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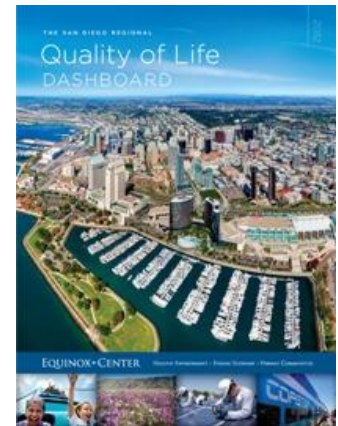
Emma Leggat (760)-230-2960  
emma@equinoxcenter.org

## **New Equinox Center Quality of Life Dashboard Shines Spotlight on 2012 Election Blind Spots**

*Regional Report Card Reveals Soaring Cost of Living, Traffic and Waste as Key Priority Areas*

**January 24, 2011 (San Diego, CA)** – The third annual report card of the San Diego region’s quality of life was released today by non-partisan research group Equinox Center, revealing that current election rhetoric is out of synch with critical regional priority areas. The 2012 San Diego Regional Quality of Life Dashboard identifies three key trends in which the region has moved in the wrong direction in the past year, threatening economic prosperity and environmental health: soaring cost of living and rising traffic and waste production.

The Dashboard is a non-partisan tool to help all San Diego residents cut through rhetoric and compare how the region and its cities are performing on quality of life issues. Now in its third year of publication, the Dashboard uses 15 data-backed indicators and benchmarks to objectively chart the region’s progress on: job creation and economic prosperity, housing affordability, transportation and traffic, water consumption and quality, land use and park access, energy, climate change, air quality and waste.



“While our job growth is improving, more than half of all San Diego County households are reeling as our region’s cost of living continues to soar, and we face some of the greatest transportation and traffic challenges in California,” said Equinox Center Executive Director Ann Tartre. “Where is the public dialogue about these issues? What do our candidates and elected officials have to say about them? The Dashboard is a tool to ignite that conversation.”

Having revealed core priority areas for maintaining a high quality of life in the region, Equinox Center is focused on advancing new solutions by informing and driving dialogue among candidates, elected officials and citizens. The organization today convened more than 100 regional leaders to discuss the 2012 Quality of Life Dashboard findings.

## **Key issues highlighted as priority areas in need of attention included:**

- **Cost of Living:** while the economy has been recovering, the San Diego region still has a long way to go to reach historic employment figures. However, recent employment data show that the San Diego region fared better than many other regions in the state. Still, a majority of San Diego County households are spending more than a third of their income on their rent or mortgage. That makes them financially vulnerable and vastly reduces the amount of discretionary spending that could otherwise be spurring the local economy.

“A high cost of living also deters businesses and top talent—especially young professionals—from locating in the region,” said Trevor Callan, Equinox Center board chairman and CEO of Callan Capital.

While a high cost of living was flagged as an issue of concern in last year’s Dashboard, this year, the number of renters at risk is even higher than in previous years as a result of a squeeze in the rental market.

- **Transportation:** high housing costs push people to live farther from core areas, increasing traffic congestion, commute times and costs. Traffic congestion threatens the region’s air quality and public health, putting vulnerable populations like children and the elderly at risk. At more than 14 highway vehicle miles (VMT) traveled per person per day, the San Diego region outranks all other counties in California.
- **Waste:** the San Diego region this year reversed a four-year trend of declining waste production per person, outpacing even Los Angeles County. On average, San Diegans are now producing more than 6 lbs. of trash per person per day—enough for every person’s trash to fill a city bus in one year. Increased waste drives increased need for landfills, which are expensive, difficult to site and threaten both our air and water quality.

## **San Diego Shines on Climate Change and Renewable Energy**

While the Dashboard is foremost a tool to define regional priorities, it also reveals areas in which the San Diego region shines. This year’s Dashboard finds that the region has demonstrated nationally unprecedented action and cooperation in tracking, mitigating and preparing for the impact of climate change. The number of unhealthy air quality days in San Diego County was at its lowest in 10 years. In addition, use of renewable energy increased and water consumption was down.

To support regional cooperation and learning, the Quality of Life Dashboard also compares individual cities to one another, shining a spotlight on those that show particular leadership and highlighting proven solutions. As such, it has become a trusted tool for citizens and policy makers on both sides of the political aisle.

“Equinox Center's Quality of Life Dashboard provides tools that help us be competitive while sharing our experiences with others,” said Cheryl Cox, Mayor, City of Chula Vista.

“Equinox Center has a reputation for commonsense approaches to complex problems,” said Sherri Lightner, Councilmember, City of San Diego.

**Related Resources available at <http://www.equinoxcenter.org/media-center.html>:**

- 2012 San Diego Regional Quality of Life Dashboard (online 1/24/12)
- Testimonials by regional leaders about the Dashboard
- City-by-City comparison tool for 2012 Dashboard (upon request)
- Infographic: A Day in San Diego County: Do you know all the ways you impact the quality of life indicators?
- Dashboard fact sheet

#### **About Equinox Center**

[Equinox Center](http://www.equinoxcenter.org) is an independent, non-partisan, not for profit policy and research center that turns research into action to help the San Diego region achieve a more prosperous economy, healthy environment and outstanding quality of life for all its residents. Led by a distinguished board of directors representing business and community leaders from across the region, Equinox uses policy analysis, communications and convenings to inspire, inform and engage the public and decision makers in crafting bold and intelligent solutions to balance regional growth with finite natural resources.

[www.equinoxcenter.org](http://www.equinoxcenter.org)

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