



By JENNIFER DENEVAN Needles Desert Star | [0 comments](#)

Posted: Monday, April 28, 2014 2:34 pm

## City council approves plan for economic development



NEEDLES — City council members continued to show their desire for economic development when they approved the strategic plan created by consultant Michael Bracken during their April 22 meeting.

Bracken first gave a computerized slide presentation explaining what economic development is, where opportunities exist for Needles, categories, implementation and how to be successful.

He told council members economic development isn't about the city. Economic development is investment by the private sector, he said. What the city does it make it easier for that investment to occur.

**Michael Bracken**

The plan details all the demographic data that's been collected for months. It also explains items such as retail recruitment opportunities, housing as an economic development strategy, the importance of an economic development ombudsman and other areas where development and opportunities exist.

Bracken went into further detail about the plan itself. He discussed work he's been doing in the time since the city hired him.

Bracken submitted a written report to the city. In it, he discusses what he's accomplished so far such as creating a strategic plan, meeting with more than 20 business owners/operators to better understand the needs of the community and working with a variety of potential economic investors.

He said he goes to a lot of trade events to put communities in front of businesses. He attended Retail Live April 2 and explained that event is essentially "speed dating" for businesses. There's a long table that representatives for each business sit at, he said. Consultants, city representatives and others get three minutes with each business.

"Wow. I got more done in three or four hours," Bracken said. "They are very focused discussions."

He detailed what a conversation might be like for council members. Bracken happens to represent more than one city, but he said in conversations such as what happened at Retail Live, that's a benefit. It's a chance to keep giving information to the business representatives.

A printed document lists all the prospects for the city, Bracken said. The document shows who they are, what's going on with them, where they are in the process, he continued.

Some of the prospects are with the planning department already, Bracken said. One is already in construction.

He explained the city attorney receives that document in line with client/attorney privilege. Some don't want their names known publicly yet as they're still in the siting process, but there also needs to be accountability, he added. Either city attorney John Pinkney or city manager Rick Daniels or some combination needs to know what he is doing at all times, Bracken said. That's part of why the document has been created.

Bracken said he and the city are working with Amtrak and are trying to get a commercial broker to manage the El Garces intermodal transportation facility for leasing opportunities.

His written report to council members included who he's been talking to as far as retailers are concerned. Among them are Stater Brothers, Wal-Mart, Dollar General, Family Dollar, In-N-Out Burger, Five Guys Burgers, Rio Ranch Market, AutoZone, Circle K, Jersey Mike's, Del Taco, 99 Cents Only, Farmer Boys Restaurants, Smart and Final Markets, Panda Express Restaurants, Dunkin Donuts and El Pollo Loco.

Bracken said of those retailers, only two said no. Even with a “no,” it’s worth checking in with those folks again later because circumstances change, he continued.

His report also included outlining goals for the city between April 15 and Sept. 30. Goals include securing a property management agreement with a real estate broker, working with Reliable Properties to secure a grocery store, maintain relationships with retailers already contacted, generate a request for proposal and market for a development partner for the Bureau Bay project and several others that include training sessions within the community related to economic development.

Council members showed approval of the work Bracken’s accomplished so far. Several comments focused on the excitement of what’s been done and what it can mean for the community in the near and distant future.