



# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR, CITY  
COUNCIL, AND REDEVELOPMENT  
AGENCY BOARD

**FROM:** Debra Figone  
Harry Mavrogenes

**SUBJECT:** VIETNAMESE AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY CENTER PROJECT

**DATE:** March 2, 2010

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** 7  
**SNI AREA:** Tully/Senter

## INFORMATION

In 2007, the City of San Jose and the San Jose Redevelopment Agency approved \$2.75 million in capital funding to finance the master plan, design and implementation of the proposed Vietnamese American Community Center (VACC) Project (\$1.15 million from the City of San Jose and \$1.6 million from the Redevelopment Agency). The objective of the VACC Project is to create a community center that celebrates Vietnamese history and culture, welcomes diversity and brings vital services to this region.

The recent State raid of Redevelopment funds, combined with a lagging economy, has led to significantly reduced funding levels, with several projects put on hold including the VACC Project until FY 2013-2014. The VACC Project Task Force has concluded its work for the initial phase of this project. The purpose of this Information memorandum is to summarize the Task Force work, provide perspectives on the vision and project location and document a set of guiding principles for future reference. The VACC Project Task Force provided core content for this memorandum.

## VACC PROJECT TASK FORCE

In March 2009, twenty-one community members were selected to serve on the VACC Project Task Force (Appendix A - Member list with affiliations) to engage the community and develop recommendations for programs and services at the center, proposed to be located at the George Shirakawa Center at 2072 Lucretia Avenue. Towards that goal, the Task Force, which served to enhance communications between City and Agency staff and the larger community, created the following strategic objectives in partnership with the VACC Project Consultant, VisionWork Associates:

- Vision Statement – Build an inclusive and effective community engagement process to help create the vision for the Vietnamese American Community Center where people from all walks of life love to gather, learn and grow together.
- Mission Statement – Gather community input through public meetings and individual conversations and, based on this input, make recommendations to the City to help shape the vision for the Vietnamese American Community Center in San Jose, California.
- Value Statement – Seek to build an inclusive and transparent community engagement process where differences are embraced and community input is respectfully solicited, properly documented and clearly communicated.

Five sub-teams were formed early in the process with the following objectives:

- Vision Events/Meeting Design Committee – Decide the number, format and structure of all Vision Events.
- Outreach and Invitation Strategy Committee – Develop targeted and general outreach approaches.
- Project Communications Committee – Keep the community and media informed about the project.
- Stakeholders Engagement Committee – Prioritize who to engage and how to keep them engaged.
- Data Collection and Analysis Committee – Guide the group in data analysis.

The Task Force members have collectively contributed over 900 hours on this project, including a day-long retreat to develop the vision, mission and values for the engagement process. They participated in numerous Task Force and committee meetings and prepared for the VACC Vision Event on September 12, 2009.

All of the Task Force members were greatly committed to ensure project integrity through a high level of transparency and a respect for varied perspectives. To ensure extensive outreach and a successful Vision Event, the Task Force members led or supported all of the activities below. Information was provided in English and Vietnamese.

- Generated a representative contact list of invitees to include individuals, policymakers, nonprofits, businesses, religious institutions, universities, schools, and potential funders.
- Created marketing collateral in preparation for the VACC Vision Event.
- Created a VACC Project Question and Answer Fact Sheet.
- Mailed out 400 invitations and distributed 150 posters and 300 general flyers at City facilities, grocery stores, retail stores, restaurants, nonprofits, churches, and temples.
- Posted newsletter notices with 23 churches and 33 community/cultural groups.
- Conducted personal follow-up with 189 individuals/groups.
- Sent press releases to 22 media outlets.
- Presented the VACC Project at five public events.

- Led the VACC Vision Event meeting content and logistics.
- Generated key talking points and surveys for the VACC Vision Event.
- Hosted the VACC Vision Event for 214 participants.
- Gathered initial community input into the needs, opportunities, mission, values, vision, and desired service components for the VACC Project.

### VISION

The September 12<sup>th</sup> Vision Event was well attended by more than 200 community members who participated in the half-day workshop. Event highlights are attached (Appendix B – Vision Event Summary). Although the event was intended to solicit input on the community's vision for the center and the type of services needed, the majority of feedback received focused on the proposed location, the name of the center and the process to get to an operational center. This feedback made it apparent that much more community engagement is required to build consensus on a vision that accurately reflects the community's needs.

