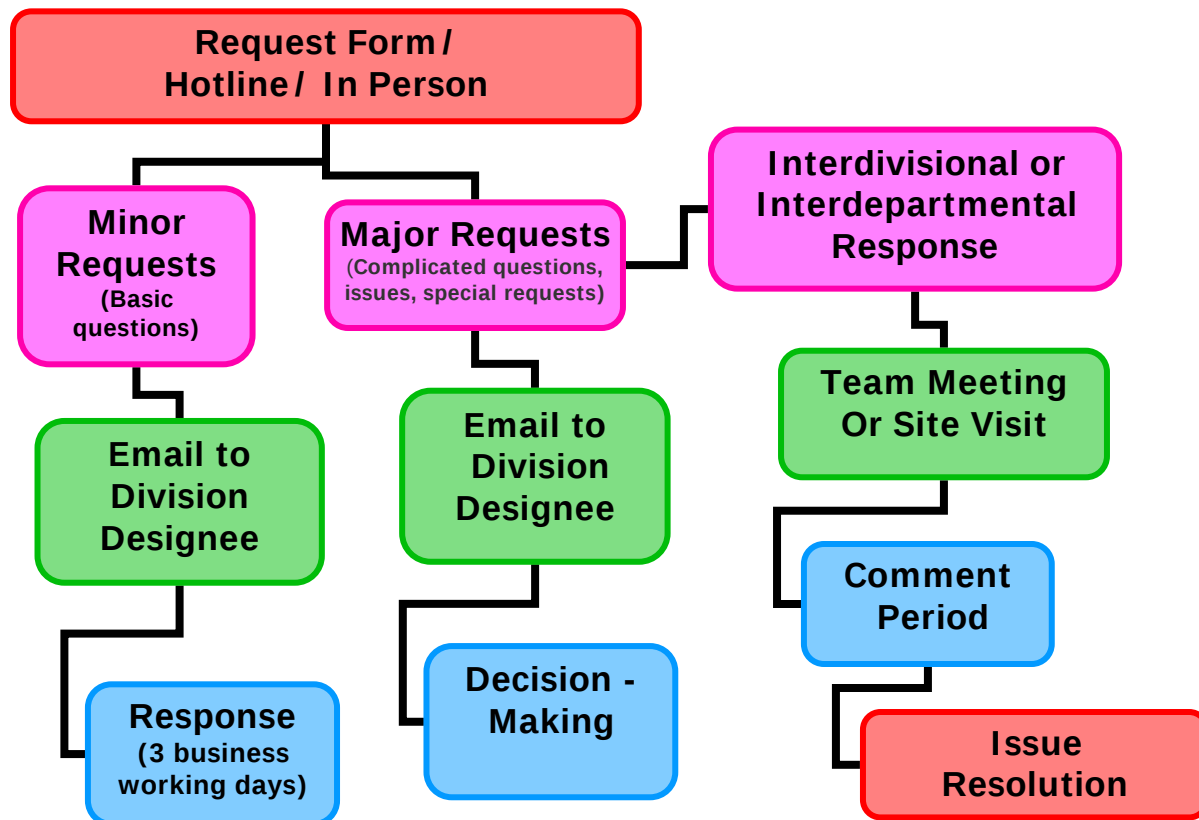
For more complicated questions, special requests, or interdepartmental items, inquiries will be emailed to division designees who will be responsible for working with division heads as necessary. The staff designee will be responsible for

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

notifying their division of special requests, unique circumstances and any problems or issues involving the division.

Major requests may require a Team site visit or meeting for discussion and issue resolution. It is expected that there would be no more than five meetings or visits a month.

- **Team Site Visit** - Some businesses may need site specific answers when opening a new business. When necessary, the appropriate Team members may be asked to assemble at the site to inform prospective business operators of any applicable City requirements. For example, if an existing restaurant space was on the market, prospective restaurant operators may have concerns about ADA compliance, alcohol permits, and/or fire requirements. By assembling members of the Team together at the site, the Team can highlight city requirements that may need to be addressed during the permit review process.



City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

- **Team Meeting** - For unique businesses, the Team may be asked to meet with applicants to discuss permitting, licensing or other regulatory issues. At one meeting, many questions can be answered and several suggestions made which make it beneficial in meeting the client's needs and timeline. These meetings may or may not include the applicant.

Weekly Correspondence

Most information received through the BRC will be inputted into a weekly email distributed to the Team. The email will summarize business activity for the week, including property that has gone on the market, new tenants that have signed leases, interested businesses wanting to come to Culver City, businesses that have submitted for plan check, outstanding issues, and city responses. The purpose of the email is to make the Team aware of upcoming projects that may be of interest and to keep all members involved in what's going on in the business community. The number of inquiries and outcomes will be documented in the Community Development Department's Weekly Update.

FISCAL ANALYSIS:

The proposed BRC encourages business development that will help to promote the economic strength of the City. The BRC keeps Culver City competitive and a preferred location for new, existing and expanding businesses and organizations.

The BRC will also reduce staff time by coordinating the work of various city divisions and may create savings for businesses by acting as a liaison to help businesses quickly solve problems and become operational. This effort will also assist in streamlining the operational process that will ultimately increase the efficiency of the City's operation.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1) Quick Guide to Opening a Business in Culver City
- 2) Frequently Asked Questions
- 3) Flowchart
- 4) Forms and Applications
- 5) Construction Permitting Guidelines
- 6) Advertising - Business Resource Center
- 7) Business Web Page
- 8) Business Assistance Request Form

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

MOTION:

That the City Council and Redevelopment Agency:

Discuss and provide comment on the proposed Business Resource Center.