

Santa Barbara Happenings



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Finance Committee Fails on Expected Outdoor Dining Charge Assessment



The City of Santa Barbara Finance Committee declined to pursue any action on outdoor dining. The committee was advised to recommend charging restaurants \$5 per square foot for outdoor dining space on public property to the City Council, but the three-member Committee could not agree.

Staff at the City had proposed an outdoor business charge for using the parklets along State Street after vehicle traffic was closed in 2020. Restauranters expressed that there was little profit to be made with the charge.

The future of the matter now rests with the City Council.

Orcutt Housing Project Wins Approval

A housing and childcare facility project in Old Town Orcutt received approval from the Santa Barbara County Planning Commission.



The unanimous vote gave the property known as “The Ranch” much praise as there was no public

pushback of any kind. The project will have a 115-bed senior residential care facility and a 48-unit senior independent living facility with 20 additional employee housing units. The proposal also has more than the required parking and includes a park.

The property, next door to the Orcutt Union School District office, will also provide a learning opportunity for students to work at the child care center.

California Voters Have Opportunity to Stop Fast Food Wage Law

The FAST Act, designed to set fast food worker’s benefits, and compensation (\$22/hr), could be terminated by a new referendum. The food and beverage industry has said this new law could cripple the industry and send food prices higher. An industry group has collected enough signatures to force a referendum.

The FAST act is supported by labor unions in the state, but their efforts to unionize fast food workers have failed so far. Industry groups estimate fast food costs will increase by 20%. The act only applies to restaurants with over 100 locations but would drive up the cost of smaller places as patrons flock to them and will accelerate the use of robots by fast food providers reducing the number of human workers in the industry.

66-Unit Hotel Proposed for Multiple Lots on State Street

The founder of SIMA Management Company, Jim Knell, has proposed a 66-unit hotel on the Ortega and State Street intersections. This proposal is in contrast to a previous apartment proposal on the same area. SIMA pointed out the value in the relative lack of regulations for the hotel application process compared with residential applications.

SIMA wants to merge the lots other land uses of 710-720 State Street to create the new hotel as

Continued on page 33

Santa Barbara Happenings from page 31

the downtown area struggles with loss of retailers and the future of State Street.



Mayor Randy Rowse is excited about the general idea for a hotel downtown. SIMA had also previously proposed a mixed-use housing development on the same site with one- and two-bedroom apartments, but pulled the proposal after issues over housing regulations.

Affordable Apartment Project Approved in Buellton

The non-profit People's Self-Help Housing has proposed their first rental project in Buellton with 89 affordable apartment units. The Buellton Planning Commissioners unanimously approved the project.



The project will include two three-story buildings with a 200-square-foot community room and a 1,350-square-foot learning center, a common kitchen and a computer lab for residents along with offices for the resident property manager, a social worker and a guest service provider.

The applicant received several concessions under the Density Bonus Law and the project contains less parking than required by the Buellton Municipal Code. It is unclear where residents will park their vehicles.

The People's Self-Help Housing develops affordable housing projects in San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. The organization has seven

developments under construction, nine in pre-development and six in the early stage of feasibility.

Santa Barbara County Fails to Meet State Housing Element Deadline

In February, the State of California will take control of residential development projects due to Santa Barbara County's failure to timely update its Housing Element, which must provide for new required housing construction. State law will require the county to permit multifamily residential developments located on land zoned multifamily, commercial, or mixed use if they include 20% affordable units without an EIR, or any environmental assessment, or payment of mitigation fees which offset a projects impact in the community.

This comes despite the county planners knowing Housing Elements are required to be updated every eight years. Work on the recent one had begun in only last February. The state requires that Santa Barbara County planners find land, or rezone it, to build up to 5,664 new housing units between 2023 and 2031.

Major sites examined for rezoning include the 95-acre Glen Annie Golf Club, 28 acres at the San Marcos Growers, and the land area of the St. Athanasius Church on Hollister Avenue.

[Editor's Note: If you don't like it... elect better representatives to Sacramento.]

Santa Barbara Hotels and Tourism Posed for Big Year

Visit Santa Barbara gave rave reviews of the future of the hospitality industry to the Santa Barbara City Council which had struggled throughout the pandemic. During the pandemic, 14,400 hospitality jobs were lost, hotel occupancy dropped to 10%, and 15 hotels closed down. The Santa Barbara Airport also shrunk to only 6 flights per day during the period.

Now, Transient occupancy taxes are at an all-time high, hotel occupancy is about 76%, and 14,700 hospitality jobs have been added and revenue per hotel room is up 44% from 2019, far outpacing the state's overall rate of -2%.

[Editor's Note: Can you build a community based on temporary tourists or are you just forcing locals out of town?]