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**Turning Businesspeople into Environmentalists:  
The Sierra Business Council**

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Figure 1. Map of the Sierra



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# **Turning Businesspeople into Environmentalists: The Sierra Business Council**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Origins**

Since 1970 the Sierra Nevada has gone through significant economic and social change as the population of this vast 18-county region has more than doubled, traditional industries in timber and natural extraction have declined, and a major tourist industry has developed. A new population from the cities has moved in in great numbers to enjoy the natural beauty and the rural life style. Low income and minority populations have been drawn to the region by jobs in the tourist industry. Not surprisingly these changes have led to political conflict among the largely Republican, property-rights oriented long term residents looking for economic development and the new arrivals who tend to be more concerned about the environment.

In this context in 1994, environmentalist Lucy Blake conceived of the Sierra Business Council to address these conflicts and to help assure the sustainability of the Sierra. She developed a novel strategy, to enlist businesspeople and help them to see how the quality of the natural environment was integral to their economic success and then to conduct a variety of projects, working collaboratively with local officials and stakeholders. Each project was designed to be consistent with SBC's graphic representation of sustainability as a Venn diagram with intersecting circles representing natural, social, and financial capital. Sustainability meant that all activities should ideally improve all three forms of capital, or at the least not damage one for the sake of another. The language was designed to speak to business, reframe the conflicts, and help people to move beyond them. The projects were designed to show how this can be done.

### **Reasons for Success**

We believe that the reasons for SBC's considerable success can be attributed to six interrelated strategies. First, the focus on business and changing the minds of businesspeople was crucial. Businesspeople were the respected civic leaders and the ones who, more than anyone else, could create change in public attitudes and practical action. While there were many who already understood the importance of the environment to their work, others needed to be convinced by businesspeople rather than by environmental groups or new residents. They needed to hear from those who faced the same issues they did. Second Blake's community organizing and political campaigning skills were crucial. This was a campaign, and there were many who were unorganized and did not at the outset have a sense of what actions they could or should pursue. Third the projects were built on many one-on-one conversations with civic leaders, including

many who were not inclined originally to be supportive. SBC really listened. This labor-intensive effort built trust and understanding that was essential to moving forward. Fourth they consciously built intellectual capital to supplement this personal and political effort. The staff prepared high quality, easily accessible research reports, along with the *Wealth Index*, which they used as a basis for shared understanding in the region and for specific action projects. This research gave SBC credibility as a neutral broker even though the reports themselves were each designed to make an argument. It was a transparent argument however based on quality data. Fifth SBC provided services of many kinds to local communities and became an important resource for them. Last and perhaps most importantly they built collaborative civic leaderships and networks through the Sierra Leadership Seminar and the annual conferences.

## **Projects**

SBC began with research and dissemination of ideas. Their first project was the *Sierra Nevada Wealth Index*, which provided and explained interesting and novel indicators on each of the types of capital in the Sierra. The *Index* has been widely read and used, and it created demand for parallel indexes for smaller regions. It is going into its third edition in 2004. The second was *Planning for Prosperity*, a document laying out simply framed land use planning principles for civic leaders, supported by pithy examples from around the country. This again has been readable and widely used. It won the prestigious Daniel Burnham Award from the American Planning Association.

The next project, Placer Legacy, built in part on this document. SBC staff worked quietly and collaboratively with Placer County elected officials and staff to create a science-based program for protecting habitat and open space and simultaneously to get the political support for it. This effort has meant that the planning department now has a major focus on these issues, and the county is raising money to buy land. SBC continues to partner with them in implementing this project. SBC also began a popular program in Town Planning Services, offering expert assistance, community organizing and facilitation to towns in the region that were dealing with growth issues. The Working Landscapes program has educated farmers and ranchers in how to sell conservation easements while they continue to work their land. It has thus far preserved over 25,000 acres of land from development. SBC staff worked for five years to set up Sierra Nevada Conservancy and in 2004 the effort came to fruition when a state agency was established to allow substantial funding to go into preserving and restoring Sierra lands. In the Inyo County Forum SBC assisted the county with organizing and facilitating visioning effort to shape their General Plan. SBC's latest recent research document, *Investing for Prosperity*, lays out how to do environmentally and socially responsible economic development, again offering success stories from around the country to support the principles it lays out. SBC has also over the years devoted a significant effort to training Sierra civic leaders from many walks of life in collaborative methods for dialogue, problem solving and conflict resolutions. Over 170 graduates of their Sierra Leadership Seminar have built a network among themselves and with SBC. They report that the Seminar built their confidence, taught them useful skills, and helped them understand

others' experiences. These graduates stay in touch with SBC and provide assistance on projects like the Inyo County Forum. Finally since 1996 SBC has hosted an increasingly popular annual conference that brings hundreds of leaders together from the entire region to learn from experts about problems they share and to network with one another to help solve their own problems.

The one major project that was unsuccessful was an effort in Nevada County to do something similar to Placer Legacy. The election of conservation-minded supervisors made it appear that this would be an opportunity to apply the Legacy model of habitat and open space conservation. Unfortunately SBC did not follow some of the key practices used in Placer County, including doing groundwork in many one-on-one conversations and making sure to have an inclusive stakeholder committee to plan the process and develop the plan. Instead interests were left out, and key local leaders saw SBC as an outsider imposing ideas on the county. The result was more polarization, no Nevada Legacy, an election loss by conservation supervisors, and a loss of credibility for SBC. The organization has however learned a good deal from this, particularly that every project has to be designed uniquely for the context and situation.

## **Outcomes**

There are many outcomes to show. SBC has built intellectual capital for the region with their research documents. It has helped towns find alternatives to declining industry. It has built social capital and created a cadre of collaborative leaders through the Leadership Seminar. It created new networks of players who are working together for the first time. At the same time it has produced concrete outcomes like thousands of acres of habitat restored and preserved, new guidelines for community design which are being applied in Sierra towns, and the Sierra Nevada conservancy to support protection of the environment. Its unique combination of reliance on research, organizing, facilitation and advocacy has worked well for the most part, though it has involved walking a careful line among these usually contradictory activities. SBC has been adaptive, learning as they go and continuing to develop new projects to fit the needs and opportunities in the region.



**TABLE 2. OUTCOMES OF SBC PROJECTS**

<b>PROJECT</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
<b>Wealth Indexes</b>	Framed sustainability concept. Focused attention on issues. Provided a well used data source. Provided a basis for other projects, Increased SBC visibility in the region.
<i>Planning For Prosperity</i>	Provided a framework for SBC’s and others’ work toward sustainable land use. Reference manual used by planners. Audit resulted in changed practices. Won Daniel Burnham Award from American Planning Association.
<b>Placer Legacy</b>	Identified valuable habitat and conservation areas. Introduced science into the decision making processes. Placer County allocated staff resources to this. Adopted by Supervisors as official policy County set aside \$11 million for land acquisition. 5,000 acres protected by mid 2004. Won Governor’s Award on Economy and the Environment.
<b>Natural Heritage 2020</b>	Nevada County Resources Report, used for planning. Conservation-minded supervisors lost election. Increased division and polarization around conservation. SBC learned value of groundwork and development of projects collaboratively with all stakeholders.
<b>Sierra Leadership Seminar</b>	170 graduates with collaborative leadership skills. Graduates instigated new projects and supported SBC work. A network of civic leaders throughout the Sierra with sustainability perspective.
<b>Town Planning</b>	Improved planning practices in many communities. Local planning based on better information. Community Design Manual for wide use. Best Practices manual for local use in planning. Implementation of June Lake Design Guidelines. Funding for Truckee rail yard and other projects. Good will and name recognition for SBC.
<b>Working Landscapes</b>	Education of ranchers and farmers about conservation opportunities and ways to protect their farms. Conservations easements by 2004 of 25,000 acres. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy.
<b>Inyo 2020 Forum</b>	Indicators document for Inyo county as basis for visioning. Sustainability principles adopted in County General Plan.
<b>Investing for Prosperity</b>	Provided framework for future SBC work. Too early to assess outcomes.
<b>Annual Conference</b>	Educated hundreds of participants about Sierra issues. Team action projects being implemented Built networks among civic leaders.
<b>Overall Outcomes</b>	Created discourse about sustainability among civic leaders. Created new and well used information resources. Spread understanding and acceptance of sustainable practices. Built stakeholder database for use in ongoing projects. Built civic capacity. Created greater sense of region across the Sierra.

## **Organization and Structure**

SBC is largely staff-driven, with substantial input and direction from its board and advisory committees. While the number of staff has varied, as of mid 2004 there were 10, including a president, a vice-president, a research director, a natural resources director, a project director for Placer Legacy, a membership director, an eastern field representative, and three support staff. It has 10 board members, all of whom are businesspeople from large and small businesses. Its approximately 600 members are drawn from retail, professional, repair services, farmers, ranchers, banks, as well as today about 20% from government and nonprofit organizations. To be a member one has to certify that one can speak for one's organization and pay a membership fee between \$100 and \$10,000. Advisory committees have been used for each of the projects drawing on members and other civic leaders. Though there is plenty of input from members in this collaborative organization, ultimately staff make the major decisions in consultation with the board. There is collaboration between staff and partners on projects.

## **Limitations**

While there is much to admire about this creative organization, it does have limitations in what it has done so far. It has learned from the fiasco of Nevada County and is unlikely to make this type of mistake again. Mistakes are part of the maturing process of an organization and beneficial if the organization learns from them. But two other limitations on the organization's success should be noted— its limited success as of yet in changing the larger civic culture and its relative lack of focus on the equity dimension of sustainability.

An SBC staff member offered the opinion that shifting the culture of the region was the fundamental mission of SBC.

Well, our official mission is to secure the social, natural and environmental capital of the region for this and future generations. So that's what you tell people when you say what the mission is. But in reality, what that means is, shifting the culture of the region so that every time people make a decision, they are thinking about not just the financial bottom line, but also how it affects your community and how it affects the environment around you. That's the real mission of the organization.

While it is fair to say that many civic leaders in the region have come to share SBC's values and understanding and work toward them in their communities, it also true that there are many people SBC has not reached. With so much money at stake in development proposals, changing the larger culture is a goal that will take much longer to achieve. One notable case in point was a proposal for 6,000 units of housing only a short distance from SBC's offices, in the Martis Valley. While we are not in a position to assess the merits of the case, the developer's proposal became a lightning rod for passionate opposition by environmental groups and some residents who claim it will

create massive traffic and air quality problems. If the Placer Legacy principles of sustainable development have been applied in Martis Valley it is not evident however. The state attorney general wrote a letter to the Placer County Board of Supervisors in March of 2004 saying his office thought the Environmental Impact Report was inadequate and failed to disclose “reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts.” Sierra Watch, an environmental group, complained that there was not regional cooperation or respect for public input and said it would appeal the decision of the county planning commission to approve much of the project.<sup>1</sup>

In the Martis Valley case, the SBC idea of inclusion and dialogue was not applied, and controversy and suspicion grew. While the supervisors asked SBC to help mediate, it was only after much had already been decided. It was too late by that time for SBC to make a difference, and in any case the staff member who tried to do this did not at that point have the necessary skills. Since Placer Legacy was enacted new supervisors have been elected so it remains to be seen whether the ideals and practices developed for the program will be institutionalized enough to survive a new board. SBC still has work cut out for it in changing the broader political culture, not to prevent development, but at least to forestall the types of processes that anger and divide and to encourage projects that are compatible with sustainability goals.

The second major limitation on SBC is that they have done very little with the third E of sustainability—equity. This is in a context where equity issues are increasingly emerging, with the Sierra’s growing population of low income workers, often immigrants, who have come to work in the resorts and parks. The *Index* showed this trend and some of its implications in education and income levels. The rapid increase in housing prices around the resort areas is increasing the inequities as many of the workers are being priced out of the housing market. If these workers cannot live there and bring up their children, the region will not be sustainable.

SBC’s materials and most of their programmatic efforts thus far have focused on natural and financial capital. Their mission, as stated in the *Index*, is to protect these without harming social capital. The last type of capital has not been a coequal objective thus far for SBC. In fairness it must be said that few CRIs actually deal with all three E’s, economy, environment, and equity, in a genuinely equal way. In fact the vast majority give short shrift to equity. SBC’s stand-in for equity is social capital, though their usage of the concept, judging by the *Index*, is more along the lines of human capital. Social capital is typically seen as social relationships, networks, and trust, which SBC does in promote. Human capital regards people as potential workers, focusing on their skills, education, health and so forth. It is easy for SBC to make the case that human capital is as essential to the region’s sustainability as the other two forms of capital. Indeed a report making this case could well be an appropriate companion volume to *Planning for Prosperity* and *Investing for Prosperity*.

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra Watch “Placer County Planning Commission rubber-stamps Martis Valley development projects” YubaNet.com, June 26, 2004.

It is easier to understand and integrate the idea of human capital into economic welfare, however, than it is to conceptualize equity as part of the economy. Equity is not just about the level of poverty, unemployment, or high school graduation rates, but about the *differences* between those who are best off and those who are worst off. It is about the degree to which groups do or do not have equal access to services, resources, quality education, transportation, and so on. The argument is not just that a healthy economy depends on educated, healthy, well-housed workers, but that the sustainability of the whole system depends on its fairness. In a business-based organization such as SBC it is understandable that the issues have to be framed in an instrumental way that shows the link of human capital to financial, but the issue of equity goes beyond this to the idea of building communities that are inclusive. SBC has recently begun to pay closer attention to equity issues. In 2004 SBC instituted affordable housing forums and did new research in the *Index* and *Investing for Prosperity* that was designed to call attention to equity issues.

### **Transition in Leadership**

The organization went through a difficult transition after the departure of Lucy Blake. Blake was eager to push as much through as possible before she left so there were inevitably loose ends or even chaos, as one board member described it. The board hired a new President, James Sayer, who was not from the area and accordingly had a good deal to learn. Blake's leadership style had involved making sure things got done even if she had to do them herself. Sayer wanted to set up organizational systems and internal accountability to improve the overall capacity of SBC and make sure that it did not depend on one person for its success. In the process staff left or were let go, and there was a lengthy process of finding and preparing new staff, who had, in turn, to build their own relationships in the region. These events coincided with a downturn in the stock market and a reduction in funds available from foundations so SBC had to search for new funding sources. They also coincided with the blowup of SBC's work in Nevada County. Sayer had his hands full and took some time working out what his priorities would be.

Sayer's approach and leadership style differed from Blake's, not surprisingly given his background in advocacy for open space and working with and in large public agencies along with his abilities to raise funding for environmental causes. These were his strengths and he played to them. His greatest achievement was the finalizing of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Unfortunately his focus on this led to some loss of credibility among leaders in conservative counties, many of whom were opposed to setting land aside at all. Some respondents told us they did not feel as comfortable with him as with Blake and felt he was not sympathetic to the business perspective. He did not operate the way Blake had in constant interaction with people in the communities, building trust, and jointly developing ideas for projects with them. He did not seem to have the deep commitment to collaborative methods that Blake had had. Under his watch the Sierra Leadership Seminar lapsed for a year. Well known facilitator Susan Carpenter had been an important informal consultant to SBC during the Blake years, providing advice on how to approach a variety of collaborative efforts, but the new staff did not

consult her in any significant way. Instead of continuing the one-on-one technical assistance activities of the town planning program after its original director left, SBC has most recently focused instead on preparing manuals for regional use. These may well prove to be useful, but this refocus has reduced an important mechanism for building good will and respect for SBC around the Sierra.

SBC remains an active organization. Sayer encouraged the growth of the conferences and located them in new areas of the Sierra to spread the organization's reach. Staff continue to work with Placer Legacy and on Working Landscapes protection programs in several counties and are preparing a Regional Main Street program and a guide to Sierra Town Patterns. SBC is also investing in a 2004 version of *The Wealth Index*. It continues work with partners to raise needed funds, convene stakeholders, and provide technical support. SBC has been conducting an active effort to increase membership in part for the funding as well as for building their support base. SBC has a data base it uses to keep track of people who make things happen in communities. There are now about 5,400 people in this database with 600 who are members of SBC. Staff are now actively assisting their members, SLS graduates, and others in networking. The SLS graduates list is a source for members, and these graduates are a vital source of information and support for each other and SBC.

While there have been major successes during Sayer's tenure, there have also been missteps, especially around methods for successful collaboration and around maintaining the social capital and trust that have been so crucial to the organization in the past. The organization has begun to be more inclusive of nonprofits and government organizations, which may well be what is needed as conditions and understandings have evolved. In the process, however, staff may have inadvertently lost touch with Blake's powerful approach of working with the business community to lead environmental change. Sayer decided to leave SBC in the fall of 2004 and at this writing a nationwide search is underway for his successor. Based on this study it appears to us that a new leader should be, among other things, a skilled collaborative leader and someone who can gain the trust of the business community.

## INTRODUCTION

I describe SBC as a land use, quasi-chamber of commerce with an environmental mission that embraces business, community, and place and does not view them as necessarily adversary.

Placer County Supervisor

The Sierra Nevada stretches for 400 miles and encompasses all or part of 18 counties. The distances among its largely rural communities are even greater than these numbers suggest as they are mostly linked only by winding mountain roads, some of which are impassible for good parts of the year. The region has been undergoing substantial social and economic change in the last few decades with its population doubling between 1970 and 1990. Some of its traditional industries like timber or natural resource extraction have declined; its tourist industry has grown; and newcomers from California's cities have arrived in search of a tranquil rural life style and the opportunity to enjoy the Sierra's natural beauty. At the same time there has been growth in low-income, largely minority population, many of whom provide services to the tourist industry. Not surprisingly these changes have led to political conflicts, often passionate ones, over growth issues and environmental protection. In many parts of the Sierra these rural communities are Republican strongholds where farmers, ranchers and businesspeople are strongly committed to protecting property rights and suspicious of, if not hostile to, government. On the other hand a growing newer population has come in with more interest in protecting the natural environment as that was the principal reason for moving to the Sierra.<sup>2</sup> An environmental activist described the conflicts this way,

You had the local leadership driving the growth development when the growth depended on the environmental aspects of the region. How do you get the Chamber of Commerce people to get this? There was almost hysterical anti-environmentalism.

In the mid-1990s the Sierra Business Council (SBC) stepped into the Sierra political and planning landscape, bringing with it a sustainability perspective and a collaborative style, which in combination were to provide an alternative to the conflicts and strategies for moving beyond them. It has changed discourses and practices, deepened understanding of the dynamic relationship of the economy and the environment, built the capacity of civic leaders to work together resolve issues, built networks that are likely to last well into the future, and helped many leaders to see the Sierra as a region with many common problems where people can learn from and work with one another. It is too early to tell how pervasive or deep these changes are, but the SBC has thus far had many clearly identifiable outcomes.

SBC's original strategy was unusual, if not unique. Instead of trying to bring the opposing stakeholders into a room together to resolve their differences, they focused on

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<sup>2</sup> For an excellent overview and background of conditions and dynamics in the Sierra Nevada see Timothy Duane, *Shaping the Sierra: Nature Culture and Conflict in the Changing West* University of California Press Berkeley, 1999

helping the business community to understand how the quality of the environment was an essential component of the potential success of their economy. Their fundamental theory of change at the outset was basically to transform business people into environmentalists so they would take different positions in the political debates over the Sierra's future. As the business people dominated the region politically this could change its political dynamics and result in different outcomes.<sup>3</sup> This strategy was supported by another component—that of training people in collaboration and using collaborative methods themselves for working with people with different views.

