



PBx – Lessons in Branding for Local Jurisdictions

League of California Cities 2025 Annual Conference and Expo

Friday, October 10, 2025

9:30-10:45 a.m.

Today's Presentation: What We Will Cover

- Who we are
- Why are we focusing on streamlining in today's development climate?
- Branding your efforts
- Real-life examples that have put Santa Ana on the map
- Your input and experiences to share (throughout today's presentation)

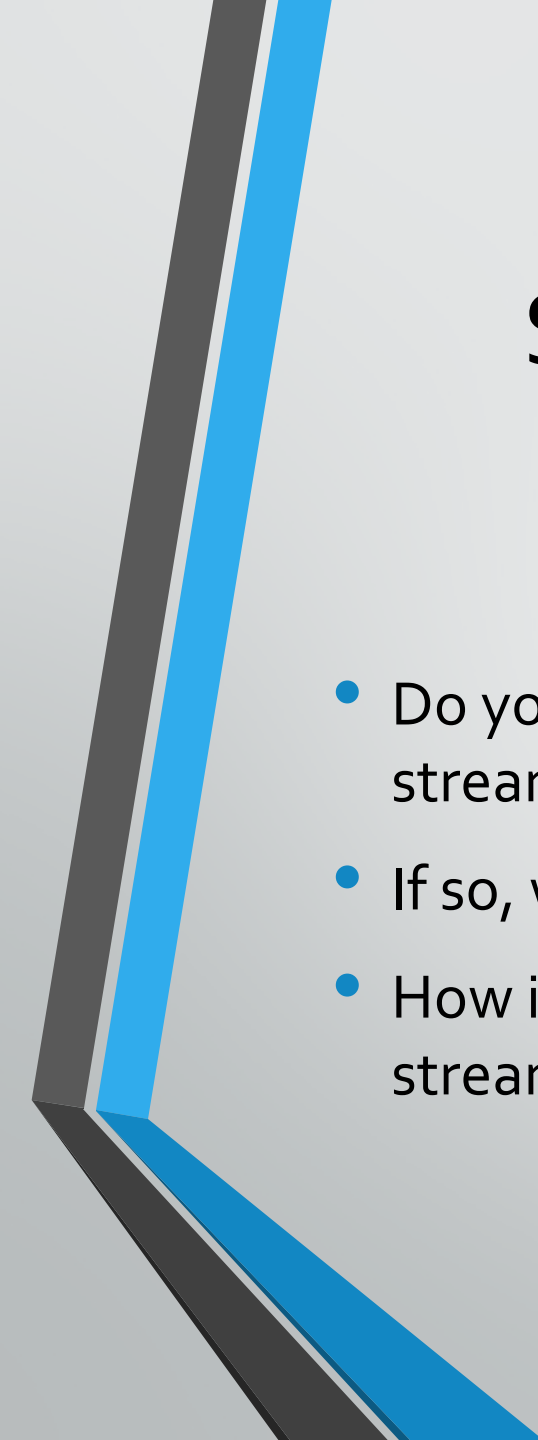
Who we are: Introductions from our Planning and Building Agency staff

- Minh Thai, Assistant City Manager
- Ali Pezeshkpour, AICP, Executive Director
- Jason Kwak, PE, CBO, CASp, Building Safety Manager
- Ricardo Soto, AICP, Acting Planning Manager



