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Contact: Supervisor Keith Carson, Chair, East Bay EDA (510) 272-6695

Darien Louie, East Bay EDA (510) 272-6843

Chris Bazar, Alameda County Community Development Agency (510) 670-5333

ALAMEDA COUNTY LEADS THE WAY IN CALIFORNIA POPULATION SURGE
New Figures Underscore County's Growing Attraction as Housing, Business Center

Alameda County's position at the forefront of California population growth tells a story about exciting dynamics in the County that likely will attract new residents here for years to come, County officials and an expert on the East Bay economy said Monday.

"The jobs are here, the housing is more affordable here and we have the best weather in the Bay Area," said Keith Carson, President of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and Board Chairman of the East Bay Economic Development Alliance (East Bay EDA) in Oakland. "For years we've been saying that Alameda County is the best place to live, work and do business. Now the numbers are making the case for us."

A report issued this week by the California Department of Finance said the state added 332,000 people between July 1, 2012 and July 1 of this year, a growth rate of 0.9 percent that is the highest since 2003-04, before the recession. According to the report, Alameda County not only topped all other counties in terms of total population increase – its 15,000 new arrivals from other states and countries led the rest of California in terms of net migration.

Darien Louie, Executive Director of East Bay EDA, said these numbers point to a fast-growing technology sector that is drawing workers to Alameda County from around the globe. Louie said other factors give the County an edge in appealing to people who have decided to relocate to the Bay Area and must decide where to make their home.

"They are not finding the love in terms of housing that is affordable in San Francisco and Santa Clara County," she said. "And even if their jobs are in those areas, we have the public transit here so they can easily travel between home and work, and still have a high quality of life."

Louie cited several other factors behind Alameda County's population growth:

- Lower commercial property costs that are attracting a diverse array of businesses, including several notable nonprofits that have purchased their own office spaces in Oakland - an option not available in other Bay Area locations.
- An influx of foreign workers, many of them highly educated, who are drawn by the area's emerging hi-tech industries. Workers from Southeast Asia and other warmer climates also find Alameda County's warm weather more appealing than communities within the coastal fog belt.
- The diverse population that has always made Alameda County attractive to immigrants. "In Alameda County you are going to find people who speak your native language, and you're going to find those assets such as the cultural centers and the stores that sell items unique to your home country," Louie said.

The cities in Alameda County with the largest population gains are Fremont, Dublin, Oakland and Hayward. The availability of housing that is more affordable in these communities – some of it in the form of new transit-friendly, multi-unit developments – seems to be a big factor in their population surges, said Chris Bazar, Director of the Alameda County Community Development Agency.

According to Bazar, Fremont is attractive to new residents due to its close proximity to technology centers in the Silicon Valley and on the Peninsula, while the city offers housing that is generally more affordable than can be found in Santa Clara County.

Bazar says a significant amount of housing that is more affordable – including new multi-family units – has recently come available in Hayward, Dublin, and Oakland. Not only are many of these housing developments attractive in terms of cost, but adding to their appeal is the fact that many are located within easy access to BART and express bus lines.

Alameda County's relative affordability is also spurring growth in another area that is often overlooked: the arrival of older Bay Area residents who choose to move here from other nearby communities, Louie said.

“They're retired, the kids have grown up and moved on, and they find the house they bought in San Francisco for \$100,000 is now worth more than a \$1 million,” she said. “So they cash out, and they move over here where they can purchase their home free and clear and still have some money left over. And even if they miss the people from the old neighborhood, they're still just a short BART ride away.”