

Imperial County supes vote whether to join with parts of San Diego County

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By ELIZABETH VARIN, Staff Writer

Tuesday, February 23, 2010 1:20 AM PST

Imperial County might be willing to partner with portions of San Diego County if the Imperial County Board of Supervisors accepts a joint economic development strategy.

Much of the south and east portions of San Diego County would be linked with Imperial County, which could provide more exposure for the region, pressuring local politicians to think regionally and provide assistance for and to local areas that cannot provide for themselves, wrote Planning and Development Services Director Jurg Heuberger in a report to the board.

It could also have some negative impacts, like forcing Imperial County to rank its projects for Economic Development Administration money, which it currently doesn't do, and possibly lose some of its competitive edge being a distressed area, he wrote.

It would increase the population of the area, which might act in the county's favor when asking for federal money, Heuberger said in a previous interview.

San Diego County is in the same boat economy-wise, but not at the same level as Imperial County, he said. The size of San Diego County would help Imperial County, and the unemployment rates in Imperial County would help San Diego.

"Collectively, we would have the statistics to qualify," he said.

The board will vote today whether to approve the strategy, but it does not commit the county to supporting the partnership, wrote Heuberger. Rather, it would show that the board might be willing to combine at a later time.

If approved by the board, it would be sent to the California State Planning Office, and then the federal Economic Development Administration, he wrote.

The strategy was approved by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors at its Dec. 8 meeting.

It's been a project in the works for more than two years, San Diego County Supervisor Greg Cox said in an interview in December. San Diego received \$50,000 in Economic Development Administration funds in early 2008 to identify areas to join with Imperial County.

San Diego County, as a whole, had a 10.1 percent unemployment rate for December, according to the state's Employment Development Department. Imperial was more than two-and-a-half times as high with 27.7 percent unemployment.

But the areas chosen for the partnership, south of Interstate 8 and portions in the east, north to Santee, have higher unemployment and lower levels of income, Cox said. Some areas range from 18 percent to 20 percent unemployment.

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