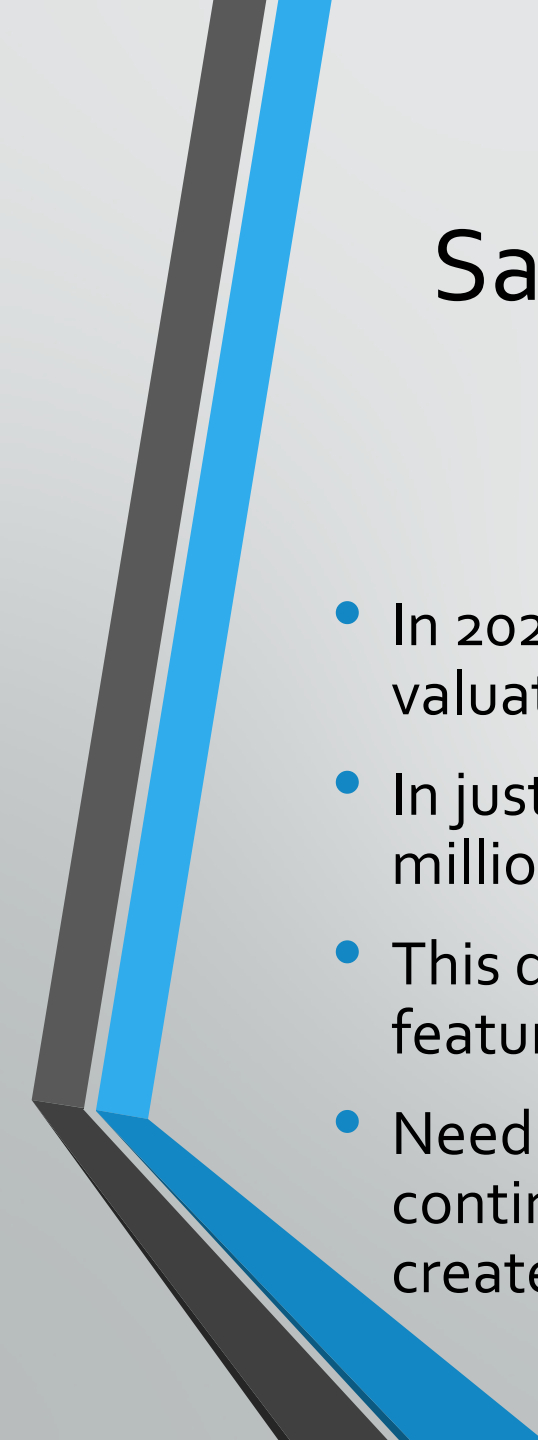


Why are we focusing on streamlining?



Streamlining: **let's hear from you first**

- Do you work for an agency or organization that has recently prioritized streamlining efforts?
- If so, why was streamlining identified as important?
- How is your agency or organization identifying or implementing streamlining measures?



Santa Ana's recent streamlining measures: **why now?**

- In 2023, the city issued over 9,500 building permits, for a record construction valuation of \$772 million.
- In just six years, development in Santa Ana has added approximately \$23 million in ongoing tax revenue for city services.
- This development renaissance is capturing national attention and has been featured in prominent publications.
- Need to maintain the positive press and changing reputation in order to continue generating the revenues to provide services to our community and create an infrastructure that supports and sustains development.

Santa Ana's recent streamlining measures: **why now?**

- Santa Ana has approached staffing levels with a “lean but mean” focus.
- New General Plan and specific plan areas.
 - Until 2019, the City had adopted only 3 specific plans in its 150-year history.
 - The City now has 5 specific plans (new ones at MainPlace and Related Bristol), with a 6th one under review.
- Regulatory climate has evolved not just at the state, but in jurisdictions of comparable size statewide and in the region.



Branding

Why brand? **Three points to consider.**

- **Building Trust and Credibility:** A strong and consistent brand helps establish trust with the public, showcasing reliability and professionalism, which is critical for government agencies in maintaining legitimacy.
- **Clear Communication:** Effective branding ensures that the agency's mission, values, and objectives are communicated clearly and consistently, helping citizens understand what the agency stands for and how it serves them.

Why brand? **Three points to consider.**

- **Clear Communication (Continued):** Equally important, branding ensures there is a clear and consistent understanding of the agency's goals among internal staff. This can lead to "culture" change within an organization, helping staff grow into new paradigms.
- **Public Engagement:** A well-defined brand can foster greater interest from the public, as people are more likely to connect with and respond to an organization that "de-mystifies" its processes.

Why brand? Think about it in the context of Planning.

- **General Plans and Codes.** We adopt general plans and various development codes to offer predictability not just to the development community, but also to our internal staff. More and more, long-range planning documents offer hints at branding, such as identifying a community image, aspirations for the future, etc.
- **Continual Process Improvement (CPI).** Most organizations, including in government, already promote continual process improvement. But branding makes CPI easy to access at all levels through becoming recognizable and a public commitment that often results in staff “backing into” the commitment.

Some City of Santa Ana brands: old and new

- Golden City (1980s)
- Golden City Beyond (2022)
- PBx



Branding: let's hear from you again!

