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Oakland needs an economic strategy

San Francisco Business Times - by [Carlos Plazola](#)

Consider our city, Oakland, as a home. Our police force is like a home security system; our social programs like a family health-care plan; the maintenance of our streets and parks like the maintenance of the foundation and roof; the duties of city staff like household chores. And our city budget, like a household budget.

Oakland is like a low-income household, unable to maintain the home and sufficiently provide for its occupants. This household can restructure its budget in different ways, but until it increases its income, it will make little difference on the quality of life of the occupants.

As most of us know, the best way to improve our quality of life at home, beyond operating more efficiently or working harder, is to increase our household income. And so it is with our city.

I listened intently to Mayor Ron Dellums' State of the City speech on Jan. 14 at the Marriott in downtown Oakland, and generally liked what I heard. He proposed new and innovative ways of rearranging our budget, or of using our income more efficiently. All of this is important, and he earned applause that evening because he provided some good strategies and ideas: area command in community policing; assisting parolees in search of work; creating health-care facilities for all middle schools.

But what Oakland needs more than anything, if we are to push through our past and current "quality of life" struggles, is the development of an economic development strategy to increase the city's revenue stream. We are about to enter an era of growing budget deficits based on stagnant or decreasing property values and a weakening retail sector. But until we figure out a way to increase our revenue stream by 25 percent, 50 percent or even 100 percent, we will never have enough money to go beyond the 803 police officers authorized under Measure Y, to create enough social programs for youth, or repair our aging sewers and streets.

While the mayor's economic priorities of developing the Army Base to create 10,000 new jobs, completing the rezoning of Oakland, and implementing the recommendations of the Oakland Partnership Cluster Groups are important, these priorities, combined, do not constitute an economic development strategy.

An economic development strategy might sound something like this: "Within five years, I will increase Oakland's revenue stream by 50 percent by attracting investors to the city around principles of smart-growth; to develop more retail and housing on major corridors; by revitalizing or redeveloping key Oakland assets like the Army Base, our waterfront and areas around BART stations; and by developing

modernized industrial jobs campuses on underused industrial land. My priorities for the allocation of this new revenue stream will be to help more people become homeowners and thus expand the middle class of Oakland, to create more programs for youth, to create a model affordable housing program, to repair our aging infrastructure and to hire more police."

With a strong economic development strategy, Oakland can weather the upcoming budget crisis, while increasing our revenue stream, thus allowing us to make the needed repairs at home, and improve the quality of life of all our residents.

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