



HOME

ABOUT

CONTRIBUTORS

SHOWS

CONTACT

# City Hall: Winner and Loser of the Week

July 26, 2019

The big news at City Hall this week was the delivery of an expensive consultant's report examining Santa Barbara's seemingly most intractable economic, political and sociological problem: What Should Be Done About State Street? Here's how it landed.



**Winner: Hal Conklin.**

Eighty-four thousand. That's how many dollars Mayor Cathy and the City Council Sextet funneled to a buzzword-brandishing consulting outