

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Colloquium: Reusing the Former Fort Ord A Community Discussion on the Economy, Education and the Environment**

A two-day Colloquium hosted by California State University-Monterey Bay (CSUMB) and the Fort Ord Reuse Authority (FORA) provided a unique opportunity for the public to hear from and interact with nationally recognized experts on topics of economic development, innovation clusters, blight removal and remediation, urban and regional design, community collaboration, and national monuments as economic engines for the region and also emphasized how important communication and partnerships are within the Central Coast region. Replay of the event is available on both the CSUMB and FORA websites at [www.csumb.edu](http://www.csumb.edu) and [www.fora.org](http://www.fora.org).

“This has been an exciting opportunity to hear from nationally-recognized experts in various fields that can assist our region in continuing our own reuse and recovery. It was also a truly unique opportunity for the public to interact personally with the experts as well as build stronger relationships among our local communities and residents,” said FORA Board chair and Del Rey Oaks mayor Jerry Edelen.

“I appreciate all the people, from both the public and private sectors, who attended, listened and discussed these important issues. Through the colloquium, we wanted to hear new viewpoints and to encourage a spirit of collaboration among leaders from around the region. I trust we will move forward on Fort Ord redevelopment with renewed energy and a focus on our common interests -- both for us and our descendants -- as a result of this event,” added CSUMB president Eduardo Ochoa.

Among the many observations provided by experts during the Colloquium, several recurring themes emerged during the presentations and dialogues: leadership, collaboration, partnerships, innovation, regional approaches in planning and implementation, and understanding and willingness among communities and residents to work together to achieve goals – to commit to decisions based on “yes, if...” rather than “no, because...”. Numerous examples of reuse success throughout the nation were described, noting the importance of policy direction that assists in redevelopment opportunity rather than creating hurdles that discourage innovation and investment. Job creation and master planning were cited as basic tools for increasing the tax base and providing for social transformation. Leadership from educational institutions to redirect efforts beyond a traditional research emphasis and serve as catalysts for development and community integration was encouraged. Utilizing the concept of creating “small wonders” in innovation rather than seeking to attract the next big international phenomena in commercial activity was posed as fitting the region. Building upon strengths of the various educational institutions in the region and incorporating integration of environment were noted as opportunities for achieving economic development.

### Background

When closure of the former Fort Ord military base was first announced in 1991 and subsequently formally closed in 1994, communities in the Central Coast region had little trouble pulling together to communicate concern about impact to the regional economy. With a military and civilian population equivalent to several of the larger cities in the region of Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties, and with significant

business, housing and employment resources dependent upon the military base, many questioned whether local communities could survive the crisis and accomplish viable recovery for the future.

Part of the proposed approach toward achieving long-term recovery was the establishment of a region-wide body called the Fort Ord Reuse Authority and the creation of a Fort Ord Base Reuse Plan (BRP) which centered on three key concepts: education, environment and economic development.

With adoption of the BRP in 1997, and following a rise in national economic conditions, the process of recovery seemed not only possible but initially solved. The BRP, designed as a 40-50 year slow-growth plan to establish jobs and create housing, would relieve pent-up job and housing demand and accommodate future anticipated natural population growth. The BRP would conserve the environment by setting aside nearly 2/3 of the property in recreational and protected open space in perpetuity. The establishment of educational institutions would serve as the centerpiece of the recovery process. Communities breathed a sigh of relief and settled into a seemingly less urgent focus within the context of the recovery process.

But recovery was far from being immediately achieved and was turning out not to be a simple or easy process. Fort Ord had served as a military training base for nearly a century. Lands were contaminated with munitions and explosives that had to be removed for public access and recovery to occur. Former military buildings contained asbestos and lead paint which would cost millions of dollars for a removal process. Roads, sewer and water distribution systems required significant repair and replacement. The vast open space lands and protection of habitat species would require endowment funding to assure safe public access and long-term preservation and maintenance. Despite problems in addressing the significant costs for issues of cleanup and habitat preservation, cities planned their recovery and revised their General Plans to accommodate reuse. There was periodic disagreement about some of the specific projects proposed or approved, but still recovery was proceeding. As time passed, with multiple and complex delays in implementing some of the reuse planning, the more recent recession, and some community debate about specific proposed projects, questions about reuse again surfaced.

The Colloquium provided an opportunity to renew discussion and understanding of the process as well as fundamental objectives of reuse to create jobs and future opportunities within the Central Coast region --- economic development through collaboration, utilizing the strengths and values of education and conservation of environmental resources.

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