

August 5, 2025

Dear SOREDI,

As mayors in the Rogue Valley, we appreciate the work that SOREDI has done to recruit traded sector businesses that provide family wage jobs for our residents. And we applaud SOREDI leadership acknowledging the need for structural change in the organization's programs and setting that change in motion through its strategic planning process. We also recognize that our annual contributions to SOREDI are a small part of the organization's budget. Within that context, we offer the following thoughts.

For most of us, the greatest economic development potential in our communities does not lie with traded sector companies. They are clearly important at a regional level, but our smaller communities do not tend to have available land sufficient for large enterprises. Instead, our greatest potential lies in helping small to mid-sized businesses get started and grow in our communities.

At the same time, each of our communities has its own personality, which is a critical element in terms of the small to mid-sized businesses that will be most successful in our specific towns and cities.

In discussions we have had, it has become apparent that we need economic development assistance that is tailored in some fashion to the needs, opportunities, and values present in each of our communities. As you know, strong local economies within our jurisdictions are a key element in a strong regional economy.

Understanding that SOREDI leadership is hiring a new executive director and undertaking a strategic planning process, we request a meeting between SOREDI and Rogue Valley mayors to do the following:

- Level set our understanding of SOREDI's current budget and program reality, including the strategic planning process and new staff leadership

- Provide mayors the opportunity to share their specific economic development needs
- Discuss how local jurisdictions can participate in a more meaningful way in the leadership structure of SOREDI moving forward as well as the strategic planning process
- Identify how mayors and our communities can actively support SOREDI in its new strategic direction

Business Recruitment Focus

We are particularly interested in pursuing efforts that will result in SOREDI providing greater focus on helping cities and towns recruit small to mid-sized companies to fill vacant commercial buildings or build on existing vacant land in our communities.

We envision a SOREDI staff person meeting with each community to identify the types of businesses they are looking to recruit and any specific economic development goals they have already identified.

They would then work in the recruitment space on behalf of all Rogue Valley communities through direct engagement recruiting or when approached by a company looking to move to the Rogue Valley. In either case, the recruiter would match the company with the characteristics of our communities and identify specific land or existing buildings across the Rogue Valley suitable for the company's needs.

It would then be up to our communities to work with the company to help them decide which opportunity is the best one for their needs. Essentially, it would be a warm handoff from the SOREDI recruiter to the towns that the company is interested in pursuing.

Moving Forward

In an era of ever tightening budgets, we are all continually reminded of the need to understand the community benefits associated with each line of investment in our budgets. A recruitment element like this would allow us to draw a clear line

for our residents between our contributions to SOREDI and our local economic health.

To move this forward effectively, it would be necessary to have a continually up to date GIS-based listing of all available commercial properties and land in the Rogue Valley. The recruiter would use this, and our communities would also be able to access it to help with our local economic development efforts. It may be possible for SOREDI to partner with RVCOG on this element as RVCOG already has a strong GIS program and once operational, it would likely not require significant staff time to keep it updated.

This is just one idea among others that we would like to discuss with you in person. If that is of interest, please reply to this message and we will work to set a date and time for you to visit with Rogue Valley mayors.

Again, we appreciate the many efforts SOREDI's leadership has underway to meet the Rogue Valley's regional economic development needs. We know this is a complex task and would like to continue to support SOREDI. However, to continue to renew our partnerships, we need more agency in helping to set the strategic direction of the organization. We look forward to discovering that structure together with your leadership.

Sincerely,

Mayor Tonya Graham - Ashland

Mayor Jesse Dugas - Cave Junction

Mayor Taneea Browning - Central Point

Mayor Ronald Palmer - Gold Hill

Mayor Donna Bowen - Jacksonville

Mayor Mike Zarosinski - Medford

Mayor Al Muelhoefer - Phoenix

Mayor Pam VanArsdale - Rogue River

Mayor Darby Ayers-Flood - Talent