

State of Stanislaus County Address
2005

2005 will bring dynamic change to Stanislaus County. As a regional community we choose to step up and embrace this change and shape our county into the forward thinking, well-planned, vibrant and healthy place that we would all like it to be. The choice is ours, and we, this Board of Supervisors, are set to lead the way as partners with our city, state and federally elected colleagues.

Though our CEO and a majority of our Board members are new, or relatively new, we are balanced by an experienced staff and two Board members of long tenure and vast experience. New ideas, new energy and many years of experience will result in the leadership needed for this new time.

This County can expect this Board to be engaged and receptive to the needs and opinions of its citizens, and when we disagree among ourselves we will do so with respect and dignity. Additionally we want to be known as a hard-working Board that achieves its stated goals. As Tom Brokaw once said of the value of accomplishment in his home community, **“In South Dakota, you were always measured by what you accomplished. You couldn’t talk your way into standing in the community, you had to earn it.”** We want to be judged by that standard.

As elected officials we are often asked by citizens, usually young people, “I live in Modesto, why aren’t there sidewalks and streetlights in my neighborhood?” The unhappy answer to them is that they live in a “County Island”, Modesto suffers with twenty-three such islands and there are more in other county cities.

These pockets were created, most of them many years ago, by allowing areas of land to annex into the city around the “island”, usually because the people living in the island, at the time, didn’t have the money or didn’t want to spend the money to install the improvements required by City standards. Now in 2005, measures are in place to prohibit this from happening again, but we are still faced with the challenge of funding the improvements to bring these neighborhoods’ infrastructures to current City standards.

One such “County Island” made tremendous progress in 2004, the Robertson Road neighborhood. The Board of Supervisors and the Modesto City Council set aside historical differences and, using federal community development dollars, will install much-needed sanitary sewers this Spring in this very deserving area.

While this specific solution was a one-time agreement only, the Board and Council are hopeful that this process of collaboration will be a template for success to finding solutions and funding to improve other “County Islands”.

The Stanislaus County Sheriff and our City Police Chiefs are locked in a desperate battle against crime here in the Central Valley. Long known as a methamphetamine-producing hotbed, our region is also under attack by organized criminal street gangs. Early last year it was estimated that there might be as many as ten thousand gang members in Stanislaus County. Additional funding was allocated and a coordinated plan of attack has been launched by the sheriff and police departments, the district attorney’s office and the probation department. This year we will be working toward a long-term solution to adequately fund these departments to sustain the assault

on these criminal activities. As we work, we will be mindful that having more criminals behind bars will require more jail, juvenile hall and coroner space.

In 2002 Stanislaus County had 62 infant deaths. Of the thirty-eight counties having a minimum of one thousand births per year, only three counties had a higher infant mortality rate than ours. This is simply unacceptable. When asked why our babies are experiencing this terrible tragedy, both health and law enforcement officials point to the insidious influence of methamphetamines. Yet one more reason to redouble our efforts to drive the criminals involved with these drugs out of our County.

Commendations are in order for the District Attorney and his hard working staff in the successful conviction won in the Peterson case. County officials are hopeful and working hard in support of several bills working through the state legislature that would reimburse Stanislaus County for investigation and trial expenses incurred during this ultra-high-profile case. Other counties' high-profile media cases have had costs covered by the State. This county should not be treated any differently.

Our County Health Services Agency continues to struggle with a huge need for medical services and dismal and inadequate funding sources. This year a lot of effort will go into designing and rebuilding a system that will provide maximum benefit to those in need of health care within the revenue reality we find ourselves.

One area that is being explored, as a partial solution, is a thorough evaluation of the land and property the County owns and controls. Conversion of assets in disparate areas to centrally located, modern facilities could bring positive economy to delivering County health care.

The voters of California passed Proposition 63 this past November. Ultimately, it will add \$6-8 million, per year, to the budget of the Behavioral Health and Recovery Services department. This increase is welcome and much appreciated, but in reality will just replace the funding that this department has lost to the State's financial problems in the last few years. BHRS staff has been exemplary in dealing with financial difficulty and cutting expenses, and we are looking forward to good things from them as they carefully plan the use of these new funds.

Congressmen Cardoza and Radanovich were especially helpful this past year in intervening on behalf of our County's Psychiatric Hospital. Medicare funding was seriously at risk due to new legislation, but with their leadership it looks as if these funds are secure for the future.

The Community Services Agency fiscally our largest department, has not only been creative in providing their services through difficult budget times, but has become a leader statewide in design and implementation of the C4 software program. We want to recognize this great example of leadership.

We are in a new era of cooperation between city and county governments. In 2004 the Board met with the City Councils of Newman and Ceres. We expect to continue these joint meetings with city councils in all our cities as often as possible. Monthly meetings between two Board members and three of the Modesto City Council members have been fruitful and productive and will continue.

The Great Central Valley of California has long been projected to experience dramatic population growth. For many years we have ignored these projections. Instead of planning what we want our County to ultimately develop into, we have engaged in a public growth/no-growth charade, while continuing to grow unplanned and improperly

financed and at unprecedented rates. Not only have we been caught short of basic transportation, sewer, water and storm drain needs, but also, we've ended up with disjointed neighborhoods that lack the amenities and continuity other communities in Northern California enjoy.