- Do you work for an agency or organization that has recently adopted a brand or slogan for any streamlining efforts?
- If so, why was branding identified as important?
- How has branding changed your agency's or organization's culture in any way, or impacted how you do business with your community?



Real-life examples putting Santa Ana on
the map

Recent examples and take-away lessons: **PBx**

- Santa Ana has implemented new counter procedures for same-day, over-the-counter permits under a brand called “PBx,” short for Planning and Building Express
- When launched, PBx was advertised through a press release, new webpage, and a logo generated in-house
- PBx allows applicants to bypass the Planning counter and go straight to permitting for a variety of permit types that:
 - Do not require a zoning review
 - Do not require plan submittal
 - Do not affect historic properties or historic districts

Step 1

CUSTOMER ARRIVES

Customer arrives at City Hall and inquires about Express Permits at Information Desk.

Step 2

INFORMATION DESK

Information Desk staff asks questions to determine if the customer can be routed to the Express Permit Counter.

Step 3

REVIEW & APPROVAL

Express Permit staff calls customer, reviews, processes, and approves qualifying application.

Step 4

PAYMENT PROCESSING

Customer makes payment at the Cashier Counter and returns to the Express Permit Counter with proof of payment.

Step 5

RECEIVE PERMIT

Express Permit staff confirms payment and permit is issued to the customer.

Recent examples and take-away lessons: **PBx**

- PBx Online Services:
 - Online same-day permits available for residential projects
 - Online same-day permits for solar photovoltaic
- PBx Over-the-counter (OTC) Plan Check:
 - Minor commercial tenant improvements
 - Small residential projects such as additions and remodels
 - New ADU units and ADU conversions

Recent examples and take-away lessons: PBx

- Take-away lessons from PBx include:
 - Success hinged on ensuring that there is staff “buy-in”
 - Proper training and adequate technology are key
 - Specific assigned staff at the Building Safety/Permits counter
- Areas for growth:
 - Expansion of PBx express permit types
 - Better integration of development teams/agencies
 - Improved technology to create more efficient work processes

Recent examples and take-away lessons: **pre-approved ADU plans**

- City has a demonstrated record of Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) production since original ADU ordinance was adopted
- City has had pre-approved ADU plans available for use since 2023
- 10 templates with 5 different architectural styles
- No significant effort made to publicize their availability, and only available for use through online plan check system

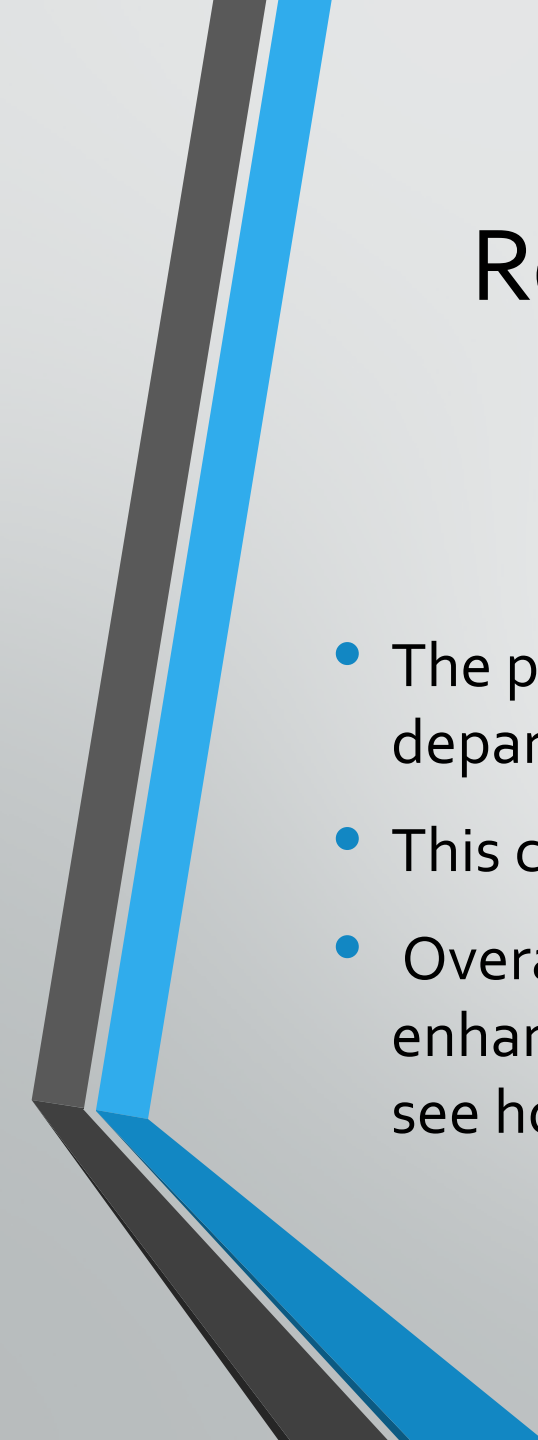
Recent examples and take-away lessons: **pre-approved ADU plans**

