

City of Brisbane - Economic Development Office

Recap of 2024 Progress Seminar

The 55th Annual Progress Seminar was held from April 19-21 at the Hyatt Regency in Santa Rosa. Here is a brief recap of the main speakers, and the four breakout sessions. It was announced that there were over 100 first-time attendees out of the 300+ total attendees, making it one of the largest gatherings in recent years.

Following a Friday evening meet and greet and dinner, the conference kicked off on Saturday morning with a breakfast and Opening General Session featuring Nicole Taylor, the President, and CEO of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF), speaking on the State of Philanthropy in Silicon Valley.

Ms. Taylor spoke about the work that SVCF does in San Mateo County and the great need that exists within the county. San Mateo is the 4th wealthiest county in the U.S., but has a large number of citizens living in poverty (There is more traffic now at local food banks than during the COVID epidemic). The foundation supports over 750 San Mateo County non-profits with grants, providing the largest level of grantmaking to these organizations on an annual basis. In 2023, SVCF and their donors gave \$55 Million to support organizations, bringing the total from 2018-2023 to \$345 Million.

Prominent areas of funding targeted the following areas:

Disaster response and advocacy – funds were allocated for organizations providing relief to Coastside communities affected by the 2022-2023 winter storms and the Half Moon Bay farmworker shootings. The WSWVCF commissioned a report highlighting the needs of farmworker housing within San Mateo County and specific policy recommendations on improving those conditions.

Early childhood care and learning programs – the foundation has led efforts to elevate the importance of early childhood development in the county. Partnering with County Supervisors and the County Office of Education on local initiatives to increase literacy, the foundation has provided grants to non-profits creating more early care and education facilities and funded a Teacher Pipeline Project as well as college apprenticeship programs to assist in training the early childhood workforce.

COVID Response – the SVCF’s regional response und funded organizations in each of 10 Bay Area Counties to directly support low-income people who were most severely affected by the epidemic through rent support and nutritional programs. In 2020 alone the SVCF funded \$23 Million to support San Mateo County organizations working on pandemic-related issues.

Advocating for Equity and Civic Engagement – the SVCF has provided funding to SM County for technical assistance on how to most effectively and equitably allocate the government allocated rescue plan dollars and to ensure that equity was at the forefront of strategies for rebuilding a stronger region. The foundation also partnered with the SM County Dept. of Elections to award over \$300,000 to 15 grassroot organizations for voter education and outreach.

Census work – leading up to the 2020 Census, the foundation distributed more than \$3.5 Million in grants to non-profit organizations working to ensure participation and an accurate count, especially within the rural San Mateo County coast-side farmworker communities.

Through the discussion by Ms. Taylor and Q&A from the audience members it was noted that although a portion of the SVCF donations is from several large Bay-Area/Silicon Valley companies and corporations, the majority of donations are received in small donation amounts from private citizens.

Following the Opening General Session, the groups were split into 4 groups which attended 4 breakout sessions. The sessions were as follows:

A). Strengthening Democracy: Country and Community

In this session, panelists Rafael Avendano (Redwood City Together); Thomas Schnaubelt (Hoover Institution Center, Stanford University); Mark Simon (San Mateo Daily Journal) and Catherine Lew (The Lew Edwards Group) discussed the challenges facing our democracy, its institutions, process, and practices, as well as strategies to mitigate and reverse negative trends that threaten the longevity of our democratic values at both local and national levels.

Discussion revolved around the increased polarization and “silo -based” cultural shifts that we find today. The devolving of our “trusted” media sources (newspapers/TV, etc.) were discussed, along with ways to help spark civic engagement.

Although our democratic process has been in place for 250 years, only 7% of citizens think that Congress is doing a good job. An issue is that the United States was set up in 1776 to keep the power within the State Governments, not the Federal Government. It is still evolving: “Our democracy is not broken; it is just unfinished...”

What will need to be put in place to move democracy forward?