This past fall our County hosted seventeen elected officials from our sister county of Mayenne, France. At their request we visited a world-renowned French/American winery in Napa Valley, Opus One. On a rooftop observation deck a winery official pointed out to our French guests that if they returned to this spot in thirty years the view would still be of green, wooded hills and lush vineyards.

Napa County had recognized its region was unique in wine grape growing abilities and has enacted land use policies to insure that when development takes place in that valley, it will not diminish the agricultural capabilities.

It's time for Stanislaus County to do something similar. Agriculture is our number-one economic sector. All of us recognize that there will be a housing market demand capable of covering our entire county. But none of us want this, including many of my good friends in the development industry. Last month's Kiplinger newsletter noted that for the second year in a row, 200,000 new dwelling units had been built statewide, yet for the second year in a row the market demand was for 240,000 dwelling units.

As a County, we need to ask each of the nine cities to thoughtfully project what their ultimate sphere of influence would be, and together with the Board determine the length of our planning timeline. All of the unincorporated housing communities in the County would need to commit to incorporation or annex themselves into adjoining cities in the same time period, if they want to continue housing growth within their boundaries. With these ultimate city boundaries in place, the County could firmly commit to no longer allowing housing development outside of cities. The voters of this County could ratify this plan, and if there was ever a need to change the plan, it could only be done by a vote of the people.

Once clearly determined growth boundaries have been established, families involved in agriculture could plan long-range, knowing that housing development would no longer encroach on their livelihoods. Regionally, we could project the increasing demand for transportation and other infrastructure systems and properly fund the building of these systems through the fees collected from new development.

Much has been said about economic development. As was previously stated, keeping the \$4.5 billion economic engine of our agriculture sector is Job One, but for too long we have kept the majority of our eggs in that basket and have not created fertile environments to nurture additional sectors. This County's inventory of infrastructured and entitled business parkland is critically low. We are not able to present adequate options to companies interested in expanding their operations here or to those considering a move into the area.

This past year has marked significant progress toward diversifying and expanding our jobs base. Ten large private employers here in our County have funded and partnered with the Alliance, Stanislaus County, Modesto, Ceres and Turlock in an application for a State Enterprise Zone. Our county is the only one in the Central Valley to not already have one of these zones. The benefits for the employers that are located in and hire employees from these zones are significant, and we are eagerly awaiting word from the

Governor's office on the status of our application. The inter-agency cooperation exhibited in the very short application time was remarkable and commendable.

Keystone Business Park opened this year in Patterson and interest has been strong with several tenants already in place. The I-5 corridor will play a significant role in the economic well being of Stanislaus County, which owns more than 3500 acres on both the east and west sides of I-5 at the Fink Road interchange.

We will start soon on an area master plan to include a prudent land reserve for the land fill, a mitigation plan and land preserve for the Kit Fox and other endangered species, a dual-runway airport plan at the recently transferred Crows Landing Naval Air Station, and ultimately many hundreds of acres of business park land. With this Master Plan we can seek proposals from private sector Master Developers to partner with the County in the development of these properties.

The Board of Supervisors has long recognized the potential for job creation in the Salida area. The 2000 Salida Community Plan is currently under review and it is agreed that no development will take place in this area until it is clearly known how the entire area will be fully infrastructured, funded and financed. Wisely, the people of Salida have made clear that they want their area to be financially self sustaining and ultimately all development decisions will need to take into account best possible design and use standards.

Vital to any economic development effort is an efficient road system for moving goods and services. There is much to be done for our roads in Stanislaus County. East/west thoroughfares and enhanced intersections with Highway 99 are decades behind the population growth. StanCOG, the agency that has been tasked with the planning and oversight of Stanislaus County road funding, is being rebuilt from the top down. The policy board, made up of representatives from all of the cities and the county, is working together to hire a new CEO who has the experience necessary to take our transportation system to the next level.

Currently, funding for road projects is very difficult. The State's budget failures have had adverse impacts on our County's road projects and funding has been suspended. Federally, Congress has been wrangling on a new Transportation Bill for several years, and we have no assurances that a Bill will be passed. Congressmen Radanovich and Cardoza have been extremely encouraging and helpful as we have sought funding for StanCOG's number-one priority, SR132, and number-two priority SR219. They have pledged more than \$20 million to these two projects, if and when a Transportation Bill is enacted. Additionally, the recently approved spending bill included money to pay for a Project Study Report (PSR) for the SR 132/99 interchange. These studies are required by Cal Trans before a project can start construction, and they should be completed and approved within 18 months. Added to this, two privately funded PSRs are currently underway for the SR219/99 and Hammett Rd/99 interchanges. So, in 18 months' time, we will have three State-approved PSRs for road projects ready to be constructed -- the first time this has ever happened in Stanislaus County.

Currently there are nineteen counties in the State that are considered self-help counties, counties that have taxed themselves to pay for road projects. State and federal officials, view these counties favorably and preferentially when funding road projects. Stanislaus is not a self-help county, but serious study and evaluation regarding the viability of a half-cent sales tax increase for transportation is taking place at the Alliance

and the Chambers of Commerce. StanCOG will soon be evaluating the results of these studies and surveys and could possibly make a recommendation to our cities and the Board of Supervisors in the first half of this New Year.

In closing, we want to emphasize that we are in a time of tremendous change. We recognize that with change comes opportunity for improvement, both for our County and our nine cities. As Stanislaus County prospers we expect all of our local governments to improve. As John F. Kennedy once said, “ **a rising tide raises all boats.**”

Thank you.