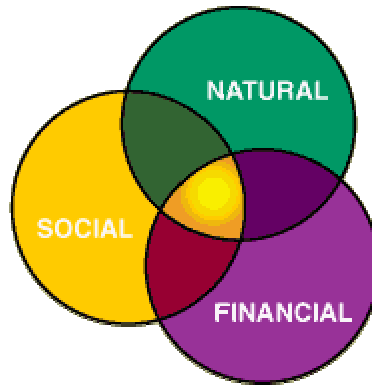
SBC sought to reframe the oppositional nature of the conflicts by replacing the widely accepted concept that the environment and economy were in fundamental conflict, to one where they are understood to have complementary roles—where you cannot have one without the other. Thus the economic well-being of the Sierra in this view depends on the health of the environment, and the environment depends on having the resources to protect and restore it. SBC targeted primarily the business community for this reframing because they would be needed if environmental perspectives were to gain wide credibility in the region. They worked through a variety of means, indicator reports, conferences, seminars, model projects, visioning exercises, and research reports directed to a broad audience. Staff worked collaboratively with public officials and private individuals patiently over the years, gradually bringing more leaders, not only from business, but also from government and nonprofit organizations. They built a shared mindset about the dynamics of the region among many players, while setting activities and projects in motion that seem likely to continue over the years.

This case study is the story of the development and evolution of the Sierra Business Council, focusing on its projects which very much define the organization and its accomplishments. We believe that the process used for designing and implementing each effort has been intrinsic to its degree of success so we focus on that process as well as on the outcomes. SBC operated in a variety of ways as a catalyst, facilitator, technical resource, and partner in these projects, typically keeping a low profile while building relationships across the Sierra.

SBC used a simple Venn diagram, showing the interaction between natural, social, and financial capital, to frame their approach to sustainability. The diagram used the language of economics and investment to appeal to SBC's primary audience, visually

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<sup>3</sup> Current SBC staff have a somewhat different perception of the history and original theory of change. "Our perception of the history is that Lucy turned businesspeople who had a strong passion for the environment and our quality of life, and they helped to drive our organization forward to support all three legs of the sustainable stool. It was about finding (not converting) the silent majority –moderate centrists who wanted a positive way to express their values and avoid the either/or conflict by expressing that we could be pro-business and pro-environment."



**CAPITAL INVESTMENT DIAGRAM<sup>4</sup>**

making the case that social, natural and financial capital are coequal parts of the region's wealth. This essentially was a reframing of the issues that were in contention in the Sierra. SBC's *Sierra Nevada Wealth Index* for 1999-2000 contends,

The critical challenge for decision makers is to design and implement investment strategies for Sierra Nevada communities that will increase at least two forms of capital while not diminishing the third. Investment located in the intersection of the three circles offers the greatest return for Sierra residents. Investments that expand one form of capital at the expense of one or both of the other forms of capital, diminish the Sierra Nevada's overall wealth and must be avoided.

This statement and diagram became the conceptual model for SBC's work and linked SBC's projects to each other and to its larger mission. This generic idea kept SBC to a consistency of mission, while allowing them flexibility to work on a range of specific problems in different parts of the region. The idea was not only a way to assure that new projects were consistent with their goals, it also framed their research and educational efforts.

## **Overview**

SBC's projects have evolved from one another, with each using a somewhat different mechanism to implement the theory of change. The projects (See Table 1) were of almost uniformly high quality in terms of the research and groundwork that went into them and the building of the relationships needed for success. Their first, the *Sierra Nevada Wealth Index*, was designed to show what the assets of the Sierra were and to provide "an integrated understanding of our region's wealth." In the process this document helped identify commonalities across the vast region. A second project was another educational document, *Planning for Prosperity: Building Successful*

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<sup>4</sup> *Sierra Nevada Wealth Index: Understanding and Tracking our Region's Wealth*. 1999-2000 edition. Sierra Business Council, Truckee CA. p. 9 <http://www.sbcouncil.org/publications.asp>



*Communities in the Sierra Nevada*<sup>5</sup> This document laid out simply framed land-use planning principles for civic leaders and public agencies and was supported by pithy examples of success stories from around the country. This was widely distributed and used by SBC as the basis for discussion at conferences and outreach and educational efforts. SBC staff then worked with planners and supervisors in Placer County to develop Placer Legacy, a science-based project to protect open space and habitat. Natural Heritage 2020 was a project to create a similar program in Nevada County which failed for reasons discussed below, though it did produce a report and recommendations. SBC's most recent publication, *Investing for Prosperity: Building Successful Communities and Economies in the Sierra Nevada*<sup>6</sup>, takes up where *Planning for Prosperity* left off, focusing on economic investment strategies rather than on land use planning. A Working Landscapes program seeks ways to preserve the traditional ways of life of ranchers and others who rely on the land through conservation easements and other methods. An annual training program for civic and business leaders, known as the Sierra Leadership Seminar, teaches collaborative methods. SBC holds annual conferences along with membership forums on special topics and other seminars. In addition, SBC has been involved in many other smaller on-the-ground projects, such as providing technical assistance to local agencies and organizations, and managing visioning efforts. The organization has a newsletter, a web site, and an active program for enlisting members and helping them to network among themselves.

**Table 1. Summary of Projects**

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Date Started</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>	<b>Description</b>
Sierra Nevada Wealth Indexes	1995	Ongoing. Third edition in progress	Social, economic, and environmental indicators of the Sierra Nevada Region
Planning for Prosperity	1996	July 1997	Guide to the economic importance of land use planning.
Placer Legacy	1997	On going	Open space and habitat preservation program in Placer County.
Natural Heritage 2020	2000	2002	Open space and habitat preservation program in Nevada County.
Annual Conference	1996	On going	Conference to engage regional

<sup>5</sup> Sierra Business Council, Truckee CA 1997. <http://www.sbcouncil.org/publications.asp>

<sup>6</sup> Sierra Business Council, Truckee CA 2003.

			leaders on pressing issues affecting the Sierra region.
Town Planning	1998	On going	Planning services to implement principles from Planning for Prosperity.
Sierra Leadership Seminar	1997	On going	Course to teach skills critical to effective community leadership: interest-based negotiation, process planning, and collaborative problem-solving.
Investing for Prosperity	2001	2004	A guide to designing economic development strategies and making investments that build long-term wealth.
Working Landscapes	1998	Ongoing	Land Easement program to help maintain the economic productivity of agricultural lands and forests by working with ranchers.
Inyo 2020 FORUM	1997	1997	Visioning exercise to shape the future of Inyo Counties general plan, attended by county staff; business and civic leaders.

SBC is largely staff-driven, with substantial input and direction from their board and advisory committees. While the number of staff has varied, as of mid 2004 there were 10, including a president, a vice-president, a research director, a natural resources director, a project director for Placer Legacy, a membership director, an eastern field representative, and three support staff. It has 10 board members, all of whom are business people from large and small businesses. Its approximately 600 members are

drawn from retail, professional, repair services, farmers, ranchers, banks, as well as about 20% today from government and nonprofit organizations. To be a member one has to certify that one can speak for one's organization and pay a membership fee between \$100 and \$10,000. Advisory committees have been used for each of the projects drawing on members and other civic leaders. Though there is plenty of input from members in this collaborative organization, ultimately staff make the major decisions in consultation with the board. There is collaboration between staff and partners on projects.

SBC has been an adaptive organization, evolving in response to opportunities and successes. It is constantly exploring for new approaches. It started with a focus on the intersection of land use and environmental protection near its headquarters in Truckee in Nevada County and is now branching out into new arenas like working with main street design programs in small towns throughout the Sierra. It is gradually expanding its geographic scope to include Reno and the full length of the Sierra. While it began with foundation funding, it now has diversified funding sources and increasingly works with fee-for-service activities, membership dues, and sponsorships. It has emerged from its early phase with a founding visionary and hands on leader, Lucy Blake, to an organization that is beginning to institutionalize its work, even while undergoing a transition in leadership style and an almost complete turnover of staff during a period when external funding was greatly diminished. While there are specific outcomes that can be identified for each of SBC's projects, we believe its most important outcomes are improving the civic capacity of the region through its educational efforts and changing the discourse among business leaders so that protecting the environment is no longer seen by so many of them as antithetical to business. It has created what has been called a discourse coalition,<sup>7</sup> a group of people who speak in common terms about the issues, and become a de facto coalition through this shared discourse rather than because they necessarily know each other or cooperate directly.

We believe that the reasons for SBC's considerable success in moving toward a more sustainable Sierra Nevada can be attributed to six interrelated elements of their strategy. First the focus on business and changing the minds of businesspeople was crucial. Businesspeople were the respected civic leaders and the ones who could more than anyone create change. While there were many who already understood the importance, others needed to be convinced by businesspeople rather than by environmental groups or new residents. They needed to hear from those who faced the same issues they did. Second Blake's community organizing and political campaigning skills were crucial. This was a campaign and there were many who were unorganized and did not at the outset have a sense of what actions they could or should pursue. Third the projects were built on many one-on-one conversations with civic leaders, including many who were not inclined originally to be supportive. SBC really listened. This labor-intensive effort built trust and understanding that was to be essential to moving forward. Fourth they consciously built intellectual capital that supplemented this personal and political effort. They prepared high quality, easily accessible research reports, along with the *Wealth Index*, which they used as a basis for shared understanding and for action projects. These reports gave SBC credibility as a neutral broker even though the reports

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<sup>7</sup> Maarten Hajer "Discourse Coalitions and the Institutionalization of Practice: The Case of Acid Rain in Great Britain" *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* edited by Frank Fischer and John Forester, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 1993.

themselves were each designed to make an argument. It was a transparent argument based on quality data. Fifth SBC provided services of many kinds to local communities and became an important resource for them. Last and perhaps most importantly they built collaborative civic leaderships and networks through the Sierra Leadership Seminar and the annual conferences.

## **Beginnings**

SBC came along in a time when communities like these in the Sierra could have gone in one of two ways. There was this real “us versus them” mentality. What SBC was able to do was to defuse that mentality and to really help people understand that there were at least certain things that they could work on together.

SBC Staff member

SBC began in 1994 during a period when environmental issues in the Sierra Nevada were gaining national attention. President Clinton visited the Sierra in 1994, and The *Sacramento Bee* in 1991 published a series on the concerns over the future of the water, air, and environmental quality in the Sierra. The *Bee* series helped catalyze a focus on the Sierra, and in subsequent months there were at least three significant conferences on the region. The first was in November 1991 when the State Resources Agency Secretary called a Sierra Summit, which was attended by approximately 150 representatives of state and federal agencies, environmental groups, local industries and local governments. The Sierra Now conference in August of 1992 led to the creation of the Sierra Nevada Alliance (SNA) in 1993, a coalition of local and national environmental groups. A third conference, the Sierra Nevada Sierra Economic Summit in 1992, led to the formation of the Sierra Communities Council as a counter to the SNA.<sup>8</sup> All of this attention created a sense of urgency about the environment in the Sierra.

It was at this point that environmentalist Lucy Blake, formerly of the California League of Conservation Voters, developed the SBC strategy. She and her principal coworker in the early years, Tracy Grubbs, were both from a background of grassroots politics and political campaign planning and community organizing. This shaped their approach and set a path for SBC. One said,

We knew how to figure out what to do to get a message out and who matters to talk to. We knew how to pitch a message quickly to key players. This is the retail side of politics—how to work in a community. But you also have to know how change happens on a grander scale. We had a saying that you have to be able to lead from the back of the room.

Lucy Blake explained her reasoning:

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy Duane, *Shaping the Sierra: Nature, Culture, And Conflict In The Changing West*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999.

My thought was if one were to create an environmental organization to create an ecological vision for the region, it would not work because environmentalists are not respected opinion leaders, much less seen as understanding economics or even being interested. I thought it would be great if we could start a business organization. If they started telling decision makers what to do, it would have an effect.

The actual work of establishing SBC had occurred months before the organization was made public in 1994. Blake traveled throughout the region, looking for individuals who could serve on her organization's board and could also become the first business members.

We were interested in getting the middle people, the visionaries, the bank presidents. These are people who understand the relationship of environmental quality and excellence or who get it right away, and people with deep roots in the community or a big payroll and thus respected. We found the visionaries could lead us to the environmental businesses and to the more conservative types who were open to this—the power brokers. The idea was to use the visionaries to get to the power brokers and to engage them in committees and transform them.

Her ideas evolved as she got started, but she emphasized seeking the most forward-looking board members she could find. She knew she was trying something unconventional and proceeded cautiously.

My original idea was to start with businesses tied to the environment, like skiing. I interviewed 80 businesses and got 75 who were very interested. It was not random. I called around for the leaders, the avant-garde businesses. I was not interested in the rear guard that would be hostile. I interviewed them to find out if there was an existing organization like [SBC] and to find out what they would be interested in working on and what the problems were that they thought needed addressing. I went ahead about four months later (in 1994). I put together a board of the most forward-thinking people I had met.

Blake's efforts to reach out to such individuals was important part of establishing SBC's reputation. A close observer and evaluator of SBC said,

My sense is Lucy tapped people who did not identify with either the Sierra Now activists or the anti-government, pro-property rights camps, moderates—people searching for a middle ground, constructive approach to their communities' future.

Blake approached influential stakeholders; bankers, magazine publishers, long-term active residents, with the idea of creating a membership-based business organization which would work to maintain the environmental integrity of the Sierra.

The idea of SBC was a remarkable one, but what is more remarkable is that Blake was able to interest so many leading businesspeople in participating in an organization with an environmental bent. One of the early people on the SBC board described the process Blake went through to enlist people.

She was on a road trip. She was going around the Sierra trying to find anyone who would think this was a good idea. She was not finding a lot of people who really had the time or interest because when you talk to small business people, you find that they are all so busy, just trying to make their payroll every two weeks or whatever, they don't have time to deal with all this other stuff, let alone the whole Sierra. They are lucky to be finding time for their local chamber of commerce. So when she walked into my office, I saw her talking to my employee and then I wandered over to see who this woman was—actually, probably because she was taking a lot of my employee's time... Anyway, I wandered over and Lucy introduced herself to me.

Blake must have been persuasive because the two became good friends and associates from that time on, and this person assisted in finding a suitable board. It was a challenge because they did not want anyone to “shoot at” on the board. One person who owned an environmental business was considered a risk because his business depended on protections of some resources. Another person who was an admitted environmentalist was a bit safer for the board because, she said,

Having someone like me on the board, or even speaking for the board, was beneficial because it was hard for them to criticize my credentials. I am a long term Republican. I am in business. I am a property owner. I have been a developer of sorts. I have built office buildings. My husband is a civil engineer making his money on developments, so I am aware of the downside to all of that—how you have to have economic development and you have to have it done correctly.

Blake's approach to engaging business leaders was somewhat unconventional. She interviewed them and asked, “Do you think your business threatens your way of life?”<sup>9</sup> and “Do you see your own work as incompatible with your local environment?” All answered a resounding “no” to this and expressed concern about sustaining their “way of life” while maintaining their personal and regional economic viability. She emphasized in her efforts the development of a simple, direct, noncombative language. She spoke with people about their love of place and love of the land but did not use environmental jargon.<sup>10</sup>

These interviews helped Blake to better understand the political context of the Sierra while beginning to reframe the dichotomy between environment and economy among the businesspeople she would later recruit into SBC. She saw herself as helping to mobilize people who were discontent with the potential overdevelopment of the region

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<sup>9</sup> Sierra Business Council, Case Study, unpublished, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p. 10.

but who had not thought of themselves as active participants. She helped them see they could play a role.

Blake selected the board with an eye to broad-based representation. This included geographic diversity as well as ethnic and gender diversity. It was difficult to enlist ethnic minorities as this population is not large in the Sierra and most have not been there long enough to have started their own businesses. These could not simply be individuals or representatives of advocacy organizations. She sought people with green businesses. She sought a diversity of expertise to help SBC get started including a banker, a lawyer and someone from both the ski industry and the gaming industry.

Blake took plenty of time in establishing the organization.

I made sure we had a mission, goals, priorities and budget for the first couple of years before even trying to raise money. We made no public announcements and worked quietly. I had no idea if the foundations would get the strategic value or would say business people should do it themselves.

For about a year SBC did not begin projects but focused on developing a framework and mission, building a membership base, and developing the board. SBC purposefully stayed away from environmental organizations and focused recruitment in the business sector. Blake volunteered her time for months and only sought funding for SBC once it had what she regarded as a critical mass of about 300 members.

Blake's visionary leadership and creative approach drove this organization as it grew and evolved, and her talents at communicating with civic leaders assured the growth of its membership and support for SBC projects. She was assisted at first by Tracy Grubbs and then by a talented staff she assembled over the years. In 2000 Lucy Blake was awarded a Macarthur Fellowship—the so-called genius award—for her work in creating and building SBC. Shortly after that Blake resigned as President and left for an extended sojourn in Spain. She was replaced by Jim Sayer, also a talented environmental leader who had been involved in many public arenas in the Bay Area, most visibly as Executive Director of the Greenbelt Alliance, the Bay Area's largest regional environmental organization.

## **THE FIRST STEP: THE SIERRA NEVADA WEALTH INDEX**

SBC's first project, The *Sierra Nevada Wealth Index* gave as its purpose, to help business leaders and policy maker understand the assets that sustain our region. The *Index* describes the social, natural and financial capital which are the foundations of the Sierra Nevada's economy and thereby provides an integrated understanding of the region's wealth.<sup>11</sup>

The theory of change embodied in this project as articulated by one of our SBC respondents was,

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<sup>11</sup> P. 6.

The *Wealth Index* is more about changing people's understanding of what is driving the economy. When we started people thought it was extraction industries. The people in the industry are such chest thumpers and make such a fuss that people pay attention to loss of 1000 extraction jobs and ignore 14,000 new jobs in other fields.

The *Index* challenged widely held assumptions, provided facts about trends, and put the data in perspective by comparing the Sierra to the rest of California. It also made an argument, using the capital investment Venn diagram as a frame and providing indicators within each category and county of the Sierra. Essentially this was a recasting of what would ordinarily be called social, environmental and economic indicators into indicators of different kinds of wealth so they would make sense for the business constituency. The *Index* also highlighted the main problems facing the region, making them more visible, and it showed how counties across the region were experiencing similar problems. When staff prepared the *Wealth Index*, they asked themselves: "What data make people feel like they are part of a region?" They wanted the indicators to resonate for people living in very different parts of the Sierra. Sierra communities are separated by 400 miles of mountains, small winding roads under chain control during many times of the year, and political boundaries defined by major topographical features. This publication was in part designed to help people in this far-flung region develop a sense of commonality.

The *Wealth Index* was distributed mainly to business and government organizations. The first version, published in 1996, won an award from a national sustainability organization, Renew America, made up of environmental, government, community and business organizations which uses its awards to highlight success stories that will "inspire communities and businesses to meet today's environmental challenges."<sup>12</sup> The 1999-2000 edition, which included considerably more background and descriptive material, was even more popular. Both were user-friendly documents with straightforward, succinct explanations and color charts and graphs. The process of preparing the second report was more participatory and less staff-driven than the first. The second *Index* separated indicators by county, but complemented them with key findings specific to each county. Staff said this was done in response to the demand for information by county officials who wanted a resource that would apply specifically to their counties. This evolution of the *Index* points to SBC's ability to adapt to feedback from their constituents.

The indicators in the second report were also more numerous and sophisticated than in the first, and they included some that were not well known or obvious but nonetheless were revealing of important dynamics at work in the Sierra. For example one indicator showed that high school seniors performed well on the SAT compared to the state as a whole, but that a lower percentage took the test, suggesting the existence of a significant social divide in the population. It showed that ethnic diversity was increasing in schools and though fewer children were in poverty than in the state, overall poverty was on the rise. These indicators suggest important social changes in the region. The natural capital section zeroes in on key issues that people care about. It shows for example that ratios of public and private land ownership vary by county—important in a region where vast lands are owned by government—that the fire hazard is significant in

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<sup>12</sup> From web site [http://sol.crest.org/environment/renew\\_america/](http://sol.crest.org/environment/renew_america/)



45% of the landscape, and that while open space preserved through the Williamson Act is increasing, contract renewals are slowing down, suggesting that conversion of agricultural land is likely to increase. In the financial capital section an indicator shows that economic diversity is increasing, which means the economy will be more resilient than when it was reliant on a small set of industries. It shows that the mix of jobs by economic sectors has changed and varies by county, with the trends away from natural resource industries and growing numbers of high wage service jobs. Overall the indicators work to convey a message in great part because they are presented in comparison to the state, across counties or over time. Most importantly they are thought-provoking as one tries to sort out the reasons for the findings. These are indicators that civic leaders have reason to use and discuss.

