



Growth issues grab spotlight at forum

EVENT: Inland politicians deliver snapshots of residents' anxieties and cities' pressing demands.

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By **MELANIE C. JOHNSON / The Press-Enterprise**

CORONA - Inland politicians Thursday tackled growth, traffic gridlock and economic development as part of the Urban Land Institute's inaugural Inland Empire Mayors' Forum.

The event at Eagle Glen Golf Club included a question-and-answer period with representatives of some of the area's fastest-growing cities.

The four panelists included Fontana Mayor Mark Nuaimi, Moreno Valley Mayor Richard Stewart, Corona City Councilman Jeff Miller and Gary Ovitt, San Bernardino County's 4th District supervisor representing Ontario, Chino, Chino Hills and Montclair.

All of the cities represented on the panel share the same profile: booming populations with soaring median housing prices and thriving economies. They also share the same concerns -- gridlock, residents who oppose growth and a shortage of affordable housing, officials said.

Ovitt, a former Ontario mayor, said there are plenty of opportunities for development and growth in his area. Annexations will bring another 100,000 residents to Ontario and 60,000 to the Chino area, he said.

"Unless you create the economy you need, you go backwards," he said.

Nuaimi said Fontana is grappling with redevelopment and residents balking at proposed apartment buildings. Huge projects such as a regional park and a library are in the pipeline, he said.

Fontana will get 13,000 more residents in June 2006 when 3,000 acres of unincorporated land gets annexed, he said. Leaders are also trying to improve the city's image, he said.

"We're calling 2005 'Extreme Makeover 2005,'" Nuaimi said. "You tell people you live in Fontana and their faces go down. The facial expressions don't match the quality of life."



Christine Iger and San Bernardino County Supervisor Gary Ovitt



Christine Iger welcomes Fontana Mayor Mark Nuami to the Urban Land Institute Luncheon 'Mayor's Luncheon' in Corona

Stewart said Moreno Valley also has dealt with image issues and the push to grow in the face of opposition from some residents who don't want their town to be any bigger.

"There is always, below the surface, this fear," he said. "They view the frustration of getting in and out of their city as caused by growth."

Stewart said Moreno Valley experienced an economic downturn in the early 1990s, heightened by the downsizing of March Air Force Base, but is now the sixth-fastest-growing city in the United States.

Corona's Miller said smart growth and transportation projects to ease congestion are key, especially in the wake of the May Murrieta recall effort prompted by what supporters saw as out-of-control growth, he said.

"The 15 freeway is too hard to get up and down, and it could spark a building moratorium if planning is not done properly," he said.

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Online at: http://www.pe.com/localnews/corona/stories/PE_News_Local_H_forum21.1d7ec48f.html