

Highlights from Monterey Bay Economic Partnership 2024 State of the Region

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Information provided by Monterey Bay Economic Partnership. Lea este artículo en español [aquí](#).

More than 325 top leaders and decision-makers from diverse sectors convened Friday to explore regional progress at Monterey Bay Economic Partnership's sold-out State of the Region event. Attendees representing the private, public, and nonprofit sectors gathered at Cal State Monterey Bay's University Center in a daylong event focused on key regional issues.

Dilawar Syed, Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration, delivered a powerful keynote on the vital role of small businesses in driving local economic growth. He shared insights on fostering entrepreneurship, supporting small business resilience, and the resources available to help them thrive.

Zoe G. Carter, Executive Director of the Santa Cruz Business Council, moderated an inspiring panel featuring local small business leaders. In partnership with the Santa Cruz and Central Coast Small Business Development Centers, panelists Zachary Davis of The Penny Ice Creamery, Tyler Davin-Moore of Redwood Records, and Edi Matsumoto of Matsumoto Fine Art shared their entrepreneurial journeys, successes, and insights into sustaining and growing businesses in our region.

Audries Blake, Associate Director of Community Relations at UC Santa Cruz, moderated "Driving Regional Economy through Quality of Place," an insightful panel exploring how quality of place fuels economic growth in the Monterey Bay region. Terence Concannon, President of Visit Santa Cruz, and Rob O'Keefe, President & CEO of See Monterey, discussed strategies to enhance community appeal and attract tourism, business, and talent. Their perspectives highlighted the vital role of place-making in building a vibrant, resilient regional economy.

"Local and State Strategies to Create More Workforce Housing," a panel moderated by MBEP Director of Housing and Community Development Matt Huerta, brought together experts tackling the workforce housing crisis. Panelists included Sasha Kergan, California Deputy Secretary for Housing, Dr. PK Diffenbaugh, Superintendent of Monterey Peninsula Unified School District, Dr. Heather Contreras, Superintendent of Pajaro Valley Unified School District, and Kathryn Avila from Avila Construction. They shared innovative local and state strategies to expand affordable housing options and support the community's essential workforce.

Montage Health President & CEO Dr. Steve Packer presented “A Reflection on Four Decades: The Journey and Future of Healthcare in Our Community,” offering a thoughtful perspective on Monterey Bay’s healthcare evolution and what lies ahead. A compelling discussion followed, with panelists Rosa Vivian Fernandez, President & CEO of San Benito Health Foundation, Dr. Allen Radner, President & CEO of Salinas Valley Health, and Dr. Nannette Mickiewicz, President & CEO of Dominican Hospital, sharing insights into the challenges and advancements in delivering compassionate, community-focused care.

Santa Cruz County Supervisor Zach Friend led “The 2024 Election: An Unfiltered Analysis,” a dynamic panel featuring Tom White of Majority Advisors and Kristin Olsen-Cate, Partner at California Strategies and former California State Assembly Minority Leader, which explored key issues, insights, and impacts of the national elections.

PG&E President & CEO Patti Poppe took a powerful stand for climate optimism, discussing innovative solutions and the role of leadership in addressing our planet’s challenges.

Rachel Barker, nonresident Fellow at the Brookings Institution, delivered an impactful keynote, “Regions Up! Uplifting the Monterey Bay Region of the Central Coast through Data,” which delved into how data-driven strategies can unlock growth, resilience, and opportunity across the region.

In a panel discussion on advancing broadband and digital equity through public-private partnerships, Sunne Wright McPeak, President & CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF), emphasized the vital role of collaborative efforts in achieving statewide digital accessibility. Angela Curro, District 4 Supervisor of San Benito County, highlighted local initiatives driving connectivity improvements in rural areas. Ken Nye, COO of Surfnet Communications, provided a perspective on innovative infrastructure solutions for delivering high-speed internet through public-private partnerships. MBEP Manager of Economic Development and Digital Equity Maure Gildea offered a regional lens on equitable tech access and economic development strategies. Stephen Lieberman, Board Chair of Loaves, Fishes, & Computers, shared the community impact of digital literacy programs and tech access for underserved populations.

“Building a Strong Workforce through Education, Training, and Innovation” a panel led by MBEP Senior Advisor for Strategy & Development Lavera Alexander, featured Larry Samuels, Senior Advisor to the Chancellor, Cesar Lara, Director of Workforce and Economic Development at the California Labor Federation, and Doug Erickson, Executive Director of Santa Cruz Works. The panel highlighted the crucial intersection of education, training, and innovation in creating a resilient, future-ready workforce for AI, advanced air mobility, and Agtech. They highlighted how far the region has come in economic development including the founding of MBEP a decade ago, Monterey Bay Tech Hub, CSUMB Mechatronics, Hartnell’s AgTech program and so much more.

This was followed by local examples of innovation underway: “Celebrating Workforce Innovation” featured a compelling discussion by leaders of the Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship Program (AMAP), highlighting an initiative that exemplifies the power of collaboration in building a skilled workforce and driving regional economic growth. Maria Elena Manzo, Program Director of Mujeres en Acción, and Josh Metz, Executive Director and co-founder of Monterey Bay DART, are at the forefront of efforts to connect individuals with meaningful opportunities in advanced manufacturing with Joby. Their collective commitment to workforce development, innovation, and community partnerships is setting the stage for a more inclusive and resilient economy.

State of the Region 2024 also featured legislative updates from State Sen. John Laird, Assembly Member Gail Pellerin, and State Sen. Anna Caballero, welcoming remarks by CSU Monterey Bay President and MBEP Board Member Vanya Quinones, Seaside Mayor Ian Oglesby, and UC Santa Cruz Chancellor and MBEP Board President Cynthia Larive, with special video message by state Attorney General Rob Bonta.

MBEP President and CEO Tahra Goraya stressed the urgency for local leaders to embrace their responsibility in modeling civility and unity within their families, companies, congregations, and community as well as driving regional solutions. “In divided times, our role is to be bridge builders so we can forge the solutions we need to create quality jobs, drive innovation, build homes, provide accessible broadband, clean and sustainable transportation – and the list goes on,” said Goraya. “As leaders, we must lead the change we want to see here locally.”

Additionally, there were thought-provoking, actionable discussions on “Childcare = Good Business” with Sonja Koehler, director, Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative; “Investing in Entrepreneurial Communities Across California” with Bulbul Gupta, President & CEO, Pacific Community Ventures; “Looking the Mirror at the State of Housing” with Monterey County District 4 Supervisor Wendy Root Askew; “Futuro: Cooperatives and the Economic Future of the Monterey Bay” with Maria Cadenas, Executive Director, Ventures; “Adapting to the Changing Labor Landscape” with Nishan Moutafian, Vice President, U.S., Baja & Canada Production for Driscoll’s; “Reservoir Farms: Robotics Incubator” with Danny Bernstein, CEO, Reservoir, and Jackie Cruz, Executive Director, Hartnell College Foundation; and a special keynote from California Forward CEO Kate Gordon.

A full event recording and presenters’ slide decks from MBEP’s 2024 State of the Region will be released soon.