The indicators did have an impact on people's thinking and actions according to a study SBC commissioned in 2001 to find out how people used the *Index* so they could do the third version better. This online survey showed that people used the *Index* primarily as a general data source and for education purposes.<sup>13</sup> The data sometimes confirmed people's understandings and gave a broader picture than they had before. The majority of respondents said it had played a role in decision making in two primary ways. First it provided a common ground from which a range of issues could be discussed. It also contributed to long range planning and visioning. The findings are consistent with academic research on the use of research in the public arena, where it is most effective when it "enlightens" decision makers rather than tells them a specific answer to a specific question—where it reframes their thinking.<sup>14</sup> In this respect it was consistent with the goal of reframing the issues in terms of the multiple dimensions of wealth in a sustainable region. SBC staff used the document when they went out to talk in communities about issues. The users in the survey considered the data to be both objective and reliable, and some used them to supplement reports and grant proposals. Moreover a number of respondents said they have used it as a model for their own community indicator reports. Some quotes from the survey respondents give the flavor of their reactions.

- Incredible tool for having a data-driven conversation.
- A data source to help justify some land use recommendations.
- Helped to place Amador County in perspective and in relation to the rest of the Sierra.
- A reminder that we are in flux and need to move in the direction of accommodating that flux.
- Made my decision much more reality-based.
- Helped in understanding regional economic issues and how they impact the natural environment.

Amy Horne, SBC's Research Director told us,

I was extremely gratified by the feedback. I was really stunned at the positive response. People have used it to gain money. It showed exactly

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<sup>13</sup> The findings are from "Report for the Sierra Nevada Wealth Index Survey" by Nancy Clair Laird, December 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Weiss 19 The Enlightenment Function of Social Research

how closely we met our goals. We wanted to give people a more complete understanding of the trends in the Sierra. We wanted to give people a common language and get people to act in an innovative way, and the *Index* did this. It was quite wonderful.

Many things are remarkable about this story. First, it is remarkable that SBC obtained outcome measures for this project. Indicator projects have been done in hundreds of regions and communities, and it is hard to find examples where people even tried to get evidence about outcomes or uses of the data. It is more likely to just be assumed that information changes minds and all you have to do is put it out there. Secondly, it is remarkable that in this case the *Index* was not only directly used, but that the users recognized how it had influenced them or others. Often these reports do little more than sit on shelves. Moreover it is also unusual that SBC has already produced two reports and plans to update the report again. Indicators are not useful unless they are tracked over time, but all too often the will or interest dies down after the first report. This report however was central to SBC's work and they were motivated and getting feedback that it was valuable.

This pattern was different from many other indicator projects, we believe, for a number of reasons. First, staff who prepared both reports based them on extensive listening to the people in the region to hear their concerns and understand their ways of looking at things, while at the same time working out what might be technically possible. Amy Horne told us,

When I was doing the *Wealth Index*, I was crunching data and talking to people and finding out what the issues were and talking to opinion leaders, county supervisors, business people who were highly active, people that have been involved in different collaborations in the area. We formed an advisory committee for the *Wealth Index* and tried hard to get representation all up and down the Sierra and the key business sectors in the Sierra. We tried to get the full gamut of concerns.

This approach seems to have paid off because the reports and their indicators fit closely with the concerns in the region. People could understand the data and relate it to their own situation and knowledge. SBC systematically make public presentations about the data and discussed them with community groups around the region and used them as part of their broad educational effort. The *Index* was an essential part of SBC's overall strategy and a basis for other projects.

A staff member explained one of the main outcomes of the first *Wealth Index* as far as SBC was concerned:

It branded the organization; it sort of gave us a signature product that we could refer to. We finally had something to show for the concept of the economy and the environment.

This staff member also contended that the first *Index* directly led to SBC's second project, *Planning for Prosperity*, which was an attempt to provide a framework for smart

growth in the Sierra that would address many of the problems identified in the Index. Staff used the indicators report as an interactive tool within the projects they were organizing. They used research findings in the Sierra Leadership Seminar, in the Annual Conference, in their reports like *Planning for Prosperity*, in their various collaborative projects with communities and in their outreach efforts.

### ***PLANNING FOR PROSPERITY: BUILDING SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES IN THE SIERRA NEVADA***

The first thing that we needed to lay out was a new blueprint for how those activities should occur in the region. On the land use side we decided that we needed to do a handbook and that was *Planning for Prosperity*. It was to lay out a new framework for the world of planning.  
SBC Staff

*Planning for Prosperity* is a manual designed to assist civic leaders and local planners in creating “successful” communities, focusing particularly on land and natural resources. It provides specific strategies that implement aspects of SBC’s sustainability framework. Unlike some manuals, it is not a how-to, cookbook type guide, but an engaging presentation of 16 basic principles (strategies), each supported by examples where particular communities applied them. The document is laid out with photos and drawings and sidebars that retain a readers’ attention. The approach allows readers to think for themselves and to try to adapt the principles to the unique conditions of their own communities.

This document is deeply grounded in an understanding of the local issues and attitudes in the Sierra. Preparation involved two years of research, surveys of business members, polling of 1,000 registered voters, interviews with planners and analysis of county general plans. Staff appointed an advisory board to provide input, brainstorm, and work with them to develop the principles in *Planning for Prosperity*. This group of 14 businesspeople included a publisher, a rancher, a trucker, a banker, a director of a gaming alliance, an architect and some retail business owners. The SBC board president was included in the group. Each principle in *Planning for Prosperity* was designed to serve as a guideline for sustainable planning and each grew out of the Venn investment diagram. Each guideline, Blake contended, is like a stone in an arch, and you need all to sustain the structure or it will collapse, just as all components of wealth must be developed jointly. This interconnectedness of actions is essential to their concept of sustainability.

One section, “Principles for Sound Development,” includes for example “preserve historic assets” and a case study of a historic preservation ordinance and “anticipate and address the housing needs of all community residents” with an accompanying example of a self help project in Nevada City to build affordable miners’ cottages. A third principle “conserve and showcase each community’s natural assets,” is accompanied by examples from South Lake Tahoe, another about open space in Massachusetts, and a third about a study that shows that Americans prefer natural open space to golf courses. A second section is about “Principles for Involving and Serving Business and the Public” and includes “integrate land use planning with planning for community development” and “create efficient ways and meaningful ways to engage the public in the shaping of local

land use plans” along with case studies and research findings. A full chapter discusses how each principle has been applied in Placer County. A final chapter summarizes SBC’s research findings over the previous two years and recommends practical action steps such as legislation and other tools that can stop sprawl, or fiscal impact assessment to find out the long term cumulative costs and benefits of proposed developments or cooperative mapping of fire hazard areas and preventing construction in these zones. Finally, an appendix offers a county by county audit of the current planning practices across the Sierra and an overview of basic planning law. The original purpose of the report was just an audit, but this purpose changed during the report’s preparation. The audit was quite critical, and SBC wanted to make this report constructive.

*Planning for Prosperity* got a very positive reception from its intended audience. An SBC staff member recalls how hectic the work load became after they published the manual.

We released [*Planning for Prosperity*] in July of 1997, and I went on the road and did all this public speaking in August, September, and October and then I got back in the office...I started getting all these phone calls from small town planners who needed somebody to come do a visual preference survey or talk to them about planning a streetscape. It was totally overwhelming. So we decided that we needed to hire somebody to help me with this role.

The report was not received positively by everyone. It called for the reframing of land use practices in the region, which was a contentious idea. An SBC staff person who was involved in the preparation recalls her experience.

When we first released *Planning for Prosperity*, I was going out and talking to boards of supervisors, and the Building Industry Association called. They just went ballistic because they had heard of this document after it was published. They were really annoyed that suddenly we had come out with this whole blueprint. They invited me down to do a presentation, and it was a total ambush. They brought up all these developers from El Dorado County, yelled at me in the middle of the presentation, and just shot me down...They were just being their unruly selves.

This document resonated with interests in the Sierra in either positive or negative ways. Some developer interests saw it as a threat to their business, as it advocated for the protection of natural capital through land use planning and design. It was to take time, but as *Planning for Prosperity* began to take shape through specific projects, some of the contentiousness was to subside, though it never disappeared completely

One of SBC’s particular strengths as an organization was its ability to show stakeholders the similarities between each other’s interests. Developers as well as environmentalists could hear SBC’s message because it had room for both of them to benefit. The executive director of a major environmental advocacy membership organization told us,

there is a greater understanding among conservation leaders of some of the economics, environmental, and social hurdles, so a type of grand vision of the different hurdles among sub regions even ours; a better awareness of these issues emerged because of the *Planning for Prosperity* report.

When the report won the prestigious Daniel Burnham Award from the American Planning Association, the citation recognized particularly the way SBC and the handbook were spreading good planning practices. The award recognizes not just *Planning for Prosperity* but SBC as an organization.

This business association of nearly 500 members is breaking all stereotypes. Their message, that the value of business in the region is tied directly to land use planning, is being heard loud and clear. The group's research, elaborated on in their *Planning for Prosperity* handbook, and presentations are elevating planning principles, raising greater awareness of the value of planning, and leading to an improved quality of life in the breathtaking Sierra Nevada region. The area is growing rapidly and, thanks to these efforts, will grow smart. The document also led to the establishment of three other SBC projects; Placer Legacy, Town Planning Services and Working Landscapes.

An article in *Planning*, the Association's professional journal, reports that a member of the APA Board making the award said, in an apparent reference to the *Index*, that SBC's "efforts are truly turning thinking around. [SBC] has developed innovative ways to sustain and measure economic progress far beyond the usual business statistics." The nomination said "The process has been brilliant. SBC has produced a model which would be extremely useful throughout the country." The APA director said "SBC is helping to break through the traditional developer vs. environmentalist gridlock by providing business leadership," essentially saying that the award was not just for the report, but for SBC's whole approach.<sup>15</sup> As of 1998 the report had been the subject of more than 40 local and national newspaper articles. Staff told us that *Planning for Prosperity* "really put SBC on the map on a national level for having a clear vision of how important the planning process is in the management of growth in these towns." They used this report to make land use planning the focus of the 1997 SBC conference.

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah Polster "The Sierra Business Council" *Planning* March 1998.

## SIERRA LEADERSHIP SEMINAR<sup>16</sup>

The Sierra Leadership Seminar really helped provide people strong collaborative, facilitator skills. People were already leaders but now I think they have a better skill set. [It produced] A whole set of trained leaders throughout the Sierra Nevada.

Environmental Advocate

Perhaps one of the most profound successes of the Sierra Business Council is its annual Sierra Leadership Seminar, where participants learn facilitation and leadership skills. After graduation, many of them are out there in our community, applying what they know.

*Moonshine Ink: What's Brewing in Truckee.* "Conjunction Junction" February 2003 p. 17

One of SBC's most effective projects for accomplishing its mission has been the Sierra Leadership Seminar (SLS). This is a unique training program consisting of two-day workshops held monthly for four months, each in a different part of the Sierra. It teaches collaborative skills, including engaging the public, working with people, negotiation, facilitation and collaborative problem solving. Each year it includes some work with SBC's latest publication to help the group better understand the Sierra and the problems and opportunities they face. Participants are drawn from many walks of life, including nonprofits, advocacy groups, government agencies, business and professional practice such as architects. Some are people focused on voluntary civic leadership. They bring to the seminar their own experience and work on practical problems they face in between workshops. The seminar is thus grounded in examples that are meaningful to participants. As of 2004 over 170 Sierra leaders have graduated from the program, including all of SBC's staff over the years.

The idea for SLS originated when Lucy Blake and Tracy Grubbs went to a workshop on collaboration led by Susan Carpenter, one of the preeminent facilitators and trainers in the country. Blake was at the time searching around for ideas and potential activities for the nascent SBC. After the meeting Blake and Carpenter sat on a curb and talked a long while developing the idea of SLS. Blake wanted to be sure it was framed around the three kinds of capital and implemented the mission of SBC. The idea was to change the adversarial polarizing politics of the Sierra and see how people could work productively together. Carpenter agreed to work with SBC to develop a program, and she continued to conduct workshops over the following seven years.

SBC gave the original purposes of SLS as:

- Expanding the skills, knowledge, and confidence of existing and emerging local leaders.

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<sup>16</sup> This section is built on our own research and interviews, as well as on a survey of SLS graduates conducted by Sharon Huntsman for SBC and it builds on some of her findings which will be included in her Masters Thesis at the University of California, Davis.

- Providing a stimulating and challenging forum where leaders can exchange ideas and experiences, learn from each other through formal and informal interaction, and form lasting friendships.
- Building strong working relationships between SBC and regional leaders.
- Training a corps of skilled facilitators SBC can call upon for support.

The last point has been dropped from recent announcements, though in reality SLS seems to have fulfilled all of the objectives. While they framed these objectives for funders in terms of how these outcomes would directly support SBC's work, it seems clear from our research and a survey of graduates that its most important outcome is building civic capacity in the region. SBC has done this by targeting leaders to begin with, by training them to be more effective in the polarizing disputes that have characterized the region's politics. A staff member told us,

Most classes have members of boards of supervisors, business owners, people working in public policy like planning, social service policy, rural economic development, and concerned citizens. And every community has a few good citizens, people that just get involved with everything. [SBC] specifically targeted these people throughout the Sierra Nevada to participate in this program.

SLS linked these people together to partner in other activities, gave them confidence to initiate new projects quite apart from SBC, and inculcated the idea that the three kinds of capital are complimentary and that this complementarity can be understood through collaboration. A consultant who was an SLS graduate told us,

I think that the Sierra Leadership Seminar is just a stroke of genius, I don't know where they came up with it, but it's really empowering the people—not SBC. SBC takes their resources and passes them on directly to the people in the community who are doing stuff. That's unbelievable.

The Seminar has worked not only to build civic capacity, but its graduates have supported SBC directly when, for example, a whole set of them volunteered to go to Inyo County to assist in the Forum SBC was running, when they came to SBC with project ideas, or when they offered their local knowledge to help get projects and programs implemented. Of course building capacity in the region underlies the fundamental mission of SBC and a better civic capacity, especially one informed by the ideas of sustainability supporting their mission. Sharon Huntsman, who has been doing research on the Seminar, sums up what she sees as its main outcomes:

- providing existing leaders with collaborative process literacy
- a network that participates in SBC projects and publications
- a network for SLS graduates to access SBC and other SLS Alumni

The online survey of SLS graduates that Huntsman conducted reflected that participants highly valued the skills taught in the Seminar. When she broke it down into the six skill categories including: being a more facilitative participant; using interest based negotiation; facilitating meetings; dealing with difficult people; understanding personality types; designing a good group process; conducting an assessment, she found that the vast majority found the training had been valuable in each category. For most categories only 3 to 6 people out of the 95 respondents<sup>17</sup> found the skill not valuable. This reflects not only that the training was done well, but also that it was something people could and did use. Almost 97% reported some increase in their self-confidence. The most highly valued components of the programs to participants were skills training, interaction with classmates and building relationships, learning about classmates experiences, getting feedback from them and designing their own collaborative processes. Seventy-four percent have participated in an SBC project and an equal proportion participate in the conference and almost as many in Alumni reunions. They have done considerable networking since graduation from the Seminar, with 74% reaching out to class peers and 76% to SBC staff. All this networking has happened largely without SBC's active involvement. They have more recently started an effort to encourage this sort of activity.

SLS has affected the way its graduates, think, work and approach problems. Many reported they developed the skills and confidence to work collaboratively and that they put these skills to work daily in their communities. These effects are best expressed in the graduates' own words.

It has helped me to understand why things get out of control. [It has] helped with understanding people's needs and how to work with people better. We all wanted to get to the end goal, but how are we going to get there? And how to deal with some people who do not want to get there.

Some people just want to throw bombs. You know the personalities and dynamic of people, how to work with people so that they do not lose face, how to work with a group.

In general my entire way of relating to those with opposing views has become more respectful and courteous as a result of the training in the Leadership Seminar. It has helped me to become more effective in reaching solutions in my planning commission and planning committee meetings and my work.

I have since facilitated the resolution of a number of community disputes throughout the Sierra on a 'win-win' basis.

I had a difficult group member who stopped us cold. He was rude and arrogant, dismissive. I used techniques learned in SLS to defuse his power, and he decided it wasn't as much fun to attend when he wasn't in power, so he left the group. We are much more effective.

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<sup>17</sup> Response rate of 70% of the 136 surveyed.



If you go through SLS you will be 180% better at being able to chair a meeting.

This training has aided me in going into contentious situations in the community and attempt to defuse opposition, build consensus and develop buy-in from the community members.

From SBC's point of view SLS has been very important to their work. It has affected how staff approach issues and work with partners. One said,

The first thing is that it gave me as a staff member some theory and practice to turn to when I was just waiting out the environmentalists, developers, and business people, who seemed about to walk from the table. So I could actually call Susan Carpenter or go back to my guide book and remember, "OK, now this is how to deal with these really contentious meetings"...so it was just a useful skill building thing for staff.

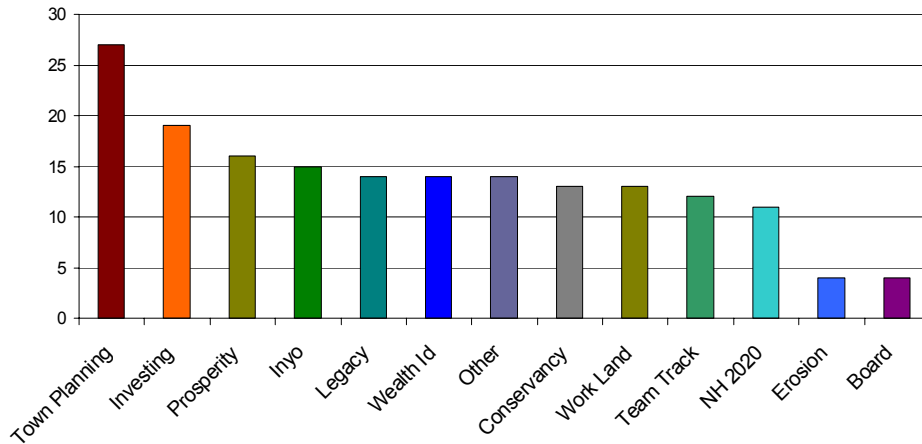
Another staff member told us,

What we are finding is that we can go to a meeting now and there are 3-4 people who are decision makers who graduated from our [SLS] program. ... We know they have had dialogue and leadership training in negotiation skills. A lot of these people will assist SBC with a phone call. If we are doing a risk analysis on a project and we are trying to understand political realities, then we call them and they will tell us what is going on behind the scenes that is not in the newspapers. So it really does work. It's amazingly effective.

Graduates stay in touch with SBC and sometimes initiate project partnerships with SBC. For example, one graduate instigated a partnership between SBC, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, ski resorts and an environmental consulting firm that was focused on methods to reduce erosion on ski slopes. The partnership between the regulatory agency and the ski resorts was not business as usual but it was brokered by the SLS and SBC. Sierra Leadership Seminar graduates have been involved in almost all of SBC's projects as this chart from Huntsman's research shows.

## NUMBER OF SLS ALUMNI PARTICIPANTS IN SBC PROJECTS

Q: Have you been involved in any of the following Sierra Business Council projects?



SBC called on SLS graduates for example to help with the political work to get the Sierra Nevada Conservancy created (see the Working Landscapes section). In Placer Legacy, also described below, a staff member explained how she relied on the network of graduates:

In Placer Legacy we had a number of big public meetings, where we brought people in from all over the county to talk about open space and get a look at the projects and we actually called on the network from the leadership seminar, and they drove up and helped. And that was true on the ranch [Working Landscapes] project as well. So it really added a lot to the power of the organization.