- Under the new *PBx* paradigm, the City has been identifying other development services that could be streamlined
- In coordination with Planning and Building Safety divisions, as well as the Public Works Agency, the City now offers a one-week ADU permitting program, made possible through:
 - Planning reviewing ADUs over-the-counter
 - Building Safety offering over-the-counter plan checking
 - Etc.

Recent examples and take-away lessons:

The “Pod”

- Santa Ana offers concurrent "Pod" plan check services as part of PBx streamlining for small commercial projects.
- Multiple departments, including Planning, Building, Public Works, and Fire, participate in the review process, with Economic Development following up.
- Applicants benefit from an in-person concurrent plan review to receive feedback from all relevant departments through a collaborative process.



Recent examples and take-away lessons: **The “Pod”**

- The process allows for immediate comments and feedback from various departments.
- This consolidated approach reduces the time needed for plan reviews.
- Overall, efficiency, communication, and collaboration are established and enhanced between departments and applicants, allowing departments to see how their comments may impact others at the same time.

Recent examples and take-away lessons: **Related Bristol and The Village specific plans**

- Santa Ana adopted its comprehensive General Plan Update and certified its Final Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) in 2022, laying the groundwork for additional intensity and investment in five new Focus Areas of the city.
- This type of EIR allows subsequent implementing activities, such as the specific plans, to be evaluated through “tiering.”
- Tiering refers to the coverage of general matters in broader EIRs, such as the GPU Final PEIR, with subsequent narrower EIRs or ultimately site-specific EIRs incorporating by reference the general discussions and concentrating solely on the issues specific to the EIR subsequently prepared, such as in the case of the Related Bristol Specific Plan’s Supplemental EIR.

