

Dellums' plan: 10,000 new jobs in five years

BY MAVIS SCANLON
EAST BAY BUSINESS TIMES

Mayor Ron Dellums at his second economic summit on May 2 will present the economic development strategy for Oakland that was forged over the last year by the Oakland Partnership.

Dellums' goals are to bring 10,000 new jobs to Oakland in the next five years, increase investment in the city and give Oakland residents better access to needed jobs. The priorities, the strategies and the many specific initiatives Dellums and others will outline at the summit cover four key sectors: international trade and logistics, health care (including life sciences), green technology and creative arts, and range from addressing infrastructure issues that constrain growth at the Port of Oakland to branding and marketing Oakland as an international gateway and from expanding a biotech training program at Laney College to creating a multipurpose art and creative business development center.

To meet his job-creation and other goals, Dellums wanted to bring together a diverse group from business, government, education and the private sector. Dellums has led the Oakland Partnership effort, but the Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce took the lead in the day-to-day organization and facilitation of the partnership and the industry clusters that emerged to develop strategies and initiatives in the four sectors.

"One of the first fruits of the cluster process has been getting more of the right



File photo by Stephanie Seemst | East Bay Business Times

Mayor Ron Dellums' economic plan goals include more jobs and increasing investment in Oakland.

care cluster include streamlining the planning and entitlements process within CEDA to make it easier for hospitals that need to rebuild to meet state seismic retrofit rules and broadening access to health care job training for residents (to date 99 graduates have gone through this training).

Each cluster group developed between 6 and 12 specific action initiatives, some of which already are being implemented and many more of which will be implemented over the next two to three years. Every six months going forward the groups will assess progress.

As the cluster groups developed initiatives, the city made parallel efforts to improve its economic and business climate, Lindheim said, specifically in

updating certain '60s-era zoning regulations and hammering out an industrial land-use policy.

The land-use policy and zoning updates "were absolutely critical issues," Lindheim said, "making it clear from a land-use perspective where people could invest and where existing businesses could reinvest without fear of being taken over by residential development."

As the Oakland Partnership process moves forward, its hurdles are actually higher with the sagging economy, rising unemployment and high numbers of foreclosures in the city. After Oakland's unemployment rate hovered between 10 percent and 8 percent from 2002 to 2005, Oakland in 2006 and 2007 succeeded in driving it down to 6.9 percent. As of March, it had ticked back up to 8.4 percent, with approximately 16,600 people out of work that month, according to monthly labor force data from the state.

That does not mean Oakland should not continue a vigorous effort to improve economic development, said Scott Peterson, public policy director of the Oakland chamber.

Being proactive and continuing to implement strong programs can not only help to ameliorate suffering that might occur as a result of an economic downturn, Peterson said, but by taking action now, the city will be ready when the economy rebounds. "But if we sit around and wait until the economy rebounds it'll be too late."