By the same token Placer County made use of SLS to develop Placer Legacy. Two of the county supervisors who were graduates of the SLS decided to send members of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the Seminar. This group represented highly diverse positions and interests. Overall 14 SLS alumni, according to the survey, were involved in one way or another in the Legacy Project. This story reflects that the Seminar was recognized as valuable by these supervisors. The SLS seems likely to have played a real part in making Placer Legacy as successful as it was.

A leader of a regional agency who participated in SLS thought there were benefits from the diversity of those represented in the seminar. Two of his board members and several people from the business sector around his region had participated in the SLS. This diversity of public, private and non-profit leaders is a major strength of SLS both for the graduates and the region. Graduates become boundary crossers and the region benefits as they discover ways to work together to create innovative programs, like a project where an SLS graduate brought together regulatory agency people to work with a

ski resort to develop improved erosion control practices. This type of collaboration reflects a kind of bridging social capital that builds the region's overall capacity.<sup>18</sup>

A staff member summed up the value of the Seminar from his perspective.

So much progress is held up because issues become controversial. They become two-sided...so you end up fighting an uphill battle trying to create change. The Sierra Leadership Seminar tries to address that problem. It gives people the ability to work collaboratively with others instead of having conflict. So we actually find ways where everybody gets what they want and everybody can be happy.

The Leadership Seminar has played a central role in SBC's work. It has created an infrastructure in the region to carry out SBC's mission and to apply and spread the ideas and practices that can support sustainability. Many of its graduates almost certainly have become more effective leaders who take more initiative and work with opponents to find constructive ways to move forward in the face of differences. During the leadership transition of SBC the Seminar was not held for one year, due to a lack of funding. The Seminar is expensive and many participants cannot pay the full cost, so individuals and the Seminar itself had been subsidized largely from Foundation funds. A staff member complained to us in early 2003,

Frustration for me is, here we are teaching people. We have the basic ingredients of starting a regional effort ... but the problem is we don't have the funding or capacity to do this ... we don't have the money to get the class this year. They keep asking us for chat rooms, refresher seminars. They want to talk to each other, and they want access to resources. But we can't do this. We are ready institutionally, we are ready to move to the next step, but we don't have the money to do it.

This seminar costs \$1500 for non-SBC members and only slightly less for members. This is not expensive comparatively for this type of course, as this covers eight full days of training and facility rentals, but room and board comes to an additional \$600 to \$800. While SBC has been able to provide some scholarship assistance, even with this, some environmental advocates and others indicated they could not afford to attend. A seminar was held in 2004, but the future of the program remains uncertain both because of funding and because Susan Carpenter has retired from her role in the Seminar.

## **TOWN PLANNING SERVICES**

Once *Planning for Prosperity* had incorporated SBC's conceptual approach to sustainability into planning principles SBC was ready to begin applying those principles to concrete projects which would shape the built environment. SBC's staff had a clear goal of helping planning departments throughout the Sierra learn and implement the principles within *Planning for Prosperity*. Hence, SBC developed their Vision to Reality project, which soon evolved into their town planning services program. SBC staff

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<sup>18</sup> Thanks to Sharon Huntsman for this point.

reported that after the release of *Planning for Prosperity*, planning staff of various Sierra towns and counties began calling SBC asking for help in incorporating some of its principles into their town and county development plans. *Planning for Prosperity*'s audit of the state of planning practices throughout the Sierra showed that there was much room for improvement. Hence, Blake created the town planning services project, hiring a director with a masters degree in planning and work experience in rural town planning and design. The purpose of the program was to provide models for better development in the Sierra through comprehensive planning. This included three components: 1) Community Assistance, 2) Sponsorship and 3) Partnerships. The community assistance is the day-to-day phone calls, with people needing assistance, referrals, information, and research. Sponsorship projects, according to staff, were

where we would work with a reputable consultant when we don't have the staff expertise... But we would be there to make sure that the work is high quality and that it could become a model for other communities.

The partnerships component consisted of teaming up with a local planning department and working on a site plan or other project together.

The partnership aspect of the program has worked to implement the principles of *Planning for Prosperity* in the cities of Truckee and June Lake, California, and Minden Nevada, among others. One project was a partnership with the California Center for Land Recycling and the Town of Truckee to redevelop the Truckee rail yard into a mixed use development containing housing, commercial, and office space. SBC was able to raise \$350,000 for the project with a grant from the office of California State Treasurer<sup>19</sup>, which served as a catalyst for gaining developers' interest and political backing from the city council. This project will increase Truckee's tax base and increase affordable housing in an area experiencing rising housing prices. The project is sustainable for the environment as it is infill, rather than development at the edge of Truckee in natural areas.

The town planning services program has also partnered with the cities of June Lake and Minden to develop design guidelines to complement the counties' general plans and the towns' master plans. The community design guidelines are intended to provide a framework for future development, as well as to clearly define the desired visual character of the area.<sup>20</sup> The community design guidelines of June Lake were unanimously adopted by the Mono County Board of Supervisors and by the Mono County Planning Commission in 2002. The Minden guidelines were unanimously adopted by the Minden council in 2002 and by the Douglas County Board of Commissioners in 2003.

Hence, SBC's town planning program serves multiple roles for towns throughout the Sierra. These roles include serving as a technical expert resource on planning and design process, a place to gain information on how other small towns in the Sierra go about designing and planning their communities, a source for helping small towns

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<sup>19</sup> The program funded through Phil Angelides was the California Pollution Control Financing Authority, Sustainable Communities Grant and Loan Program.

<sup>20</sup> *Community Design Guidelines, June Lake Community Design*, SBC publication, 2002.

develop their own planning and design principles (as in the June Lake and Minden design guideline projects); and finally as a resource to understanding sustainable development.

These diverse roles demand a great deal of interpersonal skills, political savvy and technical competence from their town planning services director. Providing this technical assistance, while also playing a convening, facilitative role and furthering SBC's mission of sustainability creates a challenge for the town planning services director. It is almost a contradictory combination of roles, serving as a technical person, facilitator, persuader, while at the same time advocating SBC's sustainability agenda and helping the towns get what they want, even though they might not have known they wanted it. It takes walking a fine line.

A leading SBC board member told us she believes the town planning services director plays an important role in the organization:

He relates very well with the development community; he speaks their lingo. And he is a safe person and they like him. Those people need to like the Sierra Business Council and that is why what [he] does is so important. He gives them options of how they can do their development in a more sustainable way.

This board member continued with her perspective on how all the types of capital affect each other, which in her view was a major justification for having the town planning services program.

So it is really the built landscape that affects everything. Not only does it threaten the natural capital, but it also threatens the social capital if not done right. You create these ghettos of rich people that are not a real community. It's phony. It has a huge impact on the social wealth of Truckee and Tahoe, because you have these really rich people getting the cost of housing so high that ordinary people can't live there—let alone people who are living on minimum wage. So trying to get communities to be real communities, where all the stakeholders have a place [is important].

Her comments also show that the town planning services director had to maneuver among competing interests and maintain good relations with all of them, while delivering a message about issues that have been neglected.

[The planning director] understands that, and he also knows how the big developers think, and so he is able to move them just a little bit. And even if you move them just a little bit, that is very powerful. But even more so, he is able to come into a meeting where you've got anti-development and development people, like at a planning commission meeting, and he is able—I've watched him do this—he is able to bring the anti-development people to a place of hope, and he is able to bring the development people to a place of willingness. The result is that they are no longer angry at one

another, and once the anger dissipates, then progress can occur toward finding solutions that are workable.

The popularity of this program is easy to understand. Most Sierra towns have small planning staffs and they are often inundated by development proposals. As one SBC staff member suggested, they are extremely busy with the “day to day running of the town, being very much reactive and overwhelmed and it is difficult for them to step back and ask the visionary questions.” The town planning services program helps these towns take that step back and reflect on how they want their town to develop; but with a new framework of sustainability.

An example of the complex role which the town planning director takes comes from the town of Truckee and the work around the redevelopment of the old Truckee rail yard. The project evolved when SBC’s town planning director conducted a charrette (a type of visioning) process for the town of Truckee using smart growth principles. SBC invited various participants who represented the different technical fields related to planning around the city of Truckee. He described the process,

Elected officials, planning officials, architects, engineers, commissioners, lawyers, and environmentalists, everybody as a diverse group of people [were present]. We broke them up into groups and [they] ended up being very diverse groups, three groups, all working on these projects. These people don’t normally work together, they oppose each other. The current planning process... “three minutes, thank you, next,” at the town hall meeting, pits people against one another at polar opposites. If we get people together early enough, we can... start working out their differences.

In this process the director first introduced participants to SBC’s approach to sustainability. He explained what he did.

We had an informational session that was three hours long on smart growth, and then we had presentations and then we looked at [other projects] from a regional scale. Actually, we looked nationally. What is going on around the country? Then we took it down to the regional scale and said “this is what is going on at the regional [scale].” Then we took it down to the town, and then we took it down to the site and then we designed the site.

Hence participants were exposed to many best-case scenarios in the Sierra Nevada relating to sustainable land use and design planning. The participants chose the site. This would be an infill redevelopment project and adhere to sustainable planning principles. SBC paid the total cost of the workshop which, the director explains, was worth it.

There was no money to do this. Actually, I made \$800 on this, after I charged for lunch, because I didn’t have any money to pay for this and the

town didn't have any money. We did it as a loss leader. So that was SBC's investment in Truckee, this workshop. And that help built that trust and leverage support for the partnership that we now have. So it worked out well.

After the workshop, SBC partnered with the California Center for Land Recycling and, using the ideas generated from the workshop, applied for a Sustainable Communities State grant for \$350,000. This grant provided the leverage for the City to begin implementing the redevelopment and in early 2004 the project made further progress when Holliday Development purchased the 30-acre site from Union Pacific Rail. The mayor of Truckee told the *Sacramento Bee*, that the project is "a giant step toward realizing our vision of expanding our downtown...this now vacant site is critical in achieving the town's planning philosophy of infill development"<sup>21</sup>. The plan is for a mixed use development, containing housing, commercial, and office space.

The town planning services project also provides towns flexibility in that it allows a sort of political engagement by SBC in a way that a typical government planning department or a hired consultant would not be able to. Hence this paradoxical role of being simultaneously technical advisor, advocate, and facilitator continually emerged within the town planning work. A staff member gave some insight into how this works.

Let's take [town]...for example where there was going to be a downtown plan. Actually, they really didn't know what they wanted. They knew that they needed the community to rally together in order to have a vision... It was just going to be focused in the downtown. Meanwhile, we are doing community workshops and we are talking about the downtown. At the same time, the county is approving commercial development at the edge of town that is impacting the plan. So we put a stop to it. We said, "you can't be doing this while we are trying to develop the downtown; they are competing interests." We put it on hold for six months and I went to the County Council and spoke, had meetings, butted heads with the county manager, and finally they agreed and it became their idea."

The town planning program of SBC is a direct mechanism for implementing SBC's framework of sustainability in the towns of the Sierra. Staff does this by being politically savvy and walking a fine line of engaging stakeholders and putting pressure on decision makers while providing sound technical assistance and usable knowledge to the local planners. The town planning director of SBC can take some risks since he does not directly work for a public agency and is not a developer and because SBC is respected in many communities. Because it is a public interest organization and it can advocate for particular goals when necessary.

The other important role of the town planning program is as a resource for towns throughout the region, whose staff often contact SBC with questions. The office has best practices manuals and presentations from various towns across the Sierra. The program

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<sup>21</sup> "Bay Area developer buys Truckee's historic rail yard." By Barbara Barte Osborn, *Sacramento Bee*, Wednesday, January 21, 2004.

in 2003 had over 12,000 photographs, 150 different award-winning site plans and about 60 different power point presentations on design and planning issues in the Sierra. This information is not gathered together anywhere else. The director said,

My whole office is lined with stuff and they can make a phone call and I can find it. Or if I don't have it, I know who does. It's not documented textbook research. This is on what other [Sierra] communities are doing. These are the things that are in the council minutes of small communities and you don't know this unless you go to those communities.

A concrete example of how SBC's town planning work has helped shape local planning can be seen in its work with the town of June Lake, a resort town located in the Eastern Sierra region of Central California. The June Lake loop connects four lakes, and runs through the town. During the winter, the town is a ski resort area, with its close proximity to Mammoth Mountain, and during the summer, the town's close proximity to Mono Lake and its own lakes (June Lake, Gull Lake, Silver Lake, and Grant Lake) brings visitors, mostly from Southern California. SBC's town planning services program partnered with June Lake officials to develop design guidelines which were to "provide a framework for future development, as well as to clearly define the desired visual character of the area."

The goals of the project were to:

- Develop predictable and clear design requirements.
- Ensure an open process.
- Understand the unique character of June Lake.
- Create detailed visions.
- Write design guidelines to implement the vision.

The principles are compatible with SBC's approach to sustainability and with their principles developed in *Planning for Prosperity*. These include for example: contain growth in and adjacent to existing developed areas, and retain open-space buffers around each area; strengthen the tourist economy by stimulating development of year round recreation facilities; retain a diversity of businesses while protecting natural and scenic resources; and provide residents with quality housing, and visitors with a wide array of housing alternatives.

The process for developing the guidelines was community-based. There were 19 members on the community design committee, appointed by the county supervisors, representing property and business owners, members of the Chamber of Commerce and residents. A total of 25 community meetings was held in a three month period. The committee, working with SBC's town planning staff, developed the guidelines, which provided a vision for development of the town, a policy framework to be used in conjunction with the Mono County General Plan, and specific recommendations for implementation of development projects in the town. They created a set of policy principles which were followed in the report by examples of housing designs, street designs, and commercial designs applying the principles. The June Lake community design guidelines were adopted by the Mono County Board of Supervisors and the



Planning Commission in 2002. There is evidence that the guidelines are being used as a policy document to shape development practices in the county.

A main example is the 2004 Rodeo Grounds Specific Plan for development. Intrawest Corporation is proposing a 90-acre project on this site across from the June Mountain parking lot at the intersection of Highway 158 and North Shore Blvd. The developers must follow requirements in the Mono County General Plan the June Mountain Master Plan, and *The 2002 June Lake Community Design Guidelines*, to get approval for construction. According to Intrawest Corp, they will comply with the design guidelines and their proposal contains specifics about how they will do so.

Interestingly enough, residents who are opposed to the development also are using the *June Lake Community Design Guidelines* as a policy document to make developers accountable. Below are public comments from an advocacy group, June Lake Advocates, on their concern that the developers were adequately using the *June Lake Community Design Guidelines*.

The proposed Intrawest development for the Rodeo Grounds in the June Lake Loop will be opposed in the form of legal, political, and voter action unless the deficiencies below are corrected:

The Developer's "Rodeo Ground Design Guidelines" must be discarded.

The developer will follow the *June Lake Design Guidelines*, which were written to govern development throughout the loop, including the Specific Plan area.

The development will not be designed or intended to act as a separate community or commercial center, but will complement and extend the current village and its character;

The June Lake Design Guidelines specifically intended to avoid the type of "cookie cutter" uniform development planned by the developer, to avoid development of a geographically separate resort and commercial area, and to preserve the unique mountain character of June Lake.

This exchange between the advocacy group and developers least shows that the document is taken seriously and is being used by community groups, developers and the county officials. It has become the focus for the discussion while taking many issues off the table because the document was adopted with wide support and collaborative engagement.

Challenges for the town planning program also emerged, mostly as SBC became inundated by proposals and calls of assistance from towns throughout the Sierra. They originally had only one person working in the town planning program and about 50% of his time was spend responding to questions on technical issues. This left a limited amount of time for the other parts of the program, such as sponsorship and partnering with local city officials. Hence the more substantive aspect of the town planning project, conducting visioning exercises and developing design guidelines, was overshadowed by the technical assistance work.

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<sup>22</sup> *Rodeo Grounds Specific Plan*, 3/24/04, obtained from Mono County Planning Division.

SBC's original town planning director left the organization in 2003. SBC staff emphasized that the success of its programs is not based on one person and hence they have committed resources in replacing the director and continuing work on a *Commercial/Mixed Use Tool Kit*. This is to be a technical guide/manual that provides strategies on how to implement sound planning principles. It is somewhat different from the earlier work which involved hands on direct work with local people on specific projects. The program's success thus far has been very much dependent on the personal skills of the director, the trust he had built and the practice of offering direct service, thus it is still too early in the transition period to predict the future of the program.

## **WORKING LANDSCAPES**

Working Landscapes is a term that has been coined to refer to the open spaces where agriculture, ranching, logging, and similar activities take place. The idea is to find ways to sustain these activities and maintain the open space values they represent in the face of encroaching development. Property taxes and estate taxes all put pressure on ranchers and farmers to sell their land to developers and to give up a way of life that may mean a great deal to them. As a result open spaces disappear and sustainability of the region may be reduced. In light of this, SBC developed its own Working Landscapes Initiative designed originally to help ranchers in the Sierra stay in business by setting up a system where they could sell conservation easements. A conservation easement is a permanent legal agreement that limits the development and subdivision of property. Under an easement, ranchers could work that same land as they always have and even mortgage it, sell it, or leave it to their heirs. The easement remains intact as the property changes hands helping reduce taxes on the property and assuring that the land will stay in ranching.

The Nevada County Land Trust provides a rationale for using easements in the Sierra Nevada:

Ranch owners in the Sierra foothills face a dilemma as they contemplate passing on property to their heirs. As more and more people move to the foothills, open land is becoming increasingly more valuable due to its potential for residential or commercial development. This means that the taxes assessed on property as it is passed from one generation to the next are going up. Estate taxes can be as high as 55% of a property's fair market value. And these taxes generally must be paid within 9 months, often forcing heirs to sell all or part of the inherited land to pay the tax bill. One way for a property owner to keep valuable agricultural land "in the family" is to place a conservation easement on the property. Future owners are bound by the terms of the agreement. For example, an owner might choose to give up the right to subdivide the property, while retaining the right to graze cattle on the land. By lowering the land's future development potential, the easement reduces the property's market value, which, in turn, lowers the estate taxes.

A main component of the Working Landscapes Initiative was assisting landowners by educating them on the financial benefits of attaining agricultural easements on their property. Since 50% of the privately owned land is in working landscapes and a substantial proportion of publicly owned land also falls into this category, this project was strategically important for the future of the Sierra.

The Working Landscapes Initiative's main focus is on protecting the rural character of the Sierra by helping ranchers attain agricultural easements. In order to do this, the project evolved into the following components<sup>23</sup>:

- *Educational workshops*: The Initiative hosts educational workshops by respected professionals on topics from tax planning to ranch diversification.
- *Estate planning referrals*: The Initiative maintains and regularly updates a list of financial professionals who understand the unique estate planning needs of landowners and can help ranchers find ways to keep their ranches in the family.
- *Farmland security zone information*: The Initiative informs landowners about the Farm Security Zone program and other tools for reducing property taxes.
- *Agricultural conservation easement services*: The Initiative helps ranchers understand the benefits (financial and otherwise) of conservation easements and whether they are an appropriate tool for them. It also helps ranchers who want to consider an easement to find the right organization to work with.

The project began in 1997 in the remote Sierra Valley, where Lucy Blake lived. This is one of the largest alpine valleys in the Sierra and forms the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Feather River. In spring thousands of migratory birds stop there while ranchers send their cattle out to pasture. Blake began by talking informally with ranchers, taking the time to really get to know them and their specific needs and building trust. This building of trust occurred around the dining room table over steak and apple pie and long conversations. The idea was to get ranchers to see the financial benefits of acquiring easements on their properties so they could still ranch on the land after the sale. Ranchers began with considerable suspicion of environmentalism. The process of actually convincing them to consider land conservation easements was a difficult one.

