

WORD COUNT: 606

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There is a major movement in downtown areas across the United States known as gentrification – basically the beautifying of older, blighted areas in both major cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, and in smaller cities, including many in the Inland Empire. The driving force behind the motivation and eventual success of these revitalization efforts is the residential component – with housing comes people and with people, comes everything else that makes for a thriving downtown – jobs, retail, restaurants, nightlife. Across the country, we're seeing a new wave of people who are choosing to live, work and play in one central location.

People are moving back to major cities in droves across the country – in Downtown LA for example, there are more than 10,000 households today and most of those have come on-line in the last five years. In the next five years, Downtown LA will see another 14,000 new housing units come on-line. This is spurring a tremendous amount of office, retail and entertainment development that is making Downtown LA a major hub of revitalization activity. While we are also seeing this happening in smaller cities across the country including several cities in the Inland Empire, the dynamics are different and therefore, it will be slower to become the phenomenon here than it is in larger cities.

Many of the Inland Empire's older and more established cities have RFPS in place to redevelop their downtown areas, primarily around civic components, including Ontario, Chino and Redlands. But compared to larger downtown areas that are experiencing a high rise condo craze, the Inland Empire has more affordable housing choices that allow people to have bigger homes and yards. This lifestyle choice is what is driving residential growth in the Inland Empire and as a result, is the biggest challenge downtown revitalization projects in the region will face.

In order to bring the right redevelopment projects to fruition, cities need to have a well laid plan for incorporating residential into their downtown revitalization plans. With the hot housing market, one strategy cities without the money to revitalize are doing is giving residential entitlements to mixed use developers to build condos, in exchange for developing the retail and office components of the downtown areas. If a strong residential base can be established, retail and office will follow.

While all of this is positive for downtown revitalization, the question remains: What do you do at night and on weekends in these areas? Things like sports teams, concerts, restaurants and other nightlife are must-haves for most people who are drawn to the downtown lifestyle. The City of Ontario is one of the most visionary and progressive cities in the Inland Empire and is close to breaking ground on what will be the Inland Empire's first pedestrian-oriented, urbanized mixed-use development where residential, business, entertainment, sports, retail and dining combine to create a vibrant central hub of activity. The crown jewel of the project is an 8,000 seat sports and entertainment

arena that is expected to bring sports and entertainment options to the Inland Empire that rival venues in Los Angeles and Orange County.

Five years from now, many of the Inland Empire's older cities will be fully redeveloped, particularly those that are more affluent and already have the mature landscaping that lends itself to that kind of environment. Best positioned for successful revitalization are Riverside, which could become a major urban center, and Ontario which has the vision and progressiveness that it will take to transform Inland Empire downtowns and make them thriving urban centers.