



New Direction for the City of Santa Ana

By Mark Moore, AyZar Commercial, The Brokerage arm of AyZar Inc,
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The City of Santa Ana has a new Executive Director of Planning. Hassan Haghani comes to Santa Ana from Glendale, CA where he successfully transformed the city's public image and influenced the realization of major projects. Haghani served the City of Glendale since 2003 and was named Community Development Director in 2010.



During his tenure in Glendale, Haghani was pivotal in the revitalization of Glendale's downtown, green-lighting numerous multistory mixed-use projects. Growth followed the implantation of many of Haghani's new policies as 1,300 living units were approved by the Glendale City Council last year alone and 3,188 living units have been approved and are in some stage of development since 2006—two-thirds within downtown's borders.

A strong driver in Glendale's growth was streamlining the process for the new developments, a policy Haghani plans to bring to Santa Ana.

"I am currently working on a preliminary streamlining package to address some of the impediments in our project review process; remove certain public hearing requirements; create more administrative (as opposed to discretionary) review procedures; modernize (i.e., reduce) certain parking standards; and allow flexible parking scenarios," Haghani explained.

Haghani has only been with the City of Santa Ana since June but has already made some progressive business friendly changes to the planning department. Among the first changes was the definition of "high rise" buildings in Santa Ana's building code to go from 55' to 75'. "This allows wood frame structures to be built up to 75 feet. So, new development may be built through wood frame construction for up to 6 stories with rooftop amenities at a considerably less construction cost per square foot. Santa Ana is the first city in OC (Orange County) to remove this expensive restriction from its codes," Haghani explained. Among other initiatives, the City's master plan is slated to be redefined under Haghani's leadership, and is poised to push for higher densification and more urban infill developments.

An update to the Housing Opportunity Ordinance is on the way as well. The changes plan to reduce some of the more expensive planning requirements, provide significant economic incentives and zoning code standards concessions and provide a much more clear and straightforward set of inclusionary requirements for multi-family residential development projects.

Haghani is also in the first steps of updating the General Plan, which is aimed at sparking development. The planning department is identifying corridors and centers throughout the City that are seasoned for rezoning to generate redevelopment.

With new policies and ordinances being introduced by Santa Ana's new Executive Director of Planning, the City is primed for new development and economic growth. The new business friendly attitude should provide incentives for developers and businesses to take a different look at Santa Ana in the forthcoming years.

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