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## TheNews

### PLANNING

## Public Policy Forum Highlights Development Potential of Orange County Cities

*Developers and politicians struggle to maintain quality of life and accommodate growth*

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**B**ringing together private-sector development professionals and public-policy decision-makers, the Orange County District Council of the **Urban Land Institute** hosted the mayors of three Orange County cities for its inaugural public policy forum.

Irvine Mayor Beth Krom, Mission Viejo Mayor Lance MacLean and city of Orange Mayor Mark A. Murphy discussed the land-use and development issues facing their cities with 200 developers, housing industry experts and city staff members.

Christine Diemer Iger, chairman of **Iger & Associates**, a Newport Beach-based government relations consulting firm, moderated the program. The conference planners, she said, looked for a "north and south Orange County dynamic" in choosing to discuss the tales of these three cities.

Orange County is the second-largest and second-densest county in the state, as well as one of the fastest-growing and densest in the nation. She said that in the future it will be rare to have a major project funded entirely by either the private or the public sector.

"It will take a partnership of both to get projects done," Iger said.

Although located in different parts of the county, all three cities face a similar public policy challenge: how to accommodate growth yet preserve the quality of life for residents.

Krom said that Irvine's population doubles every day with people coming in to work at the city's nearly 13,000 businesses. With one predominant landowner — **The Irvine Co.**, whose master plan has guided Irvine's development since before its incorporation — the city is sometimes regarded as "the first in the county to go to college on daddy's money," she said.

Irvine gets recognition for the quality of its residential villages and commercial base, but Krom said buildings alone do not a community make.

"To me, the issue of development is not only about the physical structures that we create but the quality of the human energy that gets attracted to those physical structures, and how those people are supported and sustained through the resources that we're able to provide at a municipal level," Krom said.

The city's two major issues for some time to come will be the revisiting of the Irvine Business Complex, an industrial area that is evolving into mixed uses, and the development of the Orange County Great Park on the site of the former El Toro Marine Corps base.

"This is a public-private partnership that is driven almost exclusively by the public-benefit interest," Krom said. "I can assure you it will prove to be a very good investment for **Lenar**." The Miami-based developer forked over \$649.5 million for the base.

#### Growth of Orange County

When Irvine was incorporated in 1971, it boasted 17,000 residents. Today, 185,000 people live there.

Orange County overall also has grown rapidly. The issue for policy makers is understanding how to preserve a lifestyle that has been such an attraction, in a dynamic environment that fosters new types of housing models and better transportation alternatives.

"What I believe we're looking to do is create a new quality of life," Krom said.

MacLean noted that his city, Mission Viejo

and Irvine share something in common. Irvine Co. Chairman Donald Bren was one of the principals of the company that developed Mission Viejo in 1966 as one of the first master-planned communities in the nation.

Bren later sold his interest, bought land and master planned Irvine, taking some of what he learned in Mission Viejo and applying it to the new city.

"We have some close similarities with Irvine because of that relationship," MacLean said.

Today, Mission Viejo has 98,000 residents and is nearly fully built out. The city does have a few little infill sites, and therein lies its dilemma in terms of future development. MacLean noted the city was developed as a suburban community of single-family homes.

"Being a master-planned community, one of the biggest challenges is residents bought into the master plan and that lifestyle," he said, "and now the possibility of urbanization, higher density, things like that, you find resistance to that as elected officials."

#### Public Opposition

In trying to meet its state affordable-housing mandates, the city has had a number of developments proposed, including two in the past year that have run into public opposition. MacLean cited one example: **Steadfast Cos.** and **Fieldstone Communities** have proposed the development of 144 townhomes, 22 of which would be affordable.

Called Aliso Ridge, the project originally started out with 700 units, a size that inflamed the community. Through meetings, direct mail pieces and other community outreach, the project was refashioned to address community concerns while still helping to meet the city's affordable-housing goals.

"We thought that we had arrived at something the community would accept," MacLean said. "If you read the paper, we've been hit by a lawsuit by the Public Law Center."

The lawsuit, filed by the Santa Ana-based pro bono center in late April, contends the city does not provide enough low-income housing to comply with state law.

Mission Viejo and Irvine are whippersnappers compared to Orange, which was incorporated in 1888.

Murphy said his city boasts the largest historic district west of the Mississippi River. The Plaza and Old Towne Orange Historic District is one of the city's crown jewels, which has to be considered when anything is developed.

According to Murphy, the city has a sense of history and a quality of life, and that translates into development.

"We find ourselves in an interesting position in that we are a mature community," Murphy said. "Open-space land for development purposes is declining rapidly, so we have parallels with Mission Viejo in that end of things."

But he said the city also has an interesting mix of urban areas ranging from The Block at Orange, a factory-outlet/entertainment center where the **Mills Corp.** has plans for a residential mixed-use development, and the "Orange Crush," where the 5, 57 and 22 freeways meet,

to equestrian properties and fast-growing Chapman University.

"I'm really excited about the opportunities that lie ahead, and it is something that has to happen with public-private partnerships," Murphy said.

#### Public-Private Partnerships

When it comes to public-private partnerships, Murphy said that the responsibility on the public side is to set clear expectations. Public-private partnerships are involved in virtually all development of Orange's public facilities, such as the new main library that will open in late fall across from City Hall, as well as a gymnasium-youth center.

"It's incumbent upon the public sector, in my opinion," he said, "to streamline things, to get out of the way of things, to set the vision and then allow the private community to do what they do best, which is deliver on the product."

The three cities are no exception to the pressures calling for infill and higher-density development.

Krom said Irvine has largely been developed in the single-family mode, so the projects the city is looking at in the Irvine Business Complex and the Orange County Great Park represent new housing models for the city.

With three jobs per housing unit and the highest new-home cost in the county, she said, Irvine needs to provide better housing alternatives and more creative types of housing but keep an emphasis on high quality because that is the community standard.

In addition, Krom favors the expansion of transit-oriented development. The Orange County Great Park provides the opportunity to create a mix of housing in proximity to transit, she said, noting that the Irvine Transportation Center, a multimodal transportation hub, sits right at the gateway to the park.

The city also has invested in a study for an Irvine Spectrum to Great Park skyway system, possibly a monorail. It would begin to create a transit link that works with the transportation center, and might also link to other transit projects that are being contemplated, such as in Anaheim's Platinum Triangle.

MacLean said that as a built-out community Mission Viejo's roadways were engineered to handle a certain capacity. As surrounding communities, such as Ladera Ranch and Rancho Santa Margarita, sprang up over time, those residents have used his city's arterials to get to the freeway.

It's important that as developments progress that transportation improvements come on line, MacLean said. He noted that Measure M, a half-cent sales tax for transportation upgrades that the county's voters approved in 1990, will be up for renewal in November.

Murphy said the city of Orange also is looking at the mixed-use and transit-oriented scenarios, especially around the Santa Fe Depot where passenger train service is expected to triple over the next three years.

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