Examples of services suggested through the Vision Event includes: youth services (support groups, homework assistance, after school programming); healthcare (mental, nutrition, medical); senior services (health, fitness, dance, hot lunch); classes (ESL, citizenship, computer lab); cultural activities/classes; recreation (lottery, bingo, karaoke); counseling (family, teen, truancy); and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender support. Most recently, the Task Force summarized the following key factors in support of a vision for the center - a place where families, elders, adults, and youth can spend time, bridge the intergenerational gap and learn about Vietnamese history and culture.

### LOCATION

The City and Agency had proposed Shirakawa Center as a potential location for the VACC Project. City programs currently housed in Shirakawa are scheduled to move to the new Seven Trees Community Center and Library in August 2010, leaving the Shirakawa Center vacant. Although the proposed center is intended to serve all San Jose residents, it is anticipated that a large portion of its customers will be from the Vietnamese American community, making the Shirakawa Center an ideal central location.

However, from the beginning of this phase, the proposed location of the Shirakawa Center has been a focal point of discussion. Community input from the Vision Event overwhelmingly indicated preference for a newer center and new location since they believe Shirakawa is not viable for the following reasons: (1) too old; (2) unsafe; (3) inadequate parking; and (4) the inability to accommodate large-scale events and activities due to the size. Many participants felt that money could be spent towards a newer, safer and better center. For the next phase, the Task Force would like the City and Redevelopment Agency to identify and pursue another center location. At this time, the City and Agency do not intend to begin the process of site location, programming and initial design for the VACC until the project is fully funded.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles serve as future milestones for the VACC Project:

- Reflect community needs

Community engagement strategies should reflect what both the Task Force and community envision as successful ways of engagement. First and foremost, cultural competence must be a prerequisite for the hiring of any future consultant associated with the project. In addition, knowledge of the city's political system, advanced marketing and media know-how, and proven track record with facilitation in ethnic communities are important and relevant. Second, listening and acting on information that comes out of the community engagement forums will be critical to the future success of this project and towards establishing a long-term partnership with the community.

The purpose of these forums will be to solicit community feedback and buy-in and to deepen the community trust and partnership in support of the VACC Project. If reinstated, the Task Force, in partnership with the City and Agency, should educate and solicit input from the community in four types of forums: (1) one-on-one personal meetings to identify and reach out to leaders/key constituent groups and help them understand the VACC Project concept and outreach goals; (2) small group formats where the Task Force assigns teams of two-three members to educate diverse groups at key venues, such as schools, churches and nonprofit organizations; (3) large-scale community meetings such as the Vision Event; and (4) ongoing Task Force and working group meetings to address key issues, goals and objectives. Timelines would be predetermined by all involved parties.

- Reinstatement of the VACC Project Task Force and bring on other key leaders

Of the 18 Task Force members surveyed, the majority (n=13) felt that, given the significant time investment in this project to date, the City and Agency should reinstate this Task Force when the project is ready to move forward. With broad access to the Vietnamese American and other communities, the creation of this Task Force motivated a group of diverse, passionate people to serve as local champions for the VACC Project in partnership with the City and the community. To ensure long-term success, the project will require champions at all levels – the Task Force, the community, the Council, and City and Agency staff – to make this project a reality. It will be important for interested community members to monitor and remain active advocates for the project through future budget cycles. Since project priorities are reviewed annually, the community should continue to demonstrate to the City Council and Redevelopment Agency Board that this project remains a community priority as it considers future funding decisions.

March 2, 2010

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Given the nature of attrition, the Task Force also felt it was imperative to open available slots to those leaders that represent key community organizations not historically involved with the VACC Project. The Task Force would like the City and Agency to take the time to reach out to key community representatives who are experienced and respected with the ability to stay neutral and navigate the political landscape.

- Communicate with clarity, transparency, accountability, and inclusivity to stakeholders

As the project moves forward, the goals, expectations and roles of City and Agency staff, VACC Project Task Force and the community will need to be clearly defined. In addition, the City and Agency will need to set expectations upfront about what \$2.75 million buys in terms of location, size and scope. If the project is narrower in vision and scope (e.g., a youth service focus) as a result of limited dollars, then the City and Agency will need to clearly communicate this message in the next phase. The City needs to respect the time of its volunteers and establish mutually agreed goals in an expeditious manner.