A workshop May 1998 with ranchers in the Sierra Valley organized by SBC and the Sonoran Institute launched the project. The workshop began with a discussion of the Sierra Valley's assets and participants' reasons for living and working there. Lifestyle and the rural atmosphere was a big factor, along with the advantages of having neighbors who were neither too near nor too far. Some valued the freedom to do what they want with their own land, and others cited such recreational opportunities as hiking, fishing and hunting. They valued their deep history and roots in the community and the quality of their environment. Their goals were to retain the family-owned ranches and keep them

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<sup>23</sup> Taken from SBC's web site, 2004.

economically viable and to retain the diversity of wildlife along with the quality of the environment and community. An SBC staff member said,

Ranchers are quiet and independent and it was empowering to them to see how many wanted to keep it [the valley] as it was. Their reasons were cultural and not so much environmental. They wanted to discuss estate planning and conservation easement. We helped with the three things they wanted. We protected the largest ranch with combination of money from state Fish and Game, and the Packard Foundation and various other sources. This whole ranch is the most important ecological area in the Sierra.

The result was that the group identified a number of things they wanted to learn, including how to make their business more economically viable. They wanted to learn how to use new tools to preserve the ranches and provide incentives for good ranching practices. Participants thought a new organization could be responsible for such things as a land trust (to buy the easements) and help in variety of ways to organize the ranching community.

Most of the work around the Working Landscapes Initiative occurred behind the scenes, with one-on-one meetings between SBC staff and ranchers. One of the SBC's staff members explained that she

really loved working in the Sierra Valley. That was a very different place entirely. It was slow; it was a lot of meetings around people's kitchen tables. It was a lot of eating steak and apple pie at around eight o'clock at night, and then having a meeting after that. And it was slow building trust and I think the issue there is that this is difficult to quantify. When you are writing to foundations, you make a report and you can't say, yeah, we had six steak dinners and we talked about X...

This slowness, this building of individual relationships with ranchers, was the most important part of the process. SBC staff had to become part of the network that existed in that Valley. There were forums, publications, and a lot of one-on-one time. The forums were usually hosted not by SBC, but by ranchers who were already convinced that easements would be a good thing. This created legitimacy as they were insiders and already possessed the trust needed. An SBC staff member told us in a story that reflected feelings and the situation of many of the ranchers in the Valley,

The first [easement] was a donation of a 92-year old who had managed his 2,000 acres well and did not realize he would have huge estate taxes. So I pointed this out to him and I said "you can donate this." He hated development. I pointed out that the cost basis for the property would go down. They no more had \$500,000 [to pay the taxes] than we could fly to the moon with our arms. "You mean I can rule from the grave?" he said. To him it was heaven. He hated the federal government and wanted to

keep money from them. We put him together with a land trust from the north coast, and they worked it out two months before he died.

According to SBC staff, as of July 2004, a total of 25,142 acres have been protected in the Sierra Valley and another 9,960 acres is under option, meaning that the contract to purchase them can be signed pending funding. The largest easement at that time was 13,100 acres. The goal is to find enough funding for purchasing rural land through easements and keep the ranching industry viable in the Sierra Valley. SBC is continuing to play a brokering role between the ranchers and the land trust. An SBC Board Member commented on the Initiative's impact in the Sierra Valley.

In the Sierra Valley we now have in place conservation easements and I think that in the future, we will be able to bring in more if we get the funding. That [project]...is changing the whole caliber of the discussion up there. It has gone from "oh my gosh, they are going to take your property", to: "now wait a minute, maybe I want to talk about this too. This might be something that my family might want to do too." So that is a huge jump for a very, very conservative ranching community. So have I seen a change, oh boy, big time. I am very proud of that. And it is still happening. It is not going to stop.

In order to institutionalize these practices so that ranchers and others can negotiate these easements on their own without brokering by SBC, Blake began work early on to establish a Sierra Nevada Conservancy to gain access to state funding and coordinate and direct various types of conservation easements. SBC staff told us,

For us the importance of a Conservancy for the Sierra is the funding, but it is also to create a regional institution and build local capacity and shared understanding to set priorities for natural, historic, and cultural preservation.

This effort was to take several years. SBC first organized a Sierra Nevada Conservancy Working group<sup>24</sup>. The group was composed of county supervisors, leaders of environmental advocacy organizations (such as the Sierra Nevada Alliance), representatives of land trusts, corporate businesses, labor, developers, representatives from the ski industry, a representative from the Regional Council of Rural Counties, the Resource Conservation District, the Dean of UC Davis extension, and both of SBC's Presidents. The group with SBC staff assistance prepared the *Sierra Nevada Resource Investment Needs Assessment*<sup>25</sup>. This report followed SBC strategy of building on high quality research and widely accepted data. It showed where working landscapes, watersheds, and habitats were at risk from population growth, changes in the economy and land ownership. It inventoried potential conservation projects, along with funding

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<sup>24</sup> Taken from a report by Kerri Trimmer for the Packard Foundation, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> A Report by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Working Group, July 2002, Sierra Business Council, Truckee, CA.

needs throughout the region. This early effort failed when the bill died after passing the California Senate then failing in the Assembly in 2002.

Finally in September of 2004 with the support of a new Governor and a bipartisan coalition of legislators, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy was enacted into law. It is set up as an independent agency within the state Department of Resources and it is expected to disburse tens of millions of dollars for ecological restoration and sustainable development projects. It will allow many planned restoration projects finally to proceed as well as to continue purchases of conservation easements. Establishing this was no small feat as there was considerable local opposition from people opposed to conservation easements or anything that set land aside and especially opposed to state government making decisions for them. Negotiations resulted in the Conservancy having the unique feature that it will make grants available to local groups which in turn will identify and obtain land they consider important. Blake, Jim Sayer and Steve Frisch SBC's environmental director played major roles in getting legislation passed. It took many years of conversations, negotiations and building of trust. SBC was also able to use the networks they had established with local and state officials and environmental organizations. This is a quintessential example of what SBC has been able to accomplish in the Sierra.

## **ANNUAL CONFERENCES AND MEMBER FORUMS: NETWORKING AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

Since 1995 SBC has hosted an annual conference, which has drawn a growing number of civic leaders from around the region, including businesspeople and leaders of nonprofits and staff from local and regional public agencies. The conference serves as a platform for SBC to share their mission, framework and activities with leaders from throughout the Sierra; as a forum to share best practice stories of sustainable projects; as an opportunity for networking for both SBC staff and participants; as an opportunity for discussion of controversial issues in the Sierra; and finally, as the stage for SBC to recognize member organizations that have well represented SBC's mission and with their 2020 Vision Awards. Each year the conference focuses on a timely issue or a new SBC publication. These, along with a series of member forums on special topics, have become increasingly dynamic events, opportunities for networking and bringing people together from across the Sierra. They are helping to build civic capacity in the region as a result of the education and networking that goes on.

Conferences last for two days and are held in different parts of the region as a way of expanding the reach of SBC. Symbolically the location changes illustrate that they regard their role as an inclusive regional one rather than one centered around Truckee where their offices are. Keynote speakers are drawn from around the state and the country and from different fields. They talk about a wide range of topics, from the renaissance of Chattanooga, to strategies for maintaining natural capital, the role of design excellence, historic preservation, sustainable business practices and natural capitalism. These speakers typically provide vivid examples. The speeches are interspersed with more interactive workshop sessions on topics of interest to participants such as transportation and tourism or conserving working landscapes.

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<sup>26</sup> Sierra Nevada Conservancy in the works, *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, June 11, 2004.

The conferences have evolved over time in their format and objectives, and today they are more inclusive and address a wider range of issues, going beyond the SBC's original focus on the linkage of the environment and the economy. In the first few years conferences were organized around themes of the most recent SBC publication, like the *Index* or *Planning for Prosperity*. SBC used the conferences as part of their educational program and dissemination effort for these publications. In response to feedback from participants, in more recent years conferences have focused on themes often relevant to the immediate surroundings of the conference. For example the ninth conference, which was held at the Mammoth Mountain Resort, had a theme of Partnering for Success in Gateway Communities. The conference addressed issues related to the interdependence of such cities and the national parks or major resorts seeking ways to solve problems and find opportunities. Topics ranged across transportation and infrastructure, relationships with public agencies, the arts, journalism, sustainable business and ski resorts. Discussions focused on bridging the similarities between opposed interests such as the ski industry and environmentalists concerned with ski erosion issues.

These conferences are well designed and implemented, judging by the growth in their attendance despite the costs and distances involved. The post-conference evaluations by participants show almost all respondents' rating the overall quality as good to excellent, as they do for the information covered, the quality of speakers and the amount of time for informal interaction. These evaluations also show that the main reasons for people to attend the conference were first, to learn more about current trends in the Sierra; second, to be reenergized and inspired in leadership work; and third, to network with other attendees. Thus the conference meshed well with SBC educational and capacity building mission. An active citizen in Placer County who has been to most of the annual conferences said,

It is very worthwhile to go there because it is a networking opportunity and has people who are on the same page; you have this bulk of people who are going on the same direction.

In 2003 the conference was expanded to include a preconference day for teams to work together on common problems. These "teams" had made proposals to SBC of topics and membership and SBC selected some for the conference. SBC indicated it would assist the groups in their discussions and potentially afterwards. This innovation has brought in new people and new topics for SBC and helped increase attendance from about 120 to 300 in 2003. In some cases SBC is helping find funding or otherwise to implement the ideas that emerged.

The teams addressed many issues outside the usual scope of SBC's focus on conservation and development. They also wanted to talk about many of the social concerns that these rural communities have. An SBC staff member told us,

The variety of what they did was amazing. There was a team of arts councils—arts and economic development was the theme. This was a theme of *Investing for Prosperity*. Another [team] worked on child care access. There were three teams on land trusts; something on downtown revitalization; branding for Inyo County to attract visitors. There was a

team to talk about the problem of latchkey kids at Mammoth and the resulting crime problems. Some teams met with other teams, like arts met with youth.

Teams also worked on stream pollution and traffic congestion. Each team had two SLS graduates to help facilitate the discussion, and SBC staff acted as coaches as the groups developed action plans. Some of these are being implemented. A team from Lone Pine went home to form a nonprofit organization with the goal of revitalizing their main street. They have already completed a project to restore a historical building. SBC has been directly helped the teams, mostly through fundraising, but in some instances, in implementation.

Besides the official teams, other self-organized groups formed throughout the conference to tackle issues that emerged. The superintendent of Yosemite National Park, explained how a team interested in Yosemite formed spontaneously.

This morning we came together...by word of mouth to discuss how we can collaborate on issues around the park. This was spontaneous; so if people that weren't informed wanted to be a part of this, they could.

This was a group of 10 people, representing diverse interests; such as planning, government, business and community. This is one example of how networking led to new types of dialogues among new groups, and new types of collaborative action.

The networking opportunity at the conference is unusual for the Sierra where distances normally keep people with common problems from meeting or working together. Many of the participants come with specific problems they hope to address either with the help of SBC staff or of another conference attendee. At the 2003 conference, which author Sandoval attended, there were participants who came from small rural towns previously dependent on the timber industry, who were looking for advice on how to convert their mills into another industry. There were attendees interested in setting up a bus shuttle service from their small town to a national park. At the conference they met the Superintendent of Yosemite Park and the ex-mayor of Springdale, Utah near Zion National Park, who had just organized a successful effort to establish a bus connection from community to the park. A group has continued working together around Yosemite and is forming a collaborative partnership to accomplish these goals.

## **THE INYO 2020 FORUM: VISIONING AND FINDING COMMON GROUND**

In Inyo County, everyone was in their small groups and fighting. Once groups reported, they started to see that people were facing the same problems. It got them to step back and let them see the big picture and stop them from fighting over the small things. This led to a report and it is currently still happening with their general plan. It was pretty stunning event.

SBC Staff



Inyo County is at the southeastern end of the Sierra, bordering on Nevada. Though it still depends mostly on ranching and agriculture, the county is struggling with economic vitality. New jobs are dominated by government service sectors and there are large increases in tourist-related work. Rapid change has increased hostility among economic and environmental interests. County staff approached SBC in 1999 with the idea of organizing a visioning exercise based on the principles from *Planning for Prosperity* and the SBC sustainability framework. This was to be a public participation tool to get input into the General Plan update. The goals of the exercise, known as Inyo 2020 FORUM, according to SBC staff, were first, to help residents throughout Inyo County gain a common and integrated understanding of the county's assets—its social, natural and financial capital; second, to help decision makers better understand the public's priorities; third, to inform and complement the update of Inyo County's General Plan, including the economic element; and last, to facilitate the development of an integrated investment strategy to build Inyo County's wealth over the long term. They wanted a wealth index for the County as a starting place. The request was an indication of the degree of confidence that SBC had come to inspire around the Sierra and of the recognition of the value of the *Wealth Index*.

The Forum was cosponsored by the Board of Supervisors, SBC, and the Forum Planning Committee, made up of local civic leaders. The latter organized the Forum and presented its findings to the Board for use in shaping the 2000-2020 General Plan. SBC was responsible for both the education and the public participation aspects of the Forum. The educational component consisted of a small indicators project, called *Inyo County Today*, which described the financial, natural and social capital in the county. This report included such county-specific issues as per capita income, college-bound students, water exported from the Owens Valley, Visitor Trends, and local job and population growth.

The visioning exercise was led by the Inyo County Board of Supervisors with input from SBC, and it engaged public, business and community leaders. Participants were broken into small groups and asked to discuss what they wanted to see in Inyo County in 2020, in terms of the economy, schools, environment, towns, landscape outside town, transportation and communications, and civic and cultural life. Graduates of the Sierra Leadership Seminar traveled at their own expense from around the Sierra to facilitate these working groups. This saved on costs for SBC and provided trained facilitators who understood SBC's sustainability approach. As an SBC board member explains, "when we did Inyo 2020, we needed help, so we just called on our leadership people to voluntarily go down there and help out."

After the visioning exercise, facilitators asked participants to come up with priorities. Participants chose four: Maintain Inyo County's Natural Environment and Rural Quality of Life; Support and Expand Tourism in Inyo County; Improve Government Decision Making in Inyo County; and Improve Health Care, Social Services and Education. The participants created specific recommendations within each of these priorities for the General Plan to address.

## **PLACER LEGACY: PUTTING *PLANNING FOR PROSPERITY* INTO PRACTICE**

Then we started Placer Legacy, and [the developer] called me, and you know, I really did not trust this guy. It turns out that in Placer Legacy, by virtue of this collaborative approach, [this particular developer] and I became great allies and we worked really hard. I kept the environmentalists there, and he worked really hard keeping the developers there. At the end after we completed the whole Placer Legacy, he decided to enroll in the leadership seminar. Now if he had told me that right after we published [Planning for Prosperity], I wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't have understood that you can create that kind of container, where people really get a lot out of hearing the other side.

SBC Staff

Placer County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state largely because of its proximity to Sacramento. Rapid population growth and urban development were threatening the agricultural sectors of the County and the rural quality of life that residents appreciated. It was potentially a “train wreck” in the words of an SBC staff member as its urban development threatened valuable habitat and open space. SBC was interested in organizing a program that would apply the principles and conceptual approach to sustainability in the *Index* and *Planning for Prosperity*. Placer County provided a good opportunity because the Board of Supervisors had already decided that they wanted staff to give them some options about how to protect open space in the county. They had financial resources and excellent planners, but also polarizing debates around land use policy and natural resource protection. Placer County seemed ripe for a sustainability program.

Placer Legacy is an open space protection and agricultural conservation program started in 1997 by the County. It was quietly instigated by Lucy Blake and Tracy Grubbs and has been supported throughout behind the scenes by SBC staff with technical and fund-raising support. It is typical of the SBC working style that the organization has taken a low profile and gotten little public credit. As Lucy Blake said, “If you want to influence planning you want to work with decision makers.” This approach has helped assure that Placer Legacy would be something that the County itself owned and carried forward. The two began by spending one-on-one time with county staff to plant the idea for an aggressive science-based plan for protecting open space. They contended this was important for wildlife, public safety, and natural resource conservation. It took a lot of conversation, but the planning director eventually became enthusiastic. He and SBC staff and SBC members worked to persuade the Board of Supervisors, largely also through one-on-one conversations, that this would be worthwhile. They worked particularly with two members of the Board of Supervisors who usually opposed each other's policies. When both agreed they had an interest in supporting such a program and then took the leading role in public, they gave the whole effort legitimacy. It had the potential to break down polarizing debates in the County. Both the Supervisors and SBC saw this program as a potential model for other Sierra counties.

Placer Legacy was designed to be a complementary document to the update of the County's 1994 General Plan which would show how it could meet the objectives of its open space element. It provided a framework for sustainable development, principles for policy to protect open space and agriculture, and a map of current and protected land use including agriculture and various ecological habitats. It was very much grounded in science as SBC was able to enlist a number of scientists to work with the county in developing it. In 1998, the Board of Supervisors adopted the goals and objectives of Placer Legacy, casting them in a sustainability perspective:

to develop a specific, economically viable, implementation program which will enable the residents of Placer County to preserve a sufficient quantity of resources to maintain a high quality of life and an abundance of diverse natural habitats while supporting the economic viability of the County and enhancing property values.

Since that time the program has continually developed, and active negotiations for land are underway.<sup>27</sup> Nearly a million dollars in grants have been raised for acquisition of land, much of this with the assistance of SBC. The Supervisors put a sales tax increase on the ballot to raise funds. When this failed the County put its own funds into it. Throughout SBC assisted with technical and political assistance. Today a full-time SBC staff member is assigned to Placer Legacy.

### **The Legacy Development Process**

I think we would have succeeded with the Legacy without them [SBC], but they clearly helped us and much more guaranteed that we were going to be successful.

Placer County supervisor

SBC's role was as consultant to the Placer County planning department and the board of supervisors to help organize a stakeholder-driven public participation process and develop and implement the main components of the Legacy program. SBC staff began by holding a meeting with key county supervisors and planning staff, where everyone jointly developed the vision, goals, and objectives for the program. Once the full board adopted the vision and the goals, they asked the county planning department to begin work with SBC on organizing a community advisory committee (CAC) to report to the Supervisors on the progress of the program and provide recommendations for implementation.

The public participation process was designed to be integral to the development of the program and differed from the usual process, which is driven by the California Environmental Quality Act. In the normal situation, the county would have done an Environmental Impact Report after the plan was complete and waited for comment at a county public hearing. The Legacy process was much more collaborative and ongoing, and it started before the Legacy was developed. The CAC played a major role in designing the process and the program. Moreover the input was more in the form of a

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<sup>27</sup> For the 2000 version of the program see <http://www.placer.ca.gov/planning/legacy/plegacy-finaldoc3.pdf>

multiway dialogue than the ritualistic speeches of a public hearing. In addition a range of stakeholders was systematically included. It was not taken for granted that stakeholders would show up to a hearing.

A senior county planner who worked on Legacy told us that it ended up with a broad base of support. He did not believe this would have been the case if they had gone about the process in the usual way. He contended that SBC brought in a great deal of support from the private business sectors, built a constituency around the program, and that they were able to enlist high level assistance from major organizations that were key to their success.

SBC was able to engage more people and add more levels, to gain a broader support than we would have had otherwise. And probably open some doors into conservation funding that we would have never been able to open. A local planning department does not routinely work with very high level staff at the Trust for Public Lands. We would never engage each other; we would have no business in engaging each other, other than at the front counter because they might have some questions about some property. And now we are in a partnership with them [The Trust] and other organizations like that. That would never have happened without SBC. We have also gained in understanding the opportunities that there are to work with the state-level in gaining access to legislatures. It put the county's name out there as a county willing to do conservation.

A Placer Legacy committee member emphasized the importance of collaborative skills, which were lacking in early meetings,

I did the very first meeting that they had, the very first public outreach that they had. There must have been 150-200 people in the room. Then we broke them into groups and I acted as a facilitator. From the get go it was clear they should have all had a collaboration course. If there were a recommendation to anyone who is starting this sort of process, it would be that that should happen before you ever get into these meetings that ask people to start making decisions. You should give them a session, an hour talk, if you could condense it into an hour, of what it means to work collaboratively. I am so used to it that I am amazed now when it doesn't happen. It is a way to get things done without hurting people's feelings or stepping on their toes. People realize that you can differ, you can have different views or opinions and that you are not attacking them personally. Feedback is a gift, but how many people understand that?

