Members Attending: Fred Bell, John Benoit, Buford Crites, Tom Davis, Eduardo Garcia, Cristina Gregorio, Bill Kroonen, Toni Lawrence, Mike Napoli, Jerry Patton, Mary Roche, Dr. Raul Ruiz, Kate Spates, Carolyn Stark, Bill Powers, Chauncey Veatch, Lisa Vossler Smith, Steve Weiss

Minutes for LYCEUM meeting on January 7, 2010

1. Quality of Life:

Carolyn Stark opened the meeting by stating that the group would continue to discuss the “Quality of Life” in order to determine a target area of study. She asked members to review the Blueprint handout and to provide feedback on the areas they thought were priority. She stated that some of listed items are already being explored by other organizations. One example is the Housing Trust that CVAG is coordinating. Lisa Vossler stated that public safety, infrastructure, hospitals, clinics and access to all of these are extremely important for residents. Eduardo Garcia agreed that public safety and public health are both important and said that the Coachella Valley as a whole needs to be perceived as a safe place with great opportunities.

Fred Bell stated that empowering people who are suffering from losing their homes is important. He stated that it is important to analyze how certain people’s disadvantages can be a burden to society and how it will be important to provide people with the opportunity to empower themselves. If we allow improvements for decent housing then we will empower social services, public safety and healthcare. Kate Spates stated that there is a concern that some people are working the system. Fred stated that from his experience with working for Habitat for Humanity, there are very few participants who abuse the system and who are not willing to work. Eduardo stated that there is only a small percentage that may not want to move beyond where they are but that the large majority wants to improve their quality of life. Tom Davis asked whether there should be a clearing house in place.

Carolyn asked the group to prioritize the topics listed in the handout. Members stated that we should explore safety, health, education and basic necessities first. Jerry Patton stated that it’s important to look at the needs of the people who cannot provide for themselves and then figure out how we create opportunities for them. Toni Lawrence said that education does not seem to be a part of the handout and is an extremely important component. Dr. Raul Ruiz said that education and empowerment is the key to social mobility. He stated that education is the medicine to good health and the antidote to poverty. We should determine the various needs of people such as not having access to healthcare or examine the statistics that state that there are poor high school graduation and college attendance rates in the valley. Jerry said that we should be a little concerned as this is the first time that we’re seeing children with a lower level of education than their parents and grandparents. Chauncey Veatch said that his concern is that we are
losing our boys in the 10th grade. He said that we need to take advantage of our language and rich diversity and invest in our community. He said that we are creating test takers versus thinkers with the current educational system. Dr. Ruiz said that our youth needs to be more involved so that they take ownership. It is important to use venues that are in place such as after school programs and opportunities for youth to be involved. Cristina Gregorio said that providing educational opportunities and exposure will motivate and inspire our youth to pursue/continue their education. Bill stated that he knows that people always want to highlight educational failures but that we should really take a look at key programs that are successful. He said that there are different organizations and schools that are doing great in the valley. One of these is Washington Charter School. He asked the group to consider inviting the principal to see what they are doing that is creating such positive outcomes.

Carolyn asked how we can help improve and set a positive image for the valley that will include a celebration of our diversity. Members stated that good branding of the Coachella Valley will be important and it will be necessary to work on a media and marketing effort. Carolyn stated that our mission should include preserving our good qualities. Members stated that we need to figure out what kind of event we want to hold. Do we want a traditional public event? We might want to decide how we can focus on the three: healthcare, education and housing. This might be a one year study. We may want to have a think tank group to figure out what the rest of the valley wants/thinks. Dr. Ruiz stated that we will need to focus on the task at hand and that we need to figure out how to gather data and create an inventory. He said that we also need to ask ourselves what it we are going to accomplish this year? It will also be important to manage perception, create shared commonality and promote social mobility. In other words, we should try to brand ourselves as a “Place of Opportunity.” Kate stated that it will be important to listen to the community and have action committees in place. She also said we need an inventory, marketing and we need to figure out what are national issues, not just valley issues. Lisa stated that this is the perfect time to lay out our roadmap, since it is the beginning of new a decade. It will be important to note that our problems are no longer just East Valley problems, everyone is being affected now.