

Hispanic chambers backing blueprint

BUSINESS: The county's document for growth is called good for Latino homeownership and jobs.

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THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

RIVERSIDE—After struggling to secure the backing of developers, farmers and environmentalists, county supervisors have found solid support for their controversial land-use plans in an unforeseen place — Hispanic chambers of commerce.

All seven Hispanic chambers in the county are backing the "Blueprint for Tomorrow," a \$34 million endeavor to map growth for the next half-century.

The blueprint's attempt to build new highways and encourage affordable, high-density housing while conserving habitat for endangered species appeals to the chambers' goals of promoting a workable business climate and Latino homeownership.

"Our chambers have never united behind a single issue in this fashion in Riverside County," Aurelio Aguirre, vice chairman of the Inland Empire Region for the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, said.

The chambers formed a coalition called Hispanics United for the Future to lobby for state and federal funding for the plan, estimated to cost \$2 billion over 75 years for the habitat portion alone.

The coalition held a press conference Monday to announce its intentions.

The chambers of commerce that comprise the coalition are: the Greater Riverside Hispanic Chamber, Coachella Valley Mexican American Chamber, Greater Corona Hispanic Chamber, Moreno Valley Hispanic Chamber, Perris Valley Hispanic Chamber, San Geronio Pass Hispanic Chamber and Southwest Riverside Hispanic Chamber.

Nancy Alvarez, president of the Coachella Valley Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, said building new highways, and removing environmental roadblocks to development, will stimulate the region's economy and allow for the free flow of goods.

Second-quarter 2002 Census data shows that non-Hispanic whites have a 74 percent homeownership rate while Hispanics have a 47 percent rate, chamber officials said.

But the plan also charges fees on new homes, retail and industrial projects to raise funds for transportation and wildlife preserves. Several chamber leaders said they were not aware such fees were helping fund the plan.

"It doesn't really surprise me," Alvarez said. She said she'll support the fee system "as long as it's equitable."