SBC had to also build trust with the supervisors. At first, some of the business interests, like timber, were uncertain whether SBC would be a facilitator during the process or just try to ram their agenda through. SBC told us they had committed to partnering with the County and that, as a partner, they were going to listen to everyone and pull people together. The CAC was organized by Supervisors Rex Bloomfield and Jim Williams, one representing the development community and the other with more of

an environmental orientation. The supervisors, county staff and SBC staff interviewed many stakeholders and came up with a diverse set of participants. The committee was representative of the county, including among its members a developer, someone who represented large-scale farming, someone who represented small-scale farming, a city planner, an attorney, and a member from Hewlett Packard representing a growing industrial sector. It was also geographically diverse, as people represented all parts of the county. This was a volunteer effort which demanded a huge time commitment lasting two years so members presumably cared deeply about the issues. One member told us that the committee members

had different ideas and different attitudes and different interests, and different people who represented different areas from the county - not necessarily people who had been highly involved before, but who, Board members felt, would truly represent and contribute in a collaborative way.

A supervisor described how they dealt with someone they had not chosen for the committee.

There was a representative from the local Building Industry Association [BIA], who was very concerned about the direction of the program. And even though I had a good relationship with BIA and the pro-business groups, they were really afraid about what the result could be. He wanted to be a member of the committee. The board was very self-confident about what we had done, and why we had done it. We had a very diverse board, and we did not want to change the membership because we had already selected people. But we invited this person to participate and we always wanted to hear his concerns, but individually. And in the end, he was one of the strongest supporters of the policy document.

This person later went on to take the Sierra Leadership Seminar.

It was not easy to get public support for Placer Legacy. One important reason they were successful was that the leadership came from the board of supervisors, which was a conservative group. Even though it was SBC which planted the seeds for the concept, it was the board members who staked their reputation on the program. The board was made up of Republicans who had a lot of legitimacy in the business community and among landowners in this conservative county. One Supervisor explained,

Every vote that has come to the board of supervisors regarding Legacy has been unanimously passed. And this was with policy which was fairly dicey. The public takes regarding Legacy were as intense as anything I have seen, but we were able to pass everything. Including today, when we are doing more of the implementation. They were committed to genuine collaboration and had the citizens advisory committee in place. Another key to our success is the fact that Legacy was started by the board of supervisors. It was our notion.

He went on to describe how they had to take the shots from the critics, but that having a strong reputation among the business sectors helped them maintain their political legitimacy in this process.

The other form of legitimacy came from the public outreach that SBC and the CAC engaged in with the stakeholders throughout the county. The CAC had been given a one-day training in collaborative process by Susan Carpenter, and two members of the board of supervisors had gone through the leadership seminar. Armed with this experience, CAC made sure the public engagement process was inclusive. The CAC began working with the public in specialized working groups on topics including recreation and habitat protection, where people came to participate to listen, ask questions, and contribute. The county published the results of these working groups. The working groups and the CAC fine-tuned these into recommendations for the planning department. In addition SBC worked with the CAC to hold seven community forums later in the process. Finally, SBC and the planning staff worked together to carve out specific recommendations to go to the board. The board approved all the recommendations staff presented to them.

SBC's work with individual stakeholders throughout the region was not only important to the legitimacy of the program, it also helped SBC better understand the issues and interests in the county beyond those represented on the CAC and incorporate them into the Legacy process. An SBC staff member explained how SBC played a unique and critical role:

Government can't do this and that's why they would turn to a non-profit to play this role. For example, one of my main roles was to meet one-on-one with stakeholders. Stakeholders are not limited to CAC members sitting at the table. Stakeholders are people that have the power to block; people that have an interest, like financial interests, groups that aren't at the table... We only had an 11-member advisory committee. You can imagine that there were probably about 100 people in the community who thought they deserved to be on that committee. So I would meet with these individuals. What we did was to identify the people that were actually stakeholders... A lot of my time was spent talking to them, finding out what their individual concerns were, and then making sure that those concerns were addressed as we worked through the CAC process. That is very difficult for government to do because they don't have the time. More importantly, it is often seen as a conflict of interest for government to do that. On the other hand a non-profit can do that relatively easily.

A Placer County planner acknowledged the importance of working with a nongovernmental partner like SBC.

The ability to take advantage of SBC's flexibility was really important. If we had to do something it would take us months to do, and they could do it in 48 hours. Yet they need us because they could not implement this program by themselves.

SBC and the county split the responsibilities in terms of the funding and the other work. SBC helped to get scientists from the University of Nevada, Reno and the University of California, Davis to serve on the Legacy's scientific working group. SBC had a communications network that the county government did not have, especially with the business sector. SBC kept a high level of engagement with a broad set of stakeholders throughout the county that county staff would not have had time or even legitimacy to do on their own.

The fact that the Legacy preparation process was highly collaborative from the beginning was crucial to its success. Through collaboration and dialogue the stakeholders developed trust of the program, its process and each other. The stakeholders began to see that they were all sharing the same problem and that their interests were better served working together on this program than by maintaining their own ground. This type of collaborative participation was novel for the county, and SBC needed to gain the trust of the supervisors in the process to make it effective. One SBC staff member considered that the supervisors'

willingness to go along with this process was entirely dependent on their learning along the way that they could trust it. It was a matter of honoring their input, but also showing them where the other input was from the community so that they were really aware of all the interests and the political considerations of those interests. It was getting them to see that they could trust people and that they could trust us as their partners ... to really work towards an action-oriented solution to what they saw as a major community problem.

This trust of the process was very important, as supervisors were the ones with the policy influence to implement the program and the ones whose reputation was on the line. They had to relinquish a lot of their power during this collaborative effort. This is very difficult for public officials and more often than not, they refuse to do so.

The work of building trust among the other stakeholders throughout the county, representing vastly different interests and positions was equally difficult. A staff member explained how they did this. It was a tricky process.

With many of the stakeholders, you have to establish trust. You have to listen to what they say, and you have to make sure that what you are taking down really represents their concerns. You have to know enough about the issue to know that the concern they are expressing is their true concern rather than a stalking horse for something else. And you have to take it into the process and to really honor the outcome and be able to go back to them and say, "I took this to the CAC. This is the date, the issues, the outcome, and this is how I think it addresses your concerns. Do you have any additional concerns that you want me to bring to the committee"...you have to build trust and the only way to do that is by actually doing what you said you were going to... I think that the one-on-one meetings were incredibly important. You also, by the way, can't be

afraid to go back and tell somebody, “The committee understands your concerns, but decided not to take any action on them. They are outside of the scope of this plan or it is something that they feel they can’t deal with in this process; or they dealt with it and you lost”... You can’t be afraid to say, “I’m really sorry. You had this concern and I know this isn’t the outcome you wanted, but it was included in the discussion.”

## Outcomes

The Sierra Nevada is a huge region -- 20 million acres -- and of that, about 5-7 million are in private ownership. I don’t care how much money you raise, you will never buy that land. If your goal is good natural stewardship, buying the land is only one tool. The most important tool is changing how people make decisions. And to me, that’s the most successful part of Placer Legacy.

SBC staff

Placer Legacy put land conservation policy at the forefront of planning decisions. It is not an official element of the General Plan, but it is designed to provide specifics for the open space element of the Plan. It supplements existing conservation programs, provides data, coordination and funding for park facilities, habitat protection, and agricultural open space. It is an information resource for environmental assessments and discretionary land use decisions throughout the county. The open space and agricultural plan calls for the protection of 75,000 acres of land at a cost of \$185 million, plus the formulation of a Habitat Conservation Plan and a Natural Communities Conservation Plan for the County.

Since 2001 the project has turned to implementation. One of the first things the County did was to try to raise the money for the project by placing two measures on the November 2000 election: Measure V, which endorsed the use of general county funds in this project, and Measure W, a ¼ cent sales tax to help provide initial project funding. Measure V was able to pass with 56% vote, while Measure W failed with nearly 73% voting against it.

However, the county has dedicated general funds for the implementation of Legacy, setting aside \$11 million for land acquisition. The county has already completed a restoration project with state open space funding. Land purchased as of mid 2004, included eleven properties totaling about 5,000 acres, and the county is in negotiation over others. Obtaining the massive funding needed has been a limiting aspect of the program though the Sierra Nevada Conservancy may make this easier.

Through the process of developing Legacy, the planning department has shifted its way of working to focus on natural resources. A county senior planner said,

We moved from organizing planning around a geographic breakdown of the county, to an approach specifically focusing on natural resources... It is relatively unusual for a planning department of this size to have five full-time staff working on natural resources.



The program is working on the protection of seven watersheds, the development of a detailed geographic information system showing open space and agriculture resources, and assisting farming in the western part of the county, along with its land acquisition program. Overall Placer Legacy has acquired some land, created a framework of sustainable development for protecting open space, contributed to institutional change in land use decision-making, and created new dialogues on land conservation which have brought opposing sides together. Placer Legacy won the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award, which recognizes organizations that have "demonstrated exceptional leadership and made notable contributions in conserving our precious resources, protecting and enhancing our environment, and building public-private partnerships." The award cites the Legacy, the supervisors, and SBC for recognizing the need to balance growth in this fastest growing of California counties with a proactive conservation effort. It cites the public participation component, the involvement of multiple jurisdictions, the outreach and the science-based conservation objectives.

### **NATURAL HERITAGE 2020: A MISSTEP FOR SBC**

As soon as you use the "environment" word you see a twitch in their neck and they make environmental protection seem like a communist cause. You start talking about protecting habitat and they think it is a U.N plot. They picture the black helicopters. The paranoia about conservation is extreme and unfounded. There are all these retirees who show up whenever there is an issue and talk about property rights and the Constitution.

Environmental Activist

In 1998, a new board of supervisors was elected in Nevada County, neighboring on Placer. Conservative supervisors were replaced by more liberal and conservation-oriented people, giving the left a 4-1 majority on the board. One of these was a long time member of SBC and personal friend of Lucy Blake's. This majority wanted to embark on a program similar to Placer Legacy. Blake was interested because SBC's original intent was for Placer Legacy to serve as a model for other counties. Placer County's Republican-dominated board was much more conservative than this new Nevada County board so it seemed likely that it would be easier to establish a program here than it had been in Placer. A staff member said, "We thought, 'ok now that the environmentalists hold the reins of power, it will be a cakewalk to get an open space land plan.'" The new Board invited SBC to help them design and implement the program and organize the public outreach process. SBC set up a memorandum of understanding with the Board that SBC would pay for the public engagement process.

The project was called Natural Heritage 2020 (NH2020). Its tasks were: 1) to conduct a scientific survey of the County's natural assets; 2) to protect working landscapes; 3) to develop open space and recreation programs; 4) to develop ways to pay for protection of the County's natural resources program. It was to involve a two-year public participatory process to create a natural resource and landscape protection program with SBC working with county staff. They planned for five phases: public forums; working group recommendations; a community advisory committee finalizing

recommendations; recommendations going to the Nevada County board of supervisors; and public voting on Natural Heritage 2020 programs.

It was also supposed to “provide a scientifically accurate account of the distribution and characteristics of Nevada County’s ecosystems and plant and animal species.” A scientific advisory committee was established, and SBC provided financial support for the biological resource data collection and analysis, preparation of electronic databases and printed reports, and also facilitated coordination between this committee and the citizen advisory committee. The report was to be used for the next General Plan update and for decision makers to have better access to information when implementing or planning development projects that affect natural resources in the county.

Unfortunately for SBC and the board, this process was not as linear as they had envisioned. Indeed it was to blow up amid bitter controversy and eventually SBC withdrew. Some members of the board lost the next election, in part because of the controversy. The nascent program was dismantled before it could be implemented. It was to be a good lesson in many respects for SBC about the importance of groundwork and conflict assessment before beginning a project and about the unique characteristics of each community that prevent simply transferring a program from one into another.

Although the plan for developing NH2020 was supposedly modeled on Placer Legacy’s process, in practice the process was very different. Instead of spending many months before starting getting the support of supervisors and key stakeholders on different sides, SBC and the supervisors made the idea of this program public at the very beginning. Instead of setting up a carefully selected community advisory committee to design and support the process from the beginning, they began with public meetings. Though NH2020, like Placer Legacy, had policy backing from the General Plan, which called for mitigation measures around natural resource protection, the Plan did not specify what types of measures would be implemented. Moreover property rights activists in the county who had closely monitored the Placer Legacy were ready from the outset to oppose the project. They had learned from their associates in Placer County that opponents there had been caught off guard and did not mobilize until the program was well under way. Nevada County opponents were determined to put a stop to the process right away. An SBC board member told us,

I know people who were involved in Placer County and the people involved in Nevada County. They are the same. What happened in Placer County was they waited too long to try to shut it down. They waited till the end of the process when there were public hearings and recommendations. By then too many people had bought into it. Opponents learned from Placer County and their mistakes. They are not dumb; they learned right away. They were smart enough to figure out their strategy, but we were oblivious to it.

The process of preparing NH2020 started with five public meetings in various locations around the county. These were designed for staff to present the background of the project and the reasons for it and to explain the role SBC was to play. Anyone from the community was allowed to come. This differed from Placer Legacy in that SBC had a higher profile from the outset and in that the outreach meetings were held at the

beginning rather than part way through the process after a representative community advisory committee had been at work. It also differed in that SBC staff had not held one-on-one meetings with the various stakeholders to understand the politics. While they broke the participants in these public meetings into small groups for discussion, as they did in Legacy, the result was very different. Staff reported that the opposition did not engage in discussion, but instead criticized the whole idea—even though at this point there was no formulated project. Many participants just seemed interested in letting SBC know why they hated the project and why they did not want to discuss it. A Nevada County supervisor reported on that first experience,

At our very first meeting, before we had done anything, we had organized protesters at the meeting—leading advocates for the Building Industry Association, trying to stop the process. People with yellow armbands on. People were being threatened at our very, very first meeting, so it was a very serious indication that trouble was to come.

The supervisors appointed a 19-member citizen’s advisory committee (CAC) but did not include opponents. One told us their reasoning,

The problem with the collaborative stakeholder strategy is that if you invite people into that collaborative who are dedicated to blowing it up, it will not work...There is no way that anybody else is going to be allowed to collaborate with those people in the room. And if you don’t let them participate, then they stand outside and throw bombs and yell at you.

According to the field director of the California Association of Business, Property and Resource Owners, a requirement on the application for membership on the committee was to sign a statement saying, “I have read and support the goals, objectives, and process outlined for the NH2020 in the Program Proposal Document.” In her view this requirement possibly undermined the entire process.<sup>28</sup> This requirement seemed to be a way for the supervisors to limit who could be on the CAC, but in a genuinely collaborative effort these goals and objectives would have to be jointly agreed after dialogue, not before. Thus CAC ended up without broad representation and the opportunity to work out differences. This committee held monthly public meetings in which they entertained comments from the people who attended. These were to be contentious events.

Three working groups of additional volunteers were set up, one on recreation, one on forestry, and one on agriculture. After a year of meetings and public forums the groups each developed a report and a series of recommendations. Recommendations of the recreation committee included things like “support two new park districts” and “place recreation facilities near population centers.” This group made several recommendations about using recreation as an economic catalyst and about ways to protect property rights. The Forestry group was equally cautious in reflecting the concerns of the opposition, giving not only recommendations on protections from forest fires, but also on creating new markets for timber supplies and tax breaks and incentives for landowners.

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<sup>28</sup> As quoted in “Conjunction Junction” op. cit, p 16.

Meetings were getting more and more emotional. One supervisor told us, I remember going into some of the community meetings and people would stand up and start crying and begin to call me by name and beg me not take away their homes. They were being so manipulated and nothing that we said would get through.

The public participation process was very heated, and SBC was caught between the property rights people and the board of supervisors. It led to a quick escalation of attacks in the media, churches, and through informal networks of business owners in Nevada County. Opponents threatened SBC staff by telephone. They succeeded in turning what originally seemed a non-political aspect of the program into a politically charged conflict. CAC had organized an advisory committee of outside scientists, whose job it was to develop a natural resource inventory of species for habitat management based on existing data. This was a mandated requirement of the General Plan. Opponents claimed the data would be used against private property owners and would result in the government taking their land. They also claimed that the data were flawed, though they were collected by government agencies outside the county. None of this is surprising as good practice in collaborative processes includes joint fact finding and getting agreement on data before moving forward.

SBC tried to teach participants facilitative skills, but they had some staff losses and changes that came at a bad time from the supervisors' perspective.

We were left without staff from SBC for about six months. So we had nobody blocking against these waves of misinformation—claims that we were sneaking into people's property and planting red-legged frogs, that we were making up data, and that we were going to take people's property.

SBC brought Placer County supervisors in to help them with this process, but the strategy backfired, according to a Nevada County supervisor.

They brought up Placer County supervisors and had them share their ideas with people here, but nobody here cared. In fact people in the business community thought "who cares what these people think? Why aren't you coming to me?" SBC misjudged; thinking "Well, this town is the same as that town and what works in one town will work in another." The fact that these are Republicans from this county; it will impress the Republicans in the other. It didn't.

SBC and the board of supervisors had made some fatal mistakes. They not only had not done the groundwork of conflict assessment and assembling allies, they excluded from the process some of the most oppositional people who had political influence in the county. In retrospect, SBC's staff member in charge of the program acknowledged this mistake both of SBC and the board, which chose the citizen's advisory committee. This allowed the opposition to simply refuse to participate in the dialogue and become truly

disruptive by attacking the program from the outside, through the media, at supervisors meetings, and public panels. Another SBC staff person working closely with NH2020 commented,

Actually, I think that some of the people who turned out to be the most vocal about their opposition had applied to be on the community advisory committee, but were rejected. One of them ended up being elected supervisor [in the following election]. He had written a letter to the editor of the newspaper prior to the application process for the community advisory committee, saying what a terrible project 2020 was and he could never support it.... So it didn't make any sense to put someone on the committee who was against it in the first place.

But the program may not move forward if the person excluded is important to making the deal. She added,

And there is another guy who works for the Sierra Pacific Industries, the big timber company, which owns the most private land in California. They had one of their staff people apply. He was a person that others had worked with before. They believed that he would not be able to be truly collaborative and put his personal feelings aside and be part of this group. The timber guy that was chosen was a private timber guy and didn't represent a large corporation. So we were criticized for putting someone on that committee that actually didn't represent the interests of lumber industry. We had someone who cuts firewood and who does other sorts of timber activities, but the timber folks in the community didn't feel like they had a person that truly represented their interest. I think that they were right.

A licensed professional forester, who worked on private lands, put his negative views of NH2020 in a letter to the *Nevada City Free Press*.<sup>29</sup> He made it clear that for him it was the process that went wrong. He resigned from the timber subcommittee because, he contended, it was "a flawed, biased process that cannot be repaired or made fair from the bottom rung, subcommittee level." He complained that the process was completed before the first forum and that the board of supervisors appointed "mostly like-minded environmentalists and retired government workers who do not work their land or work in the private sector." He said that the requirement to sign on to the NH2020 goals forced many farmers, ranchers, landowners, and miners not to apply for the community advisory committee. He pointed out that not one large landowner was included. He himself and all the other foresters who applied were turned down. He complained too that the science advisory committee was handpicked and included all wildlife habitat researchers. He thought there should be some conflicting advice and compromise between different perspectives.

The exclusion of strong stakeholder interests hurt the legitimacy and effectiveness of the entire process. The opponent who had been rejected became the strongest fighter

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<sup>29</sup> Issue no. 10, September 27, 2001

against the project and even gained enough political support to win the following supervisorial election, though by a narrow margin.

An SBC staff member described the tension that developed between SBC and the supervisors as the latter insisted on going forward with a process that seemed to be going downhill.

