



YOUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

# **Long-term Community Sustainability Through Job Creation, Business Retention, Tourism Attraction**

**Gilbert Chamber of Commerce  
2011 Local Public Policy Priorities  
August 9, 2011**

Gilbert Chamber of Commerce  
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TO: Mayor and Town Council members

We appreciate the opportunity to meet with you on an annual basis to discuss issues that impact the business community. We share this document with you so that as the year progresses you'll understand the priorities and philosophy of how the Chamber will be evaluating these important issues.

We have enjoyed a long-standing relationship with Town leadership over the years and will continue to bring forward input from the business community while striving to find positive solutions to community issues as in the past.

The Town has accomplished many successes this past year through process improvements, increased involvement from the community, as well as, setting the stage for future development as we approach build-out. The following are some of the main points we deem to be top priorities as we enter our new fiscal year:

- Concentrating on long-term sustainability as the basis for decisions
- Promoting business growth through sound and efficient policies, processes, technology, and customer service
- Investing in business development resources to attract new businesses and support strong partnerships to achieve enhanced business retention efforts
- Investing in tourism promotion and attraction of new destination points to benefit the Town's general fund
- Focusing on quality community amenities while keeping Gilbert an affordable place to live and do business
- Keeping Gilbert safe through adequate funding and smart planning of public safety resources.

While this document focuses on the future, we cannot close without thanking both the Council and the Town staff for their past efforts to support businesses and for their commitment to our community. We specifically want to thank you, Mr. Mayor, for your support of Chamber functions and your appearance at so many of our ribbon cuttings, to thank Councilman Sentz for his thorough and professional representation as Council liaison to the Chamber Board, and to thank Councilwoman Abbott for her continuing and loyal support to Gilbert Leadership. We look forward to working together to make these priorities a reality.

Best regards,

JW Rayhons  
Chair of the Board

# Long-term Sustainability Through Strategic Planning

Even with the slow-down in new development; build-out will occur before we know it. We simply cannot implement key, long-term strategic plans too soon. Members of the Town Council must all buy into a unified strategic plan and work together to ensure its success.

**Job Creation and Business Retention** is the key to future growth and success. To ensure this success in these long-term strategies appropriate dollars and resources must be allocated accordingly. Council should put priority on:

- Developing a long-term business development plan that clearly outlines the resources needed to compete in priority industry sectors to bring in high-wage jobs and significant capital investment to our community and putting the necessary resources behind that plan to enable it to succeed.
- Supporting activities that lead to job creation and business retention by maintaining strong partnerships with:
  - The Gilbert Chamber of Commerce through Business Links programs such as Front Runner Entrepreneurial Training, Shop Gilbert, and business counseling. We recommend evaluating new avenues to educate businesses early in their start-up processes.
  - The Gilbert Chamber of Commerce and educational partners to develop a long-term business retention plan through the Chamber's "Partners In Progress" program
  - ASU Polytechnic, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Gilbert and Higley Public Schools, as well as, the Gilbert Chamber to address workforce issues.
  - Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport to capture our share of the economic market generated by the airport's activities and growth.
  - Our Southeast neighbors to leverage our various strengths to attract those high-wage businesses and their supply chains to our communities.
- Protect commercial and industrial zoning, especially within the employment corridors identified throughout the community.

**Long-term budgeting for sustainability** – The downturn in the economy provided an opportunity for the Town to experience the impact of a budget created largely without the benefit of growth related permits and construction sales tax. Serious work needs to be done to identify the service levels needed at build-out with clear direction as to how those service levels will be met through new technology, community involvement, shifting demographics, and how necessary maintenance schedules will be accomplished. Council must prioritize decisions and actions that bring in increased revenues through expansion of the high-wage business base. The current budget should be used as the baseline to establish priorities for increased revenues

realized from successful planning. We urge the Town to prioritize placing excess funds into contingency investment for the future.

As Town growth moves south, we are beginning to see vacancies and declining population in the northern section of Town. Long-term budgeting and policy development must include redevelopment of older areas within our community. We are at the infant stages in regards to older neighborhoods and business areas deteriorating. This is not only a Town issue; it also impacts the schools and neighborhoods which can lead to an increase in police calls, reduction in general fund revenue sources, and an unsightly environment. We recommend strong, strategic partnerships to address these issues now. Redevelopment and infill opportunities should be part of this long-term planning strategy.

Proper strategic planning and realistic budgeting and controlled expenses should allow growth without creating an additional tax burden for Town businesses.

**Taxes** – Unpredictable taxes, high sales taxes, and high property taxes can have an adverse impact on businesses, large and small. The Town must have a policy of maintaining low taxes to encourage new businesses to locate in Gilbert and to retain those who have already invested heavily in Gilbert. A strong, vibrant, and successful business community translates into more resources for the Town without the need to raise the tax rates.

