

## TASK FORCE EXPLORES BUILDING ON CONVENTION CENTER SUCCESS

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One of the most visible signs of San Diego's success as a leading visitor destination is the award-winning San Diego Convention Center sitting majestically along downtown's waterfront. Since the state-of-the-art convention facility opened in 1989, it has evolved into one of the region's most powerful economic engines, supporting more than 12,000 jobs countywide and returning \$331 million to San Diego taxpayers in the form of sales and hotel room tax.

Even in lean times, the convention center has proven itself to be a wise taxpayer investment. Last fiscal year, 67 conventions were held that contributed \$1.8 billion in economic impact to the local economy and a record \$30 million in tax revenue.

The hundreds of thousands of convention visitors from around the world drawn to the building annually are vital to the local economy. The dollars they spend stay here long after they go home and filter into our communities improving the quality of life for all residents. The tax revenues are used to fund police and fire protection to keep San Diegans safe; pay

for the upkeep of libraries and museums for locals and visitors to enrich their lives; and maintain our beautiful parks and beaches enjoyed by everyone.

Mayor Sanders has called the convention center the "goose that lays the golden eggs" because of the enormous taxpayer benefits it delivers and for its resiliency in a tough economy. For every one dollar the city has invested in the convention center in fiscal year 2008, it has returned \$2.36 in tax revenues back to the city. But, like the classic fable, if we don't continue to invest in our world-class facility, and the valuable tax revenues and jobs it generates (the golden eggs), our fiscal and economic vitality may suffer into the next decade.

Our convention center has surpassed all expectations and demand has far exceeded our current capacity. Since the voter approved expansion opened in 2001, "lack of available space" is the number one reason conventions cannot bring their business to our city. Last year millions of convention business was turned away because we are "sold out" and do not have the space to capture more business and tax revenues for the city. At the same time, some of the high-

est tax and revenue generating conventions have already outgrown the building while others have reached capacity.

Mayor Sanders has charged the Citizen Task Force on the Convention Center Project with doing the essential due diligence to help decide how we should chart our future role in the convention and meeting industry. There is no doubt that our convention center has helped make San Diego a world-class destination, helped transform our downtown and provided thousands of jobs and economic benefits ensuring a solid foundation for San Diego's economic health.

In charging the task force with engaging the public and stakeholders on this important issue, the mayor has helped start a critical civic conversation on how this regional asset can continue to drive tax revenues and jobs that help all San Diegans into the next decade.

Among the group's duties:

- Review and evaluate the feasibility of an expansion, related developments or enhancements, and the impact on generating new jobs.
- Identify and evaluate various financing options for an expansion that relies mainly on revenues generated by the

convention center and/or related developments or enhancements.

- Identify key issues related to public access, resource conservation and waterfront enhancement.
- Encourage public comment on the project by holding meetings at locations and times accessible to the public.
- Present a final set of findings and recommendations to Mayor Sanders no later than September 2009.

The mayor's leadership on this topic should be commended. There's too much at stake for San Diego not to thoroughly examine this important issue and appropriate steps to retain convention market share that is critical to the region's long-term economic future.

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*An advertorial submitted by the Mayor's Citizen Task Force on the Convention Center Project. Cheryl D. Kendrick, immediate past-chair of the board of the Convention Center Corporation, and Stephen Cushman, chair of the Unified Port of San Diego, are co-chairing the Mayor's Citizen Task Force on the Convention Center Project. For the next public meeting date, please visit [conventioncentertaskforce.org](http://conventioncentertaskforce.org).*