When the program first got opposition, SBC came to the board and said, “We need to back off from this thing,” and the supervisors said, “No, we have the majority here. We have four of us here and we are going to ram this thing through.” And their constituency, the political machine that gave them money to get elected, said, “don’t do a collaborative process, just do what you want, you have the board.” The board of supervisors said, “No, we want to change the dynamics of how this community functions. We want to do a community visioning process that is collaborative and we want to bring people together.” The people who had backed them said, “no,” and walked away from supporting the NH2020 program to a large degree.

He continued describing the drama:

Then the board of supervisors just pushed and said, “we are going to do this.” It just became an escalating conflict... All along SBC kept saying, “let’s get control of this; let’s go ahead and lower the temperature here. Let’s rethink what we are doing.” The supervisors said, “No, we are pushing through it.” And it ended up in two of them being defeated in November.

The opposition which SBC and the supervisors confronted in Nevada County can hardly be overstated. The property rights advocates were extremely passionate about their cause. Opponents started two groups, Protect Your Property Rights and Citizens for Property Rights. According to staff they “started a whole movement and set up web sites that said: “the Constitution of the U.S. is the only thing of value; property rights are sacred; law-abiding Americans need to follow constitutional law.” Opponents blanketed the county with four by eight-foot signs that said, “Stop NH2020” or “Protect your property rights.” SBC staff working on the project actually felt that their personal safety was in danger, as property rights advocates sometimes brought guns to the meetings. One of the opposition leaders was so violent that eventually he was arrested for soliciting a hit man to kill his neighbor. Needless to say it was not a climate of dialogue or collaboration.

Ultimately, the program was cancelled when the newly elected board of supervisors took control. Opponents were elected county supervisors. They took down the web site and tried to take the report off the library shelves, though they were unable to due to freedom of speech requirements.

## Outcomes

Interviewer: What were the outcomes of NH2020?

SBC Staff: Besides my own nightmares?

The one concrete output from NH2020 is the *Nevada County Natural Resources Report* which was published in 2002 by the Nevada County Planning Department. This will certainly have considerable use because it is an information resource for the General Plan and for planning decisions. Other outcomes may be changes in attitudes for some of the people who worked together and recommendations which may get used at some point. An SBC staff member cites,

the specific recommendations from the agricultural community, a group that holds most of the land in Nevada County, but who mostly cannot make a living off the land so their only alternative is development. They are the ones who are the most weary and paranoid about government and most concerned about the Nature Conservancy and easements. [The making of the document] got us into a position where we put them into a room and we started working together and found out that we all had similar interests, and we produced his great body of work on how to protect agricultural lands in Western Nevada County.

Because the recommendations and the NH2020 report itself were not adopted and the document was largely eliminated from the public view, however, any results will be limited to informal outcomes of the learning and agreements made among a subset of citizens.

Most of the outcomes would be considered negative. A former supervisor told us, It deeply divided the community. I believe that developers who wanted to come in and put in subdivisions seized this opportunity to switch the board of supervisors. They did not want us there, because we had a pretty strong environmental focus. The power of the community changed. When we started this project, of the supervisors, four were progressives and one conservative. Nevada Heritage 2020, I believe was the primary issue responsible for getting us thrown out of office.

The new board of supervisors tried to dismantle what remains of NH2020—even going as far as trying to get the copies of the natural resources report taken off the public libraries shelves<sup>30</sup>! These are serious outcomes from a project that seemed to have potential for changing the debate over natural resource protection.

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<sup>30</sup> Although the board tried to take the natural resource report off the public library shelves, they were not able to, given freedom of speech, therefore the report is still on the shelves.

## Lessons Learned

NH2020 ran into difficulties because SBC tried to use a program and process developed in Placer and superimpose it on Nevada County. SBC underestimated the opposition and did not anticipate their passion. There was little prior conflict assessment done as supervisors rushed into the project rather than following the slow, incremental process of Placer Legacy. An SBC board member noted that the opposition was able to take advantage of this by refusing to participate in the process and attacking it from the outside. A staff member looking back said,

The institution-building that takes place in a multi-party stakeholder dispute, of the reaching out to the constituency, couldn't happen, because it was too volatile and there were too many unknowns. People thought that the best alternative to a negotiated agreement...was to just win the election and kick the bastards out. So as long as people held on to that idea, there was no way that sitting down at the table with their enemy was of use.

She said she learned from her experience in Placer.

Part of it, is really examining who your allies are and who they know in their community. And fortunately in Placer we had a board that had political connections, far and wide.

Another staff member felt they would have been better off had they used the lesson taught in SLS,

Frankly, I don't think we followed the techniques taught at our leadership seminar. I think we did not use them to their full effectiveness. There are many techniques we could have used that we did not because we got so hammered in the first couple of efforts.

A liberal Nevada County supervisor believed that SBC did not sort out the political issues ahead of time. They swerved from their theory of change of working with the conservative business community and the effort backfired. This supervisor contended they should have worked with all the stakeholders.

I think this is one of the big lessons that SBC should take home. That in Placer County and Inyo County they were working with the wealthy good old white boys. They had the idea that a good collaborative stakeholder meeting meant that all the wealthy white boys were invited. Not to make it a racial issue, but this is just the case.... The wealthy big landowners ran the Inyo County board of supervisors, ran the Placer County board of supervisors and used to run this one. They run just about all of them in the Sierra Nevadas. So SBC was ...working with the powers that be to do something about the environment. They were making sense, coming from



a business perspective. Then [SBC] came here and started working with, not the powers that be, even though we were the elected officials. We were the newcomers. We did not represent a large landed gentry. We represent a new people. SBC was welcomed in by Republicans in all of these other counties. They came here and were welcomed by this board of supervisors, but the Republicans did not like this board of supervisors. It was the perfect way to hurt us. That is an important comparison, yet SBC tried to use the same process [as in Placer] but the power structure was upside down, so it just kept getting worse.

A Placer supervisor offered the view that SBC had so much trouble in NH2020 because the project was labeled an outsiders' project, by contrast with Placer Legacy, which was seen as an insiders' project. He described his shocked reaction when he saw a business card that an SBC staff member was carrying that said, "Project Manager of NH2020".

Some of them were scared to death. Some of them thought that SBC was the Sierra Club.... If there was somebody prancing around in our county who had a business card from an outside entity...it is one thing for me to take hits and say, "I endorse this program. I support this program." But I was one of the five people who gave direction to our staff to go ahead with it... And we have a very smart planning director and he has been around here for 25 years. If we had brought in an outsider to be the staff person, we would have been killed. We took a lot of shots and a lot of criticism from a lot of the private property activists.

It was difficult to criticize a pro-business, Republican, conservative board of supervisors in Placer County for catering too much toward environmental interests. They could give the idea of sustainability legitimacy in a conservative county, as a more liberal board could not do in Nevada County. Moreover SBC's much more visible role in Nevada County gave the opponents more ammunition and credibility to argue this was an outsider effort.

The mistakes of NH2020 can be briefly summarized and understood by comparison with Placer Legacy. SBC did not do a conflict assessment, as is good practice in collaborative processes, though they did do it in Placer. They did not assure they had support before proceeding. Staff allowed the supervisors to dictate how it should be done instead of working with them to develop a mutually agreeable process. They allowed their role to come out publicly at the beginning. They did not include antagonistic stakeholders. They did not have a community advisory committee in place at the beginning to design the process and get buyin from everyone. Since this time SBC has developed a process to assess all potential projects along several dimensions before proceeding. They clearly will be more cautious in the future.

## ***INVESTING FOR PROSPERITY: BUILDING FINANCIAL CAPITAL***

In 2003 SBC produced a long planned companion piece to *Planning for Prosperity* which addressed how to protect natural capital in the Sierra Nevada. The new document was designed to help communities to build their financial capital that is their economies. It laid out four strategies that were conceptually simple and easy to remember including: Capitalize on Existing Assets; Cultivate Innovation; Create Long Term Social Capital, and Catalyze Community Partnerships. For each broad strategy, it offered several specific tactics, along with case examples of each from around the country. For example under Catalyze Community Partnerships, a tactic was Create a Culture of Collaborative problem solving, using examples from Placer Legacy and Tupelo, Mississippi. What the document terms “social capital” would perhaps be more accurately labeled human capital in keeping with the economic objectives of the document. It addresses health services, education and housing rather than the more common usage of social capital as trust, networks and civic capacity. This report was designed to help a region that has been hit hard by the closure of many of its lumber mills, and many communities are in transition from an economy mostly based on natural resource extraction, to something new and largely yet undefined. The tourist industry has always been strong. It remains one of the economic pillars that the Sierra towns can depend on but it cannot be the basis for a diversified and sustainable economy.

An SBC staff member described *Investing for Prosperity* as something different from an economic development manual.

This will be broader than your standard economic development book focusing on typical infrastructure and business development. We are focusing on creating an entrepreneurial sector, social capital, regional and cooperative planning. Then we give fourteen tactics to do this. What we try to do is a decent amount of depth by getting people to think about the case studies we provide.

Like *Planning for Prosperity*, *Investing for Prosperity* is a readable document, easy to skim through for particular information, illustrated by both photos and brief but vivid stories which give the reader ideas about how a tactic might be implemented. It is not didactic and does not propose a simple set of steps everyone should follow. Rather, it follows the successful model of the earlier document of giving principles and examples that can help the user to think about how a principle may be applied in his/her own community. The new document is richer than the first in terms of the number of stories and examples. The case examples serve many purposes, not the least of which is to show that something can be done. They can inspire people and can show entrepreneurs can be innovative and create change in their communities.

A staff member emphasized that *Investing* focuses on successful diversification of different areas, industries and business. How do you invest for the long term in a community, especially when you are so tourist-dependent? .... it does a good job of looking at rural areas in the U.S. and how you draw in art councils, museums, theater programs.

The process of developing *Investing for Prosperity* was different from *Planning for Prosperity* because Research Director Horne visited many of the places that emerged as the case studies, speaking to the entrepreneurs who made the projects happen and getting to know the context. She combined theories on economic development; industry-based clustering and development, reciprocal social networks, with these real on-the-ground stories about people and communities. These stories became the basis for the manuscript. The idea was that stories really communicate ideas to people that dry manuscripts filled with economic theories and jargon on economic development do not. An SBC staff member told us “With stories you can bring hearts in and that brings people in. You can say lofty profound, spiritual things and you start saying things that brings people in”. During the writing process Horne also took drafts of the manuscript to various people throughout the region for their feedback.

Once the book was completed, the entire SBC organization mobilized and started publicizing the document throughout the region. They publicized it at their 2003 Conference, in workshops throughout the region and state, and during other conferences relating to issues in which SBC is involved. Staff set up meetings with the local civic organizations in the East Sierra, such as the Rotary Club, the Lions Club, and also the Board of Supervisors to discuss the volume. The outcomes of *Investing for Prosperity* cannot be adequately assessed at this time as it was only published in late 2003. As of January 2004, SBC had conducted over 30 presentations to stakeholders around the region with approximately 2000 books distributed. The books have been distributed to local politicians and SBC members. SBC has also sold several hundred copies. One thing that SBC does well with its publications is to disseminate them and provide plenty of interactive opportunities for them to be discussed in communities.

## **ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Overview of SBC**

SBC’s web site currently bills the organization as,

a resource for business leaders, government officials, and other decision-makers seeking solutions to local and regional challenges. Our work includes research, policy analysis, public education, leadership development, and collaborative initiatives with local partners.

It also contends in what is an accurate, though somewhat incomplete, view of their strategy.

The Council represents a new approach. Our perspective is regional; clearly the challenges our communities face are more alike than different. Our tactics are proactive and collaborative; creative solutions rarely emerge without effective leadership. Our approach is long-term and inclusive; nothing else will ensure our region’s lasting prosperity.

The Sierra Business Council has been overall a successful organization, gaining high marks from participants in most of their activities and being able to demonstrate outcomes from their many initiatives. (See Table 2). It has operated by keeping its focus on the idea embodied in their capital investment diagram—that the Sierra’s wealth has three independent components, financial, natural and social and that they are not in conflict, but support each other. SBC has a diverse array of activities, each of which reflect and promotes this concept. The overarching theory of change has been demonstrably successful as the organization has worked with the business community and conservative, but not right wing, elements to reframe their understandings of wealth and show them how a healthy environment benefits their businesses. It has worked with conservative farmers and ranchers to show them how they can protect their lands from development and high taxes. They have worked with planning staff to help produce plans and guidelines that reflect their view. They have throughout maintained that the way to implement this sustainable vision is through collaboration among interests and inclusion of all key stakeholders in dialogues from early on in the process of developing projects. The power of this strategy was made more evident when SBC strayed from it in Nevada County. There they partnered with liberal environmentalists who excluded some points of view from the dialogue. As a result the project was never implemented and SBC lost some credibility for a time.

**TABLE 2. OUTCOMES OF SBC PROJECTS**

<b>PROJECT</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
<b>Wealth Indexes</b>	Framed sustainability concept. Focused attention on issues. Provided a well used data source. Provided a basis for other project Increased SBC visibility in the region
<i>Planning For Prosperity</i>	Provided a framework for SBC’s and others work toward sustainable land use. Reference manual used by planners. Audit resulted in changed practices. Daniel Burnham Award for this model document
<b>Placer Legacy</b>	Identified valuable habitat and conservation areas. Introduced science into the decision making. Placer County allocated staff resources to this. Adopted by Supervisors as official policy County set aside \$11 million for land acquisition. 5,000 acres protected by mid 2004. Governor’s Award on Economy and the Environment.
<b>Natural Heritage 2020</b>	Nevada County Resources Report, used for planning. Conservation-minded supervisors lost election. Increased division and polarization around conservation. SBC learned about value of groundwork and need to develop projects individually and collaboratively with all stakeholders.
<b>Sierra Leadership Seminar</b>	170 graduates with collaborative leadership skills. Graduates instigated new projects and supported SBC work. A network of civic leaders throughout the Sierra with sustainability perspective.
<b>Town Planning</b>	Improved planning practices in many communities. Local planning based on better information. Community Design Manual for wide use Best Practices manual for local use in planning. Implementation of June Lake Design Guidelines Funding for Truckee rail yard and other projects Good will for SBC and improving name recognition

<b>Working Landscapes</b>	Education of ranchers and farmers about conservation opportunities and ways to protect their farms. Conservations easements by 2004 of 25,000 acres. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy.
<b>Inyo 2020 Forum</b>	Indicators document for Inyo county as basis for visioning. Sustainability principles adopted in County General Plan.
<b>Investing for Prosperity</b>	Provided framework for future SBC work. Too early to assess outcomes.
<b>Annual Conference</b>	Educated hundreds of participants about Sierra issues. Team action projects being implemented Built networks among civic leaders.
<b>Overall Outcomes</b>	Created discourse about sustainability among civic leaders. Created new and well used information resources Spread understanding and acceptance of sustainable practices. Built stakeholder database for use in ongoing projects. Built civic capacity. Created greater sense of region across the Sierra.

The SBC theory of change has a detailed version involving linking activities to work together to achieve the sustainability vision and change the attitudes, understandings, and practices of key civic leaders in the region. A central part of SBC’s strategy for example has been to produce high quality research that supports the reframing of the Sierra’ issues, to publish it in usable formats directed to its audience of leaders and public agencies, and to disseminate findings through interactive forums where people can engage with the ideas. SBC has taken these documents and applied their ideas to design conservation projects, downtown revitalization, or visioning projects. As needed SBC conducts or sponsors additional research or scientific work to support projects like Placer Legacy or Working Landscapes and to provide critical information and credibility to these efforts. The organization engages in active educational efforts in the Leadership Seminar and forums of different kinds, often making use of the findings of their publications or the examples of their planning projects as teaching tools. Staff train people in collaborative methods and model how to use them through the partnerships they engage in with communities. SBC is building networks linking business and civic leaders to one another and to SBC and its work. Though it remains a primarily a business organization, in the course of the work SBC has included leaders from many walks of life and with a variety of perspectives and interests. To deal with the changes in the funding picture and in the growth of their reputation and in the membership, the organization has diversified its activities and funding sources, increased

its geographic reach through conferences, and increased and diversified their membership.

SBC plays a variety of roles simultaneously, roles which are often thought to be incompatible, but which it has found a way to combine by maintaining a delicate balance among them and constantly adjusting. These roles are researcher and information provider, technical assistance provider, advocate and community organizer, convener, facilitator, educator, trainer, catalyst, and partner. This story suggests how they have managed to be all these things and maintain credibility in each role, but success depends on continued vigilance and never going too far with one role. SBC needs to be able to provide credible information that is not seen as biased so the advocacy role promoting their vision can also be pursued. The role as facilitator and convener can be undermined by the role as community organizer, unless they are inclusive in this effort. SBC has not always succeeded in keeping this balance among roles, most notably in their Nevada County experience, but when they have done so, they have been highly effective.

## **Outcomes**

### Civic Capacity and Regional Discourse Coalition

SBC has created a discourse coalition of diverse leaders who share understandings of the region and its needs and who recognize interdependence among environmental, economic and social capital. These individuals emerge politically at different times and places and support one another because of their understanding and their shared mission to protect the sustainability of the Sierra. These leaders network among themselves, and SBC is now explicitly helping them with this effort, which began in the conferences, Leadership Seminars, and member forums. In this process SBC is helping to build the civic capacity of the region as these leaders share expertise and experience with one another, provide political support for each other's projects or even direct assistance in for example facilitating community dialogues. The proliferating community dialogues and the practices of being inclusionary have spread to a number of major communities in the Sierra in this process, supported by many examples in SBC's publications. This process has also built the capacity of SBC as these leaders bring their skills and knowledge to assist SBC in its work.

### Information Resources

SBC has produced a variety of information resources for the Sierra. The *Wealth Index* has been popular and widely used to help people see how things are changing in the key arenas they care about. It helps to reduce arguments over facts and to allow a focus on the issues that do confront the region. Indexes have been prepared for subregions as well for use in their planning. *Planning for Prosperity* and *Investing for Prosperity* serve as reference manuals for planners and businesspeople trying to change their practices to be more sustainable. *The Nevada County Natural Resources Report*, the report for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and the scientific work for Placer Legacy are science-based reports on conditions in the region that have served multiple purposes. SBC is currently working on producing technical guides such as their *Commercial/Mixed Use Toolkit* and *Open Space Toolkit* to provide strategies and ideas for how to implement planning principles for sustainable development.

### Changed Practices

SBC has created and made available tools, practices and ideas for sustainable development. They have begun to change practices of land management, open space and habitat protection, downtown revitalization, design guidelines and public involvement. They have done this through their publications, their practical projects, and their education efforts.

### Collaborative Leadership

The Sierra Leadership Seminar has produced 170 graduates with skills in facilitation, negotiation and collaborative leadership. These people have gone back to their communities and made use of their skills, contending they are now more effective and confident. The activities of these graduates, along with SBC's activities in convening and facilitating stakeholder dialogues, are modeling for others what collaborative leadership can be like in controversial situations.

### On the Ground Projects

SBC also can take credit for a number of on the ground projects that are beneficial to the sustainability of the region. Placer Legacy is the most prominent as it has become part of the planning framework for the county, assuring that open space and habitat are defined and protected as the county inevitably continues to grow. Considerable acreage has been set aside already. Placer Legacy is more than just a document as the process has taught many interests to work together and find common cause in controversial issues. Placer Legacy is an ongoing program that continues to tackle new issues, and SBC continues to help them with fundraising, technical assistance and behind-the-scenes conversations with players. The Working Landscapes Initiative has protected 25,000 acres with conservation easements. SBC worked with the town of June Lake to create community design guidelines which have been adopted in Mono County for resort communities. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is now a new institution that will provide resources for land conservation throughout the Sierra.

An SBC staff member summed up her assessment of the outcomes in a way that is consistent with what we found.

