

Zach Wasserman
Attorney at Law
Wendel Rosen Black & Dean, LLP
Oakland, CA

EDAB VISION AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

I am very honored by this award and I want to start by thanking the members and especially the Executive Board and the Officers of EDAB for recognizing me in this way. But even more I want to thank all of you for the hard work you do for this region and EDAB.

I also want to thank my partners and associates at Wendel, Rosen, Black and Dean for supporting me in my community and civic efforts and for their long-standing commitment to Oakland and to the East Bay. The firm was founded in Oakland in 1909 and its lawyers continue to serve communities throughout the East Bay in civic and charitable activities.

Most importantly I want to recognize my sons Jake and Michael and thank my wife Meg Zweiback – it is to a large extent her patience, her occasional impatience and her sense of the common man and woman that supports and guides me in all my activities.

My Basis for Vision and our Challenges

Greek civilization was based on the development of the Polis – the small city state like Athens. The basic philosophy of the democratic city/state described by Aristotle and Thucydides was that unless you participate in the Polis – the civic and political parts of your community – you are not fully a man. My parents

taught me that philosophy by example, by their participation in the PTA and charities and politics – my father even ran for the state Assembly, coming in eighth in a field of eight. I learned about the Polis in the classrooms and on the ground at UC Santa Cruz where Meg and started the school, student government (including an experiment choosing legislators by lot) and the student newspaper, City on a Hill Press. While I have not and do not ever intend to run for office I have been very fortunate for the past 27 years to play an active part in the Polis that is Oakland and the East Bay– and I want to assure you that this is no retirement party – I am just getting started.

I want to touch briefly on a couple of elements of my own vision and some of challenges I see facing us today and in our future.

The name of this organization - EDAB - has meaning. Economic Development Alliance for Business.

“Economic Development “ is pretty clear – support for the institutions, programs and policies that promote economic strength and sustain and create jobs, a solid growing tax base and the human, physical and economic resources to help us grow in a sustainable way.

“Alliance” means we are a collection, a collaboration of organizations and we reach out to each other and to still other organizations to do our work. EDAB

is one of the best, most real and most productive public/private partnership that I know of in this state and perhaps the country.

And “Business” – the bottom line. We are an organization that recognizes that Businesses are the base of economic development – the people who own, operate and are employed by businesses are the ones who create and offer jobs, who pay the taxes, and who produce the goods and services that make this a vital successful region where we want to live.

We are a regional organization – based in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties but serving all of the East Bay. Several years ago at an EDAB retreat we talked about Regional Stewardship and that concept has stuck with me. I think it is a very important approach to what we are trying to do. Regional stewards are leaders who are committed to the long-term well being of places. They are integrators who cross boundaries of jurisdiction, sector and discipline to address complex regional issues such as housing/job balance, equity, education, real transportation concerns, reasonable consideration of environmental and making bureaucracy work. They see the connection between economic, environmental and social concerns and they know how to “connect the dots” to create opportunities for their regions. Regional stewards are leaders who combine an understanding that we are responsible for making this place, our cities and our region, a better place for future generations with the need to confront and solve the very problems facing us at this moment.

Stewardship means the careful and responsible management of something entrusted in our care. Regional stewardship combines the idea of “regional citizenship” with “stewardship of place.” We look beyond the narrow focus of our personal needs, the needs of our business, the needs of our particular jurisdiction and organization – we do not ignore them – but we look beyond them to the needs of and possibilities of the region and of the many jurisdictions and organizations within the region. We analyze and we ACT with that broader perspective.

So what does that mean for us today. We know we face incredible public budget challenges at the federal, state and local level today. The Governors’ Budget makes that clear. Many of us remember surviving the problems of Proposition 13 and we will survive the current crisis, but we need to focus on the future as we deal with these awful cuts.

I hope we can continue our broad view as regional stewards as we do several things:

1. Continue to educate and cajole our legislators at every level that programs that support business retention and attraction – like Technology Ventures Network and Manex and many others – are even more critical as we face this budget crisis. They may have to suffer cut backs like every program but they should not be abandoned and indeed in some areas should be expanded to fuel the

economic recovery. Our friends who are here –names – don't need the persuasion but others will

2. Fight to save investments in our infrastructure – particularly our roads and public transit organizations and university research – they are what will keep progress in this region possible. Failure to continue to invest now, may doom us to a much longer gloomier recovery period.

3. We need to think even more creatively about ways to finance our public infrastructure. A broad effective alliance in Alameda County led the way two years ago to win an 81.5% vote approving reauthorization of Measure B for transportation. It took us four years and two elections but we did it. And Contra Costa County will do it as well. We need to learn from those experiences and find more creative financing that we can put in place more quickly. We need to find more ways to help government do more with less as businesses – and many governments - have been doing for the past several years.

4. And we need to create a more effective and united voice for business at the state and local level. Keith Carson emphasized this at yesterdays' Executive Committee Meeting. We all are part of different trade groups and lobbying organizations that support some of our narrow interests. We need to spend time to figure that those issues that are most important to all of as businesses and business

supporters and unite to convey our message to the state legislature, the governor and to local elected officials.

I want to leave you with two phrases that have been very helpful in guiding me in my efforts to participate in the Polis and to help create a vision for my community. One is from my son – who did not originate it but sometimes uses it as a mantra – If we do not change, we cannot survive. If we do not survive, we cannot change. This is a good message for dealing with the current budget tensions.

The other is a teaching from the Mishnah– a collection of rabbis' commentaries about the Torah – by Rabbi Hillel:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

If I am for myself alone, what good am I?

If not me, who?

If not now, when?

Again I thank you very much for this honor, and I urge you to continue to work together with a regional vision and the courage to act.