**Reasonable fees and regulations** – Keeping fees reasonable, predictable and providing both the ability to pay them at one time and to pay them on-line is of great importance to the business community.

For many small businesses in today's environment, this can be a substantial burden. The Chamber has worked closely with the development services staff this past year to ensure a smooth transition to an annual business license process for this purpose. We encourage the Town Council to continue the practice of bringing all fees that impact the business community forward at one time to allow the full impact of the increases/decreases on local and particularly small businesses to be evaluated.

Fees must be reasonably related to the service provided. Imposition of new fees should be thoroughly vetted with local businesses and members of the public before any council action. Optional revenue increases attached to services should require an affirmative action on the part of the paying party rather than a less transparent opt-out provision.

We recommend the continuation of funding the customer service survey for permitting projects. In addition, we believe the *actual business owners* should be contacted randomly to receive their perspective of how it went for them opening their business.

**Investing in state-of-the art technology** – As our society becomes more and more dependent on technology; Gilbert must not be left behind. Gilbert must invest in critical technology and infrastructure to allow easy access to online information, online fillable forms/payments for services, as well as, the electronic plan submittal. Technology investment should be focused on streamlining processes and ease of submissions from the business community. The Town website needs to be completely revamped to allow the general public to easily find information.

**Public Safety** – A safe community is very important for businesses. Safety and security are vital to business attraction as well as the retention of our existing businesses. Adequate funding is critical in the public safety arena yet smart planning and outreach to the community is of utmost importance as well. We encourage police and fire personnel to spend time one-on-one with businesses within their beat to help strengthen that relationship and provide assistance that could prevent emergency situations in the future.

**Visibility for businesses** – The Chamber appreciates the Town Council’s willingness to extend temporary signage opportunities until January 2012 at which time a re-evaluation will occur. A long-term look at the entire sign code is underway and we will be bringing recommendations back to the Council. We believe that the use of new technology for signage can be added to the sign code, as well as easy to understand options and reasonable regulations which can all help businesses tremendously and we look forward to presenting these options to the Council soon.

**Tourism’s Return on Investment is essential to long-term sustainability** – Enhancing tourism opportunities and growth has to be a vital part of Gilbert’s long term vision and strategy. Increased tourism allows the Town to grow its revenues by collecting taxes and fees from those who live and work outside of Gilbert. This is like frosting on your favorite cake. Those who stay in our hotels, visit friends and families, or stop by one of our destination points in Gilbert all bring extra dollars to deposit into our local economy. Promoting both overnight stays in and daytrips to Gilbert adds to the Town’s economic engine. Through strategic partnerships with the Gilbert Chamber and tourism related industries we can maintain and enhance this important revenue source for the future. In order to grow and enhance tourism, it is essential that the Council do as other communities do, and make the necessary investments in business development to attract tourists. Council should allocate a portion of the bed tax collected directly to tourism. Increased tourism will not only help to ensure a successful business community, it will also create a solid foundation for sustainability beyond build-out.

**Heritage District Investment** - Never before has the historic downtown area been more poised for development and promotion. The Town must remain focused on developing the area, including moving forward with the parking structure, strategic development agreements to entice unique retail and other commercial businesses to locate and succeed. The success of the downtown supports and broadens the tourism efforts that will bring outside dollars to the Town’s general fund.

**Transportation** – We remain consistent in our support for investment in roadway upgrades and street maintenance as a catalyst for a healthy business environment along with opportunities to provide fast and efficient transportation pathways. Transportation corridors contributed to the successful growth of Gilbert and will continue to do so in the future. It is important to:

- Invest in multi-modal options to connect customers and employees to businesses.
- Stay engaged with the expansion of HOV lanes along the SanTan Freeway as well as connections to Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport.
- Continue to be involved in regional transportation and connectivity discussions.
- Support connectivity to light-rail and Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport.

- Support activities to provide increased business access and signage during road construction as this can mean the difference between a business making it or closing its doors. Early discussions with business owners is recommended to work out schedules which may include night-time work schedules to speed the completion.
- Continue to invest in timely street maintenance, as putting off necessary repairs will only lead to more costly requirements in the future.

**Environmental and Energy Conservation** - The new emphasis on the environment and energy conservation in the recently approved General Plan as well as the creation of the new Environmental and Energy Conservation Advisory Board are positive steps for the future. We support encouraging businesses and residents to be innovative in seeking and use ways to be more economical and efficient. We support removing barriers rather than introducing mandatory requirements to bring about these efficiencies and economies. The Town must serve as an example in their own buildings, train their employees on these latest technologies or open the review of unique projects to professional consultants when necessary in an effort to streamline the time of review.

**Infrastructure** -- Short-term decisions must be weighed against long-term costs to the community. The Town has done a great job preparing for the infrastructure needs of the community but this is not the time to forgo necessary repairs and additional construction needed for the future. Through business growth the Town Council can replenish those depleted funds used to balance the general fund budget during slow economic times.