I think in the planning world, we have given confidence to people asking questions and thinking of a different model of development. We have stemmed the tide of suburban [conversion] of the foothills. I can't say that we have stopped it, but we definitely have planted the seeds for alternatives to be created. I think we have really empowered Placer County and its residents to save what is left of the open spaces there and...we have created a political movement to save open space in the county that wasn't there before. I think that with the ranching community, we brought this new understanding of what their options are, with conservation easements and state tax planning which were not there in any form before. And I think that with the Leadership Seminar we have given people these tools to problem solve that they did not have before. They hopefully come up with solutions faster so that they can move out of the



unstable back and forth conflict state into a more collaborative decision making stage, where things actually get done instead of just debated. A lot of it is just bringing information to people, of setting up alternatives, and at the same time training people by virtue of their experience in our projects or by training in the Leadership Seminar to just get things done.

## **Limitations**

While there is much to admire about this creative organization, it does have limitations in what it has done so far. It has learned from the fiasco of Nevada County and they are unlikely to make this type of mistake again. Mistakes are part of the maturing process of an organization and beneficial if the organization learns from them. But two other limitations on the organization's success should be noted— its limited success as of yet in changing the larger civic culture and its relative lack of focus on the equity dimension of sustainability.

An SBC staff member offered the opinion that shifting the culture of the region was the fundamental mission of SBC.

Well, our official mission is to secure the social, natural and environmental capital of the region for this and future generations. So that's what you tell people when you say what the mission is. But in reality, what that means is, shifting the culture of the region so that every time people make a decision, they are thinking about not just the financial bottom line, but also how it affects your community and how it affects the environment around you. That's the real mission of the organization.

While it is fair to say that many civic leaders of the region have come to share SBC's values and understanding and work toward them in their communities, it also true that there are many people SBC has not reached. With so much money at stake in development proposals changing the larger culture is a goal that will take much longer to achieve. One notable case in point is a proposal for 6,000 units of housing only a short distance from SBC's offices in the Martis Valley. While we are not in a position to assess the merits of the case, the developer's proposal has become a lightning rod for passionate opposition by environmental groups and some residents who claim it will create massive traffic and air quality problems. The state attorney general wrote a letter to the board of supervisors in March of 2004 saying his office felt the Environmental Impact Report was inadequate and failed to disclose "reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts." Sierra Watch, an environmental group, complained that there was not regional cooperation or respect for public input and said it would appeal the decision of Placer County's planning commission to approve much of the project to the board of supervisors.<sup>31</sup>

In this case, the idea of inclusion and dialogue seems not to have been applied, and controversy and suspicion grew. While the supervisors asked SBC to help mediate, it was only after much had been decided or was perceived as decided and parties were not willing to participate in more than one meeting. It was too late by that time for SBC to

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<sup>31</sup> Sierra Watch "Placer County Planning Commission rubber-stamps Martis Valley development projects" YubaNet.com, June 26, 2004.

make a difference and in any case the staff member who tried to do this was not trained in the necessary skills. If principles of sustainable development have been applied in Martis Valley it is not evident. Since Placer Legacy was enacted new supervisors have been elected so it remains to be seen whether the ideals and practices developed by the earlier supervisors will be institutionalized enough to survive a new board. Overall what this suggests is that SBC still has its work cut out for it in changing the broader political culture, not to prevent development but at least to forestall the types of process that anger and divide and to produce projects that are compatible with their sustainability goals.

The second major limitation thus far on SBC is that they have done very little with the third E of sustainability—equity. This is in a context where equity issues are increasingly emerging with the Sierra's growing population of low income workers, often immigrants, who have come to work in the resorts and parks. The *Index* showed this trend and some of its implications in education and income levels. The rapid increase in housing prices around the resort areas increases the inequities as many of the workers are being priced out of the housing market. If these workers cannot live there and bring up their children, the region will not be sustainable.

SBC's materials and most of their programmatic efforts thus far have focused on natural and financial capital. Their mission, as stated in the *Index*, is to protect these without harming social capital. The last type of capital has not been a coequal objective thus far for SBC. In fairness it must be said that few CRIs actually deal with all three E's, economy, environment, and equity, in a genuinely equal way. In fact the vast majority give short shrift to equity. SBC's stand-in for equity is social capital, though their usage of the concept, judging by the *Index*, is more along the lines of human capital. Social capital is typically seen as social relationships, networks, and trust which SBC does in fact promote. Human capital regards people as potential workers, focusing on their skills, education, health and so forth. It is easy to make the case that human capital is equally essential to the region's sustainability as the other two. Indeed doing this could well be an appropriate companion volume to *Planning for Prosperity* and *Investing for Prosperity*.

Even if SBC does develop the role of human capital more explicitly there remains a missing piece in their strategy and that is a focus on equity. It is much easier to understand and integrate the idea of human capital into economic welfare than it is to conceptualize equity and integrate this idea. The notion of equity is not just about the level of poverty, unemployment, or high school graduation rates. It is about the *differences* between those who are best off and those who are worst off. It is about the degree to which groups do or do not have equal access to services, resources, quality education, transportation, and so on. It is about the degree to which opportunity is equally available to different ethnic and income groups, or whether some are systematically disadvantaged. Thus the argument is not just that a healthy economy depends on educated, healthy, well-housed workers, but that the sustainability of the whole system depends on its fairness. In a business-based organization such as SBC it is understandable that the issues have to be framed in an instrumental way that shows the link of human capital to financial. The way inequities may harm the long-term stability of the system is the instrumental issue, but the issue of equity goes beyond this to a moral question. It also goes to the idea of building communities that are inclusive.

SBC has recently begun to pay closer attention to equity issues. This was brought to our attention by SBC staff when we asked for feedback and updates on SBC activities

after our research was completed. SBC staff tell us that in 2004 they instituted new activities.

A series of affordable housing forums throughout the Spring of this year [2004], was established to help galvanize groups of affordable housing providers around the Sierra. We already have two teams on affordable housing attending the Conference. We are also carefully tracking the growing income disparities in the region as one of the most telling indices that will be in this year's *Sierra Nevada Wealth Index*, precisely to bring equity issues to more people's attention.

They also note that the equity issue was behind their most recent report.

Finally, our focus in *Investing*, was precisely to diversify economic development because tourism tends to have too many service-level poorly paid jobs. We recognize this is a key issue in the future of the Sierra and look forward to finding other ways to address it.

### **Transition in Leadership**

The organization went through a difficult transition after the departure of Lucy Blake. Blake was eager to push as much through as possible before she left so there were inevitably loose ends or even chaos, as one board member described it. The board hired a new director James Sayer, who was not from the area and accordingly had a good deal to learn. Blake's leadership style had involved making sure things got done even if she had to do them herself. Sayer wanted to set up organizational systems and internal accountability to improve the overall capacity of SBC and make sure that it did not depend on one person for its success. In the process long term staff left or were let go, and there was a lengthy process of finding and preparing new staff, who had, in turn, to build their own relationships in the region. These events coincided with a downturn in the stock market and a reduction in funds available from foundations so SBC had to search for new sources. They also coincided with the blowup of SBC's work in Nevada County. Sayer had his hands full and took some time working out what his priorities would be. In this process the Sierra Leadership Seminar had a hiatus and other activities slowed down.

Sayer's approach and leadership style was quite different from Blake's, not surprisingly given his background in advocacy for open space and working with and in large public agencies along with his abilities to raise funding for environmental causes. These were his strengths and he played to them. His greatest achievement was the finalizing of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Unfortunately his focus on this led to some loss of credibility among leaders in conservative counties, many of whom were opposed to easements and setting land aside at all. Some respondents told us they did not feel as comfortable with him as with Blake and felt he was not sympathetic to the business perspective. He did not operate in like Blake and Grubbs in their constant interaction with people in the communities, building trust, and jointly developing ideas for projects with them. The new leadership did not seem to make collaboration and all the detailed ground

work that goes into it as central as Blake had done. Under Sayer the Sierra Leadership Seminar lapsed for a year. Trainer Susan Carpenter, who had been an important informal consultant to SBC during the Blake years, providing advice on how to approach a variety of collaborative efforts, was no longer consulted. A lack of understanding of collaboration may have accounted for some missteps like the abortive effort to mediate the Martis Valley development dispute. Instead of continuing the one-on-one technical assistance activities of the town planning program after its director left, SBC has recently focused on some preparing manuals for regional use. These may well be useful, but the strategy has also reduced an important mechanism for building good will and respect for SBC around the Sierra.

SBC continues to be active and engaged. Sayer encouraged the growth of the conferences and located them in new areas of the Sierra to spread the organization's reach. SBC staff continue to work with Placer Legacy and on Working Landscapes programs in several counties and are preparing a Regional Main Street program and a guide to Sierra Town Patterns. SBC is also investing in a 2004 version of *The Wealth Index*. It continues work with partners to raise needed funds, convene stakeholders, and provide technical support. SBC has been conducting an active effort to increase membership in part for the funding as well as for building their support base. SBC has a data base it uses to keep track of people who make things happen in communities. There are now about 5,400 people in this database and about 600 are members of SBC. Staff are now actively assisting their members, SLS graduates, and others in networking. The SLS graduates list is a source for members, and these graduates are a vital source of information and support for each other and SBC.

While there have been successes during Sayer's tenure, there have also been missteps, especially around methods for successful collaboration and around maintaining the social capital and trust that have been so crucial to the organization in the past. The organization has begun to be more inclusive of nonprofits and government organizations, as may well be appropriate as conditions and understandings have evolved. In the process, however, staff may have inadvertently lost touch with Blake's powerful approach of working with the business community to lead environmental change. Sayer decided to leave SBC in the fall of 2004 and at this writing a nationwide search is underway for his successor. Based on this study it appears to us that a new leader should be, among other things, a skilled collaborative leader and someone who can gain the trust of the business community.

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<sup>32</sup> Sierra Watch "Placer County Planning Commission rubber-stamps Martis Valley development projects" YubaNet.com, June 26, 2004.



## **SBC Appendices**

### **APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY**

The research for this case used a combination of methods: in depth interviews, observation, a survey, and review of documents and newspapers. Research was conducted beginning, with preliminary work in 2001 and research ending in spring 2004. Most of the research was conducted by Judith Innes and Gerardo Sandoval. Eric Nakajima did the preliminary work of gathering information on SBC and an assessment of Placer Legacy. Sharon Huntsman, graduate student at the University of California Davis, who is completing her Masters Thesis on the Sierra Leadership Seminar, worked with us to develop her survey and shared her findings from the survey, her interviews and observations with us.

Innes and Sandoval completed formal, in-depth interviews with 25 people, some of whom were interviewed more than once. These interviews, which took between one and two hours were with SBC staff and board members, former SBC staff, Sierra Leadership Seminar graduates, Sierra politicians and activists, consultants working with SBC, a newspaper reporter, and high level public officials. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim (encompassing hundreds of transcribed pages) to gain quotes and keep details of the interviewees' responses. Huntsman also conducted about a dozen interviews.

Observational research was also a key part of the study. Sandoval attended the ninth annual SBC conference in Mammoth Mountain and two council meetings in cities where SBC had projects. In addition Sharon Huntsman was a participant observer in the Sierra Leadership Seminar in Spring 2004. Both provided opportunities for informal conversations to supplement the formal interviews.

Finally, research included review of SBC's project documents, regional newspapers in the Sierras, James Irvine Foundation internal reports, and publications related to the Sierras, collaboration, sustainability and other themes pertinent to SBC's work.

Interviewees were promised confidentiality and told the tape could be turned off at any time. All were sent letters before the interview as required by the University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, explaining the project (see Appendix II for the letter) and promising confidentiality. An interview guide (see Appendix III) provided some structure to assure topics were consistently covered with different interviewees. Questions were open-ended, however, and there was ample opportunity for respondents to volunteer points they thought were important that we might not have thought to ask about. We maintained the flexibility to ask further questions or guide the conversation in new directions as needed.

We assembled the narrative out of all these parts, searching for a coherent story that accounted for all that we learned. We particularly sought to understand the themes and strategies that SBC employed and how these worked in practice.

We extend our thanks and appreciation to all the people we interviewed for their generosity in sharing their time and thoughts with us. Their perspectives and reflections have played a central role in this work. We also extend thanks to the Sierra Business

Council for their cooperation and assistance throughout the project. They provided us whatever information we needed and supported our efforts. Finally we are grateful to Sharon Huntsman, for the opportunity to work with her and include aspects of her observations, interviews and findings on the Sierra Leadership Seminar. Her study was a crucial part of the project, which our resources would not have enabled us to do.

## **APPENDIX II: LETTER TO INTERVIEWEES**

The following letter was sent to all potential respondents prior to setting up an interview:

Dear:

As you may know, faculty members at the University of California Berkeley's Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IURD) have been contracted by the Irvine Foundation to conduct an assessment of what the Collaborative Regional Initiatives (CRIs) have accomplished and how. Our research team will be looking at what has worked well and what has worked less well and will try to understand the reasons behind the results. The primary purpose of this research is to assist the CRIs in their future work and in their choice and design of activities. This study will also be directed to the philanthropic community and other funders to provide them a perspective on the CRI program and its many activities and to help them to identify promising future initiatives.

One of these CRIs is the Sierra Business Council, and we would very much appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about your work with this CRI or of your knowledge of its work. We hope to learn something about your role, your understanding of how the projects and programs are organized, and your perceptions of the value and outcomes of some of its activities. More generally we hope that you can provide us insight into the work of Sierra Business Council over the years.

One of the team of faculty members or a research associate will contact you to see if he/she can set up an appointment to talk with you at a time and place that is convenient for you. We estimate we would need at least an hour of your time if possible. With your permission, the interviews will be taped, but the tape can be turned off at any time you wish. Your participation is voluntary, and you may end the interview at any time. The tapes and transcripts of the interviews will be confidential and shared only among the research team. Your identity will either be concealed or we will get your permission before attributing comments or quotes to you in any reports which are disseminated beyond the Foundation or which are published in journals.

We also hope to attend some meetings related to the CRI to observe and take notes, with permission of the participants.

The benefits of this research are that it will assist all the CRIs in developing the most effective strategies and assist the philanthropic and larger funding community in getting a perspective on the work of CRIs. Lessons learned will be shared with the CRIs. There are no personal risks to you in participating in this effort.

Feel free to contact Judith Innes or any of the other investigators at any time with questions or concerns you have about this project ([jinnes@uclink.berkeley.edu](mailto:jinnes@uclink.berkeley.edu), 510-642-6579). You may also contact Kim Belshe at the Irvine Foundation ([kimbelshe@irvine.org](mailto:kimbelshe@irvine.org), 415-777-2244).



If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact the University of California at Berkeley's Committee for Protection of Human Subjects at 510-642-7461, or email [subjects@uclink4.berkeley.edu](mailto:subjects@uclink4.berkeley.edu).

Sincerely,

Judith Innes  
Principal Investigator

And Co-Principal Investigators:

Karen Chapple, Assistant Professor of City and Regional Planning  
Karen Christensen, Associate Professor of City and Regional Planning  
Judith Gruber, Associate Professor of Political Science  
AnnaLee Saxenian, Professor of City and Regional Planning, and Information Management

## APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDES

### Interview Guide for Public Official:

Please note as we said in the letter everything you say is confidential. We will not use your name with quotes without your permission. Normally what we write will have just categories of respondents.

As you may know we are no longer doing an evaluation of the CRIs but now a retrospective and overall assessment, focusing on the largest ones that have been in place the longest. We are focusing on four in particular and looking at the programs and activities they have done over the years to get a sense of what does and does not work and how. We are looking at what some of the outcomes are as well as at how things have evolved. The audience for this will be the larger philanthropic community as well as other CRIs. We are looking very broadly at outcomes including learning, building networks, changing practices and norms as well as things like legislation. We are still deciding which projects to look at in depth, but these will certainly include the Placer Legacy, the Sierra Wealth Indexes, Planning for Prosperity, Investing for prosperity and Natural Heritage 2020, Working Landscapes, Sierra Leadership Seminar Are there others you think we should look at?

1. Can you tell me about your current position as (supervisor or other role), ie. Roles and responsibilities?
  - a. Length as supervisor?
  - b. About your professional background and education?
2. How did you become involved with the SBC?
  - a. How did you first hear of it?
3. How did you become involved in (project name)?
4. What is the purpose or mission of (project)?
  - a. Can you tell us a bit about its origins?
  - b. What problems is the project trying to address?
  - c. What have been some accomplishments of? Concrete evidence of success that you can point to, [probe for awards, outcomes, people coming to you, new ordinances, new partnerships, changed attitudes (via polls or whatever)]
  - d. How was the project funded?

- e. Who were some of the stakeholders involved?
  - f. What specific role did SBC play? Get examples...
  - g. What were the partnerships that you formed? Who makes up the partnerships, (probe for city staff, community members, business organizations).
  - h. What kinds of research and other information do you use in the project? Who provides it (staff, consultants, universities, local experts?) Do you feel you have enough resources for research?
  - i. Have you used professional facilitation in the project? If so, has this been useful, why?
  - j. To what do you attribute the success of the project?
  - k. What have been its benefits to the Sierra Nevada region?
  - l. How about some of the challenges faced? Have there been some things that did not work well and had to be changed? Are there obstacles you are still working to overcome?
  - m. Has the project been reproduced in other counties in the Sierra? If so, what have been the outcomes?
  - n. How would the project be different if the SBC would not have been involved?
  - o. What do you see as the future of the project?
5. Could you characterize what you see as the overall purpose or mission of the SBC?
  6. Do you see the SBC as a resource? If so, how or why not?
  7. What do you think SBC has contributed to the region that would not be there without SBC (probe for examples and good quotes)?
  8. What do you see as your future relationship with SBC? What about the counties future relationship to SBC?
  9. What do you see as some of the challenges that the SBC is facing?

10. Who are some of the key players in these projects whom you think we should interview?

**Sample Interview Guide for SBC staff**

**This is for those working on Town Planning projects:**

1. How long have you been working at SBC?
2. What attracted you to working at SBC?
3. What were you doing before that (probe for info on training, education)
4. Tell us about your general responsibilities and activities in the organization. Have these changed over time?
5. Which of the various programs/project have you worked on most? (Or which are you most familiar with?)

(Make sure you focus on Town Planning Services, June Lake, Truckee project)

6. Can we go through the basic programs (related to Town Planning) and ask you to give us your perspective on each one? We know about them from the written materials but really would like to get a better sense.
  - a. What do you think is particularly important about each one?
  - b. Can you tell us a bit about the origin of these projects?
  - c. What problem is each one trying to solve?
  - d. What have been some accomplishments of each one? Concrete evidence of success that you can point to, (probe for awards, outcomes, people coming to you, new ordinances, new partnerships, changed attitudes (via polls or whatever)
  - e. How were these funded?
  - f. Who was involved in each project from SBC (staff, volunteers, consultants etc?) How were these people selected? How important were staff? What specifically did they do?
  - g. What were the partnerships that you formed? Who makes up the partnerships, (probe for city staff, community members, business organizations).

- h. What do you see as differences between you and a planner in a city planning department?
  - i. To what do you attribute the success of these efforts?
  - j. How about some of the challenges in these or other programs? Have there been some things that did not work well and had to be changed?, Are there obstacles you are still working to overcome? We are trying to learn from things that did not work
7. Could you characterize what you see as the overall purpose or mission of the SBC? Has this changed in the time you have been here?
  8. Can you characterize the overall approach and strategy of SBC?
  9. We understand you have made some use of professional facilitation and facilitation training over the years? How has this been done in your projects? Was it useful? If so why.
  10. What kinds of research and other information do you use in the town planning process? Who provides it (staff, consultants, universities, local experts?) Do you feel you have enough resources for research?
  11. The CRI program, according to The Irvine Foundation is about sustainability. Do you consider that SBC is focused on this? What does it mean operationally for SBC? How does this relate specifically to the projects you are engaged in?
  12. (Probe if they do not mention equity– A few CRIs do place emphasis on equity issues? Do you think SBC does that? If so in what way? Do you see a need for emphasis on this in future. Who are the disadvantaged populations in the Sierras?
  13. What do you think SBC has contributed to the region that would not be there without SBC (probe for examples and good quotes)?
  14. If SBC is successful what would be the outcomes in the region? What would you like to see as results
  15. Who are some of the key players in these projects or in the leadership of SBC whom you think we should interview?