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MEMORANDUM

To: **Tony Boren**
Executive Director

Date: April 29, 2010

Subject: **Status report for April 2010**

The intent of the present document is to provide you with a **Status Report** regarding SRI's activities during the month of April 2010.

Farmland Conservation

We have completed the lion's share of the interviews with Influentials within the **Agriculture Industry in Fresno County** — including Agri-Biz organizations, family farmers, trade organizations representing various special interests within the Ag Industry, as well as key individuals in local government, and the private sector. What has come out of this process is a clear CONSENSUS that **Farmland Conservation** in Fresno County is, indeed, desirable; that said, as would be expected, there is NOT a clear consensus regarding how best to accomplish this.

Phase 1 of the study was an **Exploratory** effort, wherein we were in search of a Model that appeared to have merit. If no such model surfaced, we would have terminated the study and made a formal recommendation to Fresno COG to cease all efforts toward Farmland Conservation in Fresno County, at least for the foreseeable future. However, such a MODEL did surface; one that appears to have merit; thus, we moved into Phase 2.

Phase 2 can perhaps be best described as a **Confirmatory** Phase; in other words, we tested each element of the Model to see if there was CONSENSUS among stakeholders (many with competing agendas) for the implementation of such an approach to Farmland Conservation. The confirmatory phase of the present study found that the Model being tested does have merit.

However, while we have CONSENSUS with respect to the Model tested, we are NOT prepared to bring this Model forward with a recommendation for implementation. By definition, CONSENSUS is NEVER universal; for example, even though we had CONSENSUS prior to moving forward with placing Measure C on the local ballot, not all of the stakeholders and special interests were "on board". In the present case, there are a few individuals interviewed who are not prepared to embrace the Model that came out of this study; unfortunately, two or three of these individuals are major "*movers and shakers*" within the Industry.

An Institute for CONSENSUS BUILDING

Further, as the Model unfolded, virtually everyone (whether or not they embraced the Model) asked one particular question; this question is central to being able to implement Farmland Conservation. That question is, **How will the implementation of Farmland Conservation be funded?** To date, the only funding mechanisms for Farmland Conservation are: (i) the Williamson Act and (ii) easements of various forms; clearly, especially given the present state of the local, State, and national economies...these revenue streams are not nearly sufficient to address the fiscal needs inherent to Farmland Conservation. Fortunately, we have identified a funding mechanism for addressing this key element of Farmland Conservation; however, it needs to be “tested” to determine whether or not it is, in fact, viable.

As a result, one additional step is necessary before we can bring forward the Model that has come out of this concerted effort in the form of a recommendation for moving forward or conclude that Farmland Conservation is simply not feasible, at least not at the present point in time. This involves surveying Fresno County residents. Here again, we will be employing the proven approach to building CONSENSUS that led to 78% percent voter support for Measure C’s \$1.7 billion funding mechanism for enhancing public transit and public transportation throughout the County.

This study will not only test the concept (desirability) of Farmland Conservation from the perspective of public opinion; but, it will test each element of the Model that came out of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study. This will include two possible funding mechanisms that will make the model viable. Should **Farmland Conservation** (in particular, this Model) be embraced by Fresno County residents, then we will recommend to Fresno COG that we move forward in implementing the Model that has surfaced through the present study; if it is NOT embraced, we will bring forward the Model, but with the recommendation NOT to move forward. In other words, the scientific survey will yield definitive conclusions.

As a result of this study, now know a specific elements that are mandates with respect to bringing any form of Farmland Conservation forward. Three of these are:

- The approach to Farmland Conservation MUST be consistent with the ***San Joaquin Valley Blue Print***, which means (in part) it MUST be centered on “Smart Growth” (high density development).
- Farmland Conservation has to be driven by the concepts inherent to **A Landscape of Choice**; this document provided a framework that was embraced by most, if not all, of the stakeholders within Fresno County (and beyond) who were exposed to this work when it was released in 1998. What this document lacked was an implementation strategy.
- Likewise, Farmland Conservation needs to take full advantage of the concerted work put into the **Model Farmland Conservation Program for Fresno County**. While this document proved to be more than a little controversial, it did introduce key elements to the successful implementation of Farmland Conservation. This work needs to be preserved and leveraged in a constructive fashion.

With respect to TIMING, we should be able to construct and administer the scientific survey over the summer months; we should have a final answer to whether or not Farmland

Conservation is viable for Fresno County (and perhaps the entire Central Valley) by the end of summer 2010. The good news is that due to the depressed economy, there will be little threat to the Valley's agricultural lands in the immediate future that is due to a lack of Farmland Conservation; as a result, the culmination of this particular study by September 1, 2010, is NOT problematic.

Transit Consolidation in Fresno County

The major accomplishment, to date, with respect to **Transit Consolidation** in Fresno County is that two firms were interviewed (**Transit Resource Center** of Winter Springs, Florida (with offices in Grass Valley, California) and **Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates**, headquartered in San Francisco, CA.) and the latter firm was selected to work with Fresno COG in moving forward with Transit Consolidation. John Downs is in the process of finalizing a formal Agreement with Nelson\Nygaard, including a Work Plan and time line; work will begin, immediately thereafter. I will be working closely with John Downs, the Exploratory Committee, and the consultants.

California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

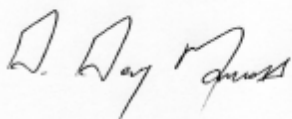
Now that the interviews involving Farmland Conservation have been completed, I can begin work on a project for the California Partnership. The initial project on behalf of the *Partnership* involves similar in-depth interviews with INFLUENTIALS throughout several Counties; as a result, I was not able to begin this process until I finished the interviews involving Transit Consolidation. I will be in touch with Mike Dozier, soon, to pick up where we left off.

Support for members of Fresno COG

At the present time, we are continuing to support a variety of activities with public agencies that are members of Fresno COG. This includes, for example, the City of Mendota and the City of Huron. I have been asked to submit a proposal to Rocky Rogers, City Manager of the City of Reedley, which I will be doing within the next week. I will provide updates on these activities as we progress with activities on behalf of these entities in the public sector.

Of course, there are other projects (e.g., bringing the High-speed Rail Maintenance Yard to Fresno, for example) that SRI will be likely be asked to work on. However, the above projects are those that are on the front burner at the moment. If you have any questions and/or comments you would like to share, please know that I'm telephone close and I monitor my e-mails quite closely.

Respectfully submitted,



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