

4

RULES TO HELP
TRANSFORM
YOUR COMMUNITY



THE
SPRINGS
WONEDER
PROJECT

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SPRINGS W O N E D E R PROJECT

4 RULES TO HELP TRANSFORM YOUR COMMUNITY

History

The Boyes Hot Springs corridor is approximately a 2-mile strip on Highway 12 just north of the city of Sonoma. Featuring a mix of residential, retail, recreation and resort use, as well as a rich multi-cultural community, it sadly has been a neglected region of Sonoma County for many years. 30,000 people drive through the 'Springs' on Highway 12 each day without even knowing it, viewing a mostly non-descript area of grey and beige buildings. Sections of the area have fallen into disrepair with abandoned buildings and damaged housing. It remains one of the least economically developed areas in Sonoma County.

The Facade Improvement Challenge

With a mandate to alleviate the deterioration of neighborhoods, Sonoma county has begun to address situations like this throughout the county by allocating a mix of forgivable and low interest loans towards facade improvement for businesses. This valuable beginning faces a number of challenges. The forgivable loan funds are minimal for the work involved and a portion of it can be eaten away by sign/building permits and loan fees. Another challenge is that if not done right, applying different designs to each individual business can result in a mix of varying styles and even worse, uneven levels of design and execution. In fact, a number of Springs businesses were approached by a national sign company that barely if at all met with the store owners. The owners felt like they were being pushed substandard designs that had nothing to do with their own businesses, with the threat to accept them before the forgivable loan money went away. Bad for business and the county all the way around. The end result of these challenges can lead to essentially "putting lipstick on a pig" with a visual mishmash of uninspired buildings, an unfortunate waste of government funds and a community that feels further alienated. And what of the Springs? It will remain a forgotten and nondescript area that cars drive through to get to someplace else.

A Solution for the Springs

We can do better. Having designed the successful 'La Michoacana' ice cream store in the Springs on Highway 12, I have become very familiar with the area and it's local business community. There are a number of ways to approach this project that will help set it on the right track.

RULE NUMBER ONE : GO TO THE PEOPLE Many businesses that these loans were originally meant for are hispanic and english is not always understandable. The first thing I did was walk up and down the 2 mile strip with Teresita Fernandez, owner of La Michoacana, to help translate and meet as many business owners as we could. We told them what we knew about the loan program and invited them to a meeting at La Luz community center to learn more.

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RULE NUMBER TWO : EDUCATE THE PEOPLE At that meeting, we were fortunate to have Susan Gorin, Sonoma County Supervisor of the district, as well as John Haig, Fred Bengs and Andy Pozzi from the Sonoma County Community Development Commission graciously explain the entire loan program in detail to the group of business leaders and answer all questions. The meeting was attended by members of 'La Luz' business community outreach, the Springs Alliance group, and quite a number of local business leaders and property owners interested in improving their neighborhood. There was a Spanish translator as well. The meeting showed the remarkable diversity of the area and was an excellent example of community involvement.

RULE NUMBER THREE : GET INSPIRATION FROM WHAT WORKS I gave a presentation at the meeting showing examples of how other areas across america dealt with trying to upgrade their area on a small budget. There were 2 solutions that really stood out. The first was color. Bright colors! It is amazing what simply bright beautiful colors can do to bring lightness and smiles to a neighborhood. Adding bright colors to a once run down area in Tuscan Arizona created a boom in business and helped to transform the local community.



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The Second simple solution that created neighborhood aliveness and business success was Murals and public art in general. Here is a great example. A blighted area was transformed with brightly colored murals welcoming drivers to the city of Philadelphia. Interestingly, these murals are so universally loved that they have become 'Graphiti proof'.



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And closer to home, 'El Molino Central' is a wonderful example of a successfully transformed business in the Springs. The solution of directly painting on the building with bright colors is both fun, less expensive than other forms of signage and effectively reflects this business and the local hispanic community.



RULE NUMBER FOUR : CREATE A VISION WHERE EVERYONE WINS After all of the research I had done, combined with my years of experience branding and marketing for major companies (HBO, Discovery Channel, Beringer), I had an inspiration. Rather than approaching this project as individual businesses, why not reimagine it as a community of businesses, each one branded in a unique way, but visually tied together with color and other unifying motifs? It had to be visually stunning in order to capture the imaginations of others and see that this is more than just a thoroughfare. This is a unique area known as 'The Springs' that people will want to remember and tell their friends about. There is something special going on here. Rather than just driving through, we want to encourage people to pull over, explore the area, learn about the community and patronize the local businesses.

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There are many benefits to this approach. In designing a comprehensive and creative solution, a regional identity is formed which is open and inviting. The economy will grow. The new beauty can even help activate the local community into more neighborhood participation. Already, after presenting these designs to a number of local businesses and community groups, I have experienced delighted excitement from all age and ethnic groups. It is heartening to witness diverse peoples inspired to work together towards a common purpose. I am very touched by the overwhelming support I have received from not only the Springs community, but also from every official that I have talked to in the Sonoma County government. I am grateful to be offering a solution that will bring a much needed boost to this special part of Sonoma county.

Getting it done

Realizing such an expansive program will be challenging, and understanding that the county may not have the artistic resources capable or willing to take on such a project for the minimal amount of funds available, I have assembled a remarkable team of craft contractors, painters, muralists, sculptors, electricians and sign makers that will make these designs a reality. I am offering my services to coordinate my team for the entire project, for the minimal budget that the county is providing. Please note that the actual costs to do this work in the time I am scheduling far exceeds the budget the county is offering. Gratefully, a number of my skilled team members are willing to donate their own extra time to realize this project. It is a remarkable gift and a tribute to the amazingly resourceful heart of our community.

Along with the many business owners in the community and their families, our team is excited to begin. This is a great project. It will certainly be impactful in helping to bring attention to a much needed region in Sonoma county and be the beginning of a new era of economic development for the Springs. I am grateful for this opportunity to serve. We are blessed to live here.

warmly,



Rico Martin

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