- Recognize the center as an economic and cultural engine for San Jose

The VACC Project not only represents a community center in concept but also would be one of the first Vietnamese American centers of its kind with official recognition from a city or municipality. The Center will serve as a symbol and legacy of the City's recognition and celebration of the contributions of the Vietnamese American population. The VACC Project would bring regional economic and cultural value as follows: (1) the potential to attract residents from neighboring Bay Area communities to San Jose as the center sponsors programs with a Vietnamese emphasis and (2) the vision of making the VACC Project a community center that welcomes everyone and celebrates the Vietnamese American culture.

Throughout the process, the VACC Project Task Force demonstrated the utmost level of commitment, engagement and enthusiasm for this project. On behalf of the City and the Redevelopment Agency, we extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the VACC Project Task Force and the community for their contributions to this project and to this report, which can serve as the official document to guide the work of the VACC Project in the second phase.



DEBRA MCGONE  
City Manager



HARRY S. MAVROGENES  
Executive Director

For questions, please contact Cindy Ho at 408-795-1855.

Attachments

**Appendix A**  
**Vietnamese American Community Center**  
**Project Task Force**

#	Name	Affiliation
1	Lien Cao	Asian American Recovery Services
2	James Dinh	Resident
3	Bryan Do	Community Activist/Business Consultant
4	Dac Doan	John XXIII Center
5	Dan Hoang	Vietnamese American Federation
6	Dennis King	Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
7	Thuy Le	YWCA Project Inspire
8	Hung LeDang	Police Officer
9	Michele Lew	Executive Director, AACI
10	Don Long	County Social Worker
11	Cherry Nguyen	Graduate Student
12	Dinh Nguyen	Business
13	Hieu Nguyen	Resident, Scouting volunteer
14	Thuy Nguyen	CET Immigration & Citizens Program
15	Vuong Nguyen	Community Activist
16	Mylinh Pham	Community Activist
17	Tina Thuy- Hang Pham	Law Foundation of Silicon Valley/Mental Health Advocacy Project
18	Martin Renteria	Treasurer, Tully-Senter NAC UC Berkeley Vietnamese Students Association
19	Lynne Tran	Association
20	Quyen Vuong	International Children Assistance Network
21	Clark Williams	Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits

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# Vietnamese American Community Center Project

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Appendix B  
Vision Event Summary  
September 12, 2009

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# Task Force

- **21 Members**
  - **Vision Statement** - Build an inclusive and effective community engagement process to help create the vision for Vietnamese American Community Center where people from all walks of life love to gather, learn and grow together
  - **Mission Statement** - Gather community input through public meetings and individual conversations and based on this input, make recommendations to the City to help shape the vision for the Vietnamese American Community Center in San Jose, California
  - **Value Statement** - We seek to build an inclusive and transparent community engagement process where differences are embraced and community input is respectfully solicited, properly documented, and clearly communicated
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## Vision Event

214 participants attended the community meeting and provided input on:

- Needs
  - Opportunities
  - Values
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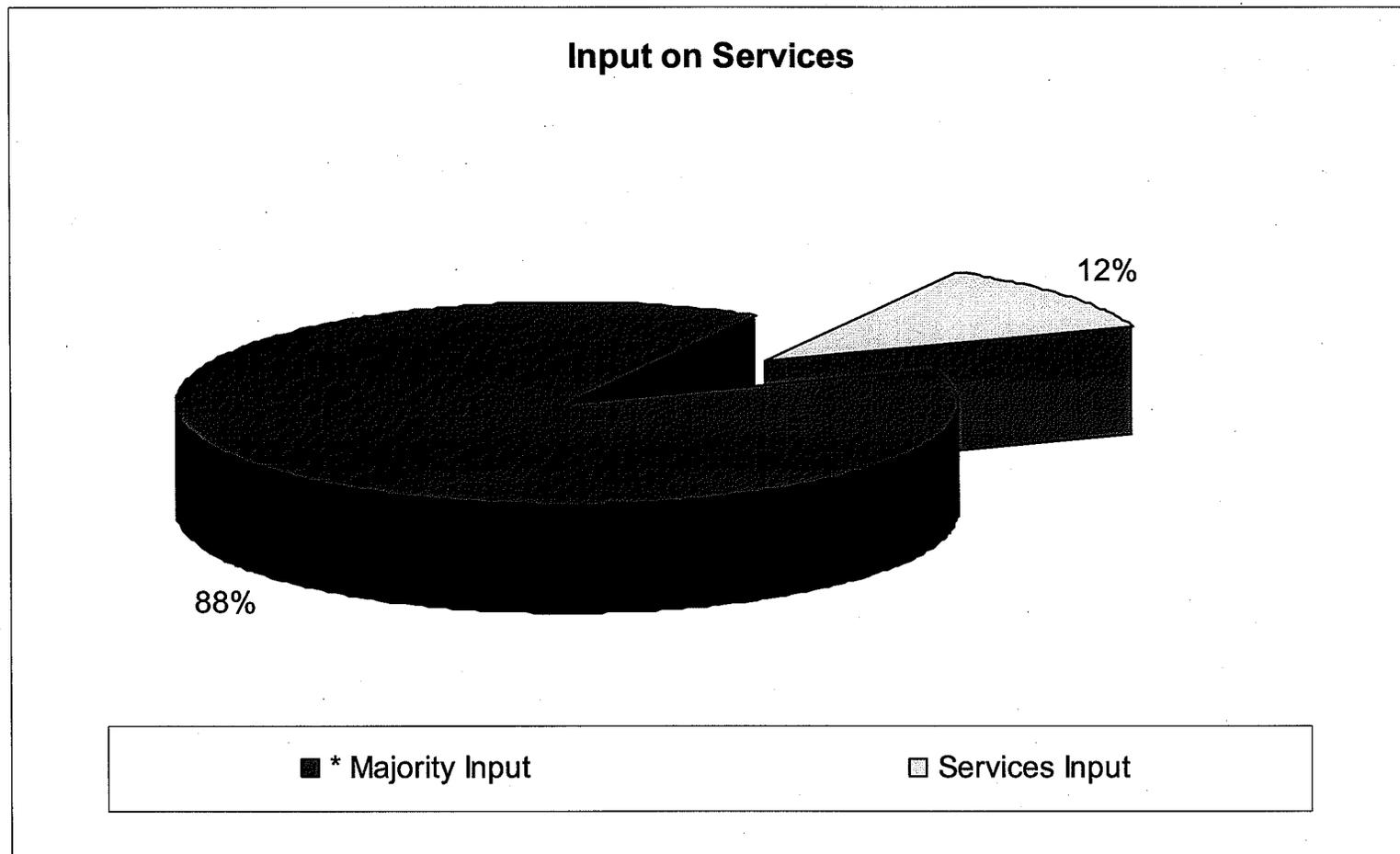
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## Participants' Input: Services

Vietnamese Americans need a community center with:

- **Youth services** (support groups, homework assistance, after school programming)
  - **Healthcare** (mental, nutrition, medical/Medicare)
  - **Senior services** (health, fitness, dance, hot lunches)
  - **Classes** (ESL, citizenship, computer lab)
  - **Cultural activities/classes**
  - **Recreation** (lottery, bingo, karaoke)
  - **Counseling** (family, teen, truancy)
  - **Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender/LGBT support**
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# Participants' Input: Services



## Input on Services - Top 5 Themes

1. Youth Services (3%) 2. Healthcare (2%) and Senior Services (2%) 3. Classes (2%) 4. Cultural Activities/Classes (2%) 5. Recreation and Counseling (1%)

\* The majority of input focused on the proposed location, name of the center and the process to get to an operational center.

Information is based on a minimum total of 500 responses on all items related to the VACC.

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## Participants' Input:

### Shirakawa Center Location

- Too small
- Too old/unsafe (concerns about earthquake)
- Does not have enough parking spaces for events (Tet, Mid-Autumn Festival, etc.)
- Cannot accommodate the Vietnamese American community, events and activities
- In this real estate market, money can be spent towards a newer, safer and better center

\*Reflects majority of comments

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## Participants' Input: Name/Process

- Majority consensus/voting process
- “Vietnamese American” is too general and leaves opening for interaction with agents of other political forms
- Prefer “Resource” vs. “Community” Center
- Do not use the term “Vietnamese” if the focus and intent are not to provide true Vietnamese cultural experience
- Vietnamese Americans are immigrants of politics, not economic immigrants
- Only hang the Republic of Vietnam flag (yellow with three red stripes)

\*Reflects majority of comments

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## Additional Themes

- The Vietnamese Americans need a community center
  - Who will pay the operation and maintenance costs?
  - Who will administer and oversee the center?
  - Will the City respond to the community input?
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# Questions?

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