Members Attending: Don Perry, Chauncey Veatch, Steve Weiss, Mary Roche, Pam LiCalsi, Cynthia Flores, Steve Weiss, Jeff Beckelmen, Aurora Wilson, Eduardo Garcia, Raul Ruiz, Cristina Gregorio, Carolyn Stark

Minutes for LYCEUM meeting on November 5, 2009

1. Quality of Life:

Carolyn Stark started the meeting by explaining that the Lyceum group changes its area of study and membership every year. This year the Lyceum will focus on “Quality of Place,” which also happens to be an important piece of the Coachella Valley Economic Blueprint. During the previous meeting, members discussed the topics important to the valley that pertain to the “Quality of Place.” Mary Roche said that we do not talk about why we live here and that we need to start doing this. She said it is important to define all these elements and have the right representation at the table. Steve Weiss said that we need more young professionals at the table to learn what they are looking for in terms of work, arts and entertainment. Terry Green said that it will be important reach out to teenagers because many of them complain that there is not much to do here. Karolee Sowle said that when she hires young professionals the selling point is the diversity of the Valley. Don Perry said that the Valley is really a celebration of diversity. He has lived in several places where people do celebrate where they live. He mentioned that it is understated here – it needs to become a part of our DNA. This will help as it becomes more appealing to people moving and staying in the valley. Carolyn stated that the group needs to commit to being inclusive of all parts of the Valley as this will allow us to gain a regional perspective.

The group discussed successful events such as Coachella Fest and StageCoach and how planning around these events can be key in economic development. Carolyn said that it will be important to explore art and cultural festivals ideas. Eduardo Garcia said there has been discussion about moving these events further east as development is occurring in the current area. Aurora Wilson said that several years ago we didn’t have higher education and now we do which is key. Cynthia Flores stated that education is the key growing and creating a workforce from within and that this gives our local community a boost. Steve Weiss said that there needs to be a balance in terms of hiring from within and outside of the valley. Mary agreed that you need to do both as we still have a hospitality industry where employment needs are seasonal.

Carolyn mentioned that the “Quality of Place” can be defined in different manners and all perspectives need to be heard. Cristina Gregorio said that the East Valley really values having good educational opportunities, healthcare resources and job stability.
Raul Ruiz said that the East Valley likes entertainment, culture, museums, conferences and educational stimulation just like many parts of the Valley. More activities would help the “Quality of life” in the East valley. Raul said that entertainment, country clubs, golf, restaurants and entertainment are not accessible to the East Valley due to distance and economics. Kids in Coachella don’t play golf because it’s not accessible and it’s expensive. There is a demographic difference as there are more children and teenagers on the East valley and more retired population living on the western end of the valley.

Pam LiCalsi said that it’s important to explore how we can integrate the community. Raul said that integrated activities will be important. These could include hosting a Coachella marathon, bike ride or run and have it connect the community by hosting at different cities. It will be important to figure out a way how to integrate in a complimentary manner. We don’t want the East valley to look like the West Valley. The mom and pop stores are gone in the west, but the east has still maintained these. He asked how do we maintain the soul of our beginnings and our roots and celebrate the soul of the different cities.

Eduardo said that it is important to look at Coachella and for those involved in policy to make sure that the Blueprint extends itself to the eastern portion of the Valley. It’s important for every city to benefit from the economic opportunities the Blueprint will offer. Chauncey Veatch said that the East valley is unique because the kids who leave for college want to come back. They want the educational opportunities that everyone should have accessible really value community. He said that many of the historical parts of the Valley are in the East valley. If we want to promote young professionals then it will be important to understand how we can support and invest in their education. We need to find or create a pipeline for the students to return. Eduardo said that Pathways is an example of what we should be doing. There are opportunities being given through programs like these.

Steve said that we need to figure out how we can you bring together all of the different entities of the valley in a positive manner where our individual and combined strengths are recognized. He said that we need to do an inventory and a balance sheet. What are our assets or shortcomings and how do we help each other. Each city will discuss their strengths and weaknesses and then figure out how we can leverage or enhance them. Mary mentioned that we need to look at our natural resources, ease of transportation and the assets that we mutually benefit from and highlight areas where integration needs to occur.

Raul asked how do we celebrate our differences: How do we celebrate the retired population and the young working class Latino? The traditional economic partnership of the valley is the west has the businesses, job, hospitality and restaurants and the east has the workforce. This is not working for the eastern side of the Coachella Valley as the working class have two jobs, don’t have health insurance, daycare and can’t afford to
send their children to school. When we think of development we should not think of the same status quo but more of a complimentary partnership that benefits the entire Valley. There is also a need for hospitals, recreation centers, and nice entertainment in the Eastern Valley. Steve stated that if we can be successful in what was identified in the Blueprint then these will end up in the East Valley because that is where land is available. Cynthia said that she wants to make sure that as we move forward in exploring our quality of life that we continue to look at social justice and equity. Raul suggested doing a diagnostic of the valley. Who are the people who are or are not happy with the valley? Who is leaving and why? We need to work as a community and keep this discussion data driven versus perception. Pam said that we need to invite other community members, such as tribal members, to the table and have them share their perspectives. Mary said that maybe the media needs to start highlighting/celebrating our diversity that can show the importance of diversity. We need to think about elevating our valley together, not just parts of it. There should be future discussion on how this can be achieved.

Meeting adjourned.

Agenda for December 10, 2009:

Continue discussion of “Quality of Place” by hearing from member’s guests – young professionals in the Valley.