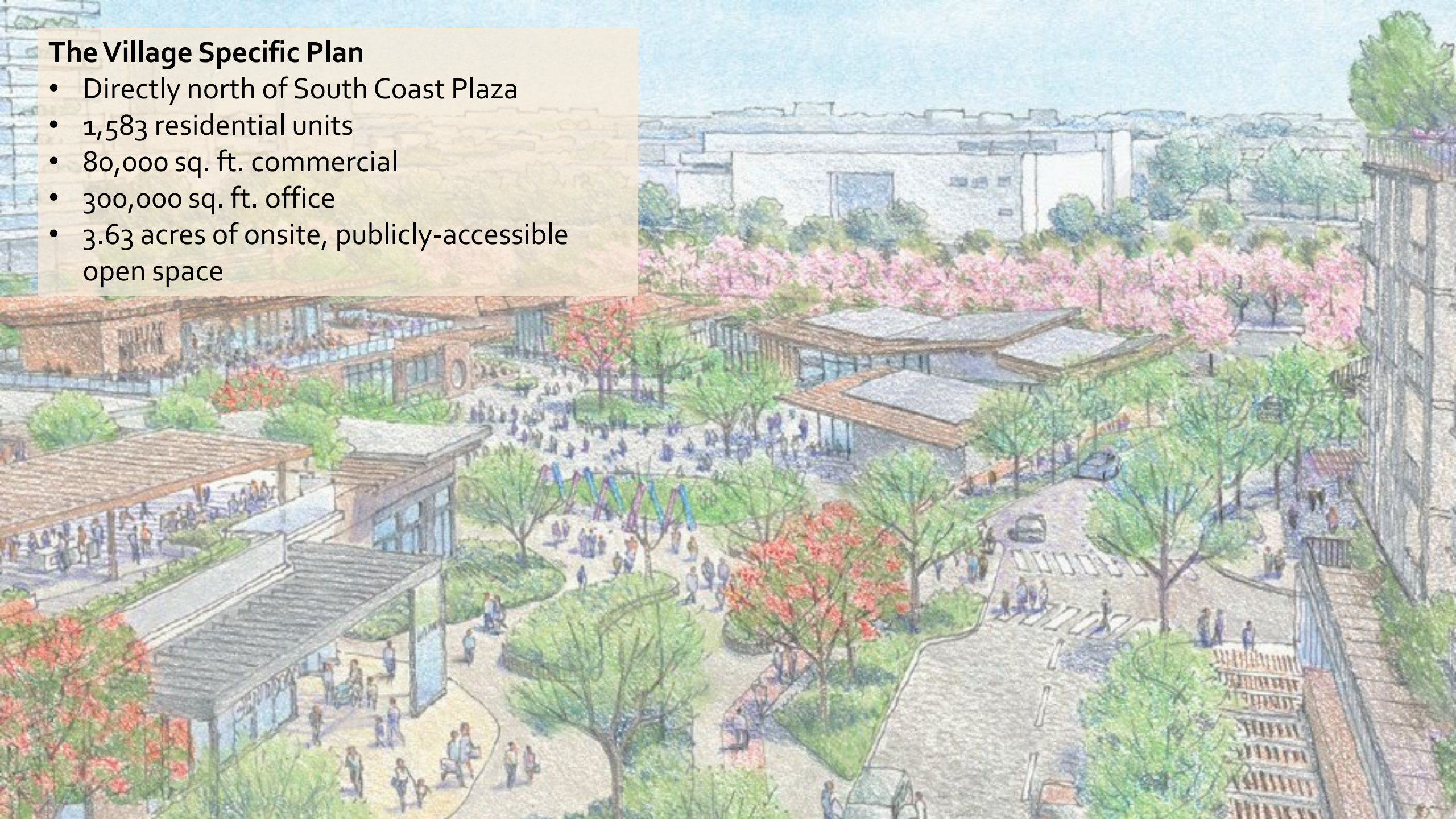
Related Bristol Specific Plan

- \$2.9 billion investment directly north of South Coast Plaza
- 3,750 residential units
- 350,000 sq. ft. commercial
- 250 hotel rooms
- 200 units senior continuum of care
- 13.1 acres of onsite, publicly-accessible open space



The Village Specific Plan

- Directly north of South Coast Plaza
- 1,583 residential units
- 80,000 sq. ft. commercial
- 300,000 sq. ft. office
- 3.63 acres of onsite, publicly-accessible open space



Recent examples and take-away lessons:

Related Bristol and The Village specific plans

- Adoption of the General Plan Update and certification of its Final PEIR allowed the Santa Ana City Council to be bold in its decision-making.
- Tiering off the Final PEIR streamlined the environmental review, and allowed for more focused discussion of the Related Bristol Specific Plan's environmental impacts with the community and policymakers.
- The Related Bristol Specific Plan itself was framed as an implementing action of the General Plan, allowing the City Council to view the project as:
 - Consistent with the General Plan
 - Bringing the General Plan's "Golden City Beyond" brand to life
 - A real-life example of how heavy lifting up front in long-range planning makes implementing projects more attractive to the development community while reducing burdens on staff

Housing, Sustainability and Streamlining: **let's hear from you again!**

- Do you work for an agency or organization that has recently made changes to its approach to housing, sustainability, and streamlining through adoption of long-range planning documents, or through approving projects that have “pushed the envelope” in your community?
- If so, in what ways were your experiences bold?
- How does your staff approach these topics in a way that balances community concerns, quality control, and encouraging development?

Recap: bringing it back to Santa Ana

- Santa Ana's development renaissance is no accident!
- Adopting long-range plans requires a focus on sustainable processes and staffing levels to carry out implementing projects.
- Changing an organizational culture is gradual, but public commitments and branding can build momentum for change internally and through changing public perceptions and expectations.



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Thank you