Structural Reforms, Bridgebuilding, Voter and Citizen Education, and better Leadership at a local and national level.

B). Everyone works from Home...Why we still need strong transit systems.

In this session, Kristine Zortman (Port of Redwood City); Casey Fromson (Caltrain) and Jessica Epstein (SM County Transit District / SAMTRANS) led discussion about the changes how Bay-Area residents live, work, and travel and how the public transit systems were impacted.

The Bay-Area has the highest work-from-home rates in the nation and the slowest downtown recovery rates, resulting in fewer commute trips. The public transit agencies are currently running services using one-time federal emergency funds that will run out in 2025/2026. How can agencies cope with high fixed costs to maintain/build infrastructure and low fare-box income due to reduced ridership?

Ms. Zortman gave some facts about the Port of Redwood City:

The port handles primarily Construction Supplies and Recycling Cargo, totaling over 2,000,000 metric tons per year. It is also a FEMA transport site for handling supplies and manpower in the case of a disaster or emergency.

The port wants to expand to encompass a future Ferry Terminal, to interact with other ferry terminals within the Bay Area.

Challenges to the Port: The 101/84 interchange is very old and outdated. Needs to be rebuilt and improved/enlarged to handle trucks and cargo.

Ms. Fromson spoke on the history of CalTrain service (over 160 years) and the challenges for CalTrain showing that during the COVID epidemic and the subsequent working-from-home

environment, CalTrain lost 98% of their ridership. Since last year 2022 -2023 they have seen a 25% increase in ridership, but still have a long way to go. Once they electrify the routes, they will be able to double the number of trains running and can more effectively plan for commute trends and schedules with trains running every 10-15 minutes.

Ms. Epstein spoke on the value of the county bus system, SamTrans. They primarily service riders who do not have access to or own a vehicle. 95% of their ridership are lower income individuals. During the pandemic, most of these individuals were still working and their ridership only fell to 60% for pre-covid levels. Today, they have recovered 91% of their pre-pandemic ridership (and are over 100% if youth ridership is factored in). The El Camino Real routes comprise 20% of their total passenger load.

They are also handling specialized transit needs such as San Mateo Paratransit and Microtransit (Uber pool) ridership.

The panel spoke on the challenges of having 27 different transit agencies within the 9 county Bay Area. (BART, CalTrain, SamTrans, VTA, GG Ferries, etc.) and the MTC -proposed SB1031 which they see as a bailout for MUNI (SF) and BART. The San Mateo transit agencies are against this as they see it as an MTC power grab and a consolidation of agencies. A question is: As SM County transit is self-funded, do we, (As San Mateo County citizens) owe it to keep AC Transit/GG Transit/ GG Ferries/ BART alive? BART is reported to lose over \$30,000,000 per year on fare evasions alone.

C). Why is Artificial Intelligence (AI) a Positive Development

Marc Benioff (CEO of Salesforce) recently praised the Bay Area and San Francisco as the “World’s Number One A.I. City”, highlighting the growing A.I. scene and the presence of innovative startups. The city and regions’ reputation as a prime location for A.I. innovation will continue to attract attention and investment from the tech industry. Is this a positive development for SM County?

This panel consisted of: Ray Mueller (Supervisor, SM County); Annie Tsai (COO-San Mateo County Journal); and Vishal Verma (Edgewood Ventures, LLC).

This session focused on discussions relating to what AI is, how it’s not entirely a new technology and the trends in venture capital funding for AI.

The panelists explained how AI has been around since the 1940's but was previously called – machine learning. Computer systems and Early robotics employed AI technology 80 years ago to speed development of processes and manufacturing.

The expansion of AI startups will require huge amounts of processing power and subsequently space and energy needs for servers and computer systems. The technology will enable the finetuning of training systems, applications, and the ability to access data much faster than currently possible.

An evolving theme is that A.I. is still constantly learning new information – much like a developing child, but that the “answers” it gives are not always vetted and accurate. It has lot of information stored, but how accurate is it? All AI generated “facts” must be fact-checked and double checked to ensure validity.

Newest phase of AI is Human Conversational Chatbot (Siri, Alexa, etc.)

The venture capital community is ramping up its investment in A.I. innovation:

2020	VCs invested \$160 Billion in the stock market
2021	Investment was \$321 Billion in stocks
2022	Investment was \$200 Billion in stocks / \$25 Billion in AI
2023	Investment was \$160 Billion in stocks / \$65 Billion in AI

The trends show the scale that AI is attracting investors and how much the venture economy believes in it.

D). Follow the Federal Dollars – Funding our Local Future

This panel consisted of the following participants: Emily Douglas (Engie); Van Ton Quinvilan (Futura Health), and Shawn Marshall (P.C.E).

This discussion was an overview of some of the legislation from the Federal Government allocating over \$41 Billion to States, Cities and Counties for Infrastructure, Employment, and Innovation (Such as Chip development, Solar Panel Infrastructure, etc.). Are the local Bay Area cities taking advantage of these programs? And how can local cities receive more of these benefits?

Ms. Douglas spoke about Engie and their work with establishing “micro-grids” for cities and school districts through innovative solar programs, while Ms. Marshall detailed the work that PCE (Peninsula Clean Energy) is doing to educate customers and citizens on transitioning their homes for total electrification and eliminating the need for gas-fired appliances, as well as PCE’s work on solar power, EV Chargers at home and at work, and providing information for rebates for transitioning from an ICE vehicle to an EV.

Ms. Ton-Qunlivan spoke on the needs of an aging population and how to meet the educational needs of a much-needed workforce. 75 Years ago, there were 12 working adults over the age of 65 per every 100. Today, the number is 7 per 100, while in 20 years, the estimate is 4 per 100.

Healthcare workforce development for positions in home care, EMS, x-ray tech, etc. will be critical to meet the healthcare demands and needs with the industry. Many of these positions require less than a bachelor’s degree, but the shortages are staggering. Currently there is a shortage in California of 500,000 people to fill these positions, at a time when the population growth numbers are flattening.

There will be an ongoing need for healthcare positions and a key to filling them is through community colleges and other programs to qualify applicants for these types of good paying jobs (not requiring a BA or a BS degree).

Following the four sessions, everyone met for the Luncheon General Session:

Understanding Healthcare San Mateo County: Connecting, Collaborating and Caring

The panel consisted of: Dr. Kismet Baldwin-Santana (SM County Health Officer), Dr. Edward Kao (Physician in Chief, Kaiser Permanente), Dr. Lisa Chamberlain (MPH, Stanford School of Medicine).

The discussion focused on the interaction of SM County General Hospital (serving mostly low-income patients), and the challenges of healthcare providers such as SM County, Kaiser, Sutter Health, and Stanford Medical to collaborate, share information and coordinate better levels of care within the restraints of HIPAA statutes and the increasing strata of medical costs and patient’s need to seek and pay for care.

In the evening a dinner was held.

On Sunday morning over breakfast, the Closing General Session was held with a roundtable discussion with candidates running in the 16th Congressional District for the US House of Representatives, and the San Mateo County 4th Supervisorial District.

16th Congressional District:

Sam Liccardo – former Mayor of San Jose

Joe Simitian – Supervisor San Mateo County

Evan Low – Assemblymember, California State Assembly

This was a spirited debate between the three candidates who were hoping to be placed on the November ballot. (Simitian and Low had tied in the primary, but a recount (called on by one of Liccardo's supporters), has subsequently knocked Simitian out of the race). Good Q and A session with members of the audience asking pointed questions.

San Mateo 4th Congressional District:

Lisa Gauthier – Councilmember, City of East Palo Alto

Antonio Lopez – Mayor, City of East Palo Alto

Less spirited as both members are of similar political leanings and represent the same area. A good session for them to get acquainted with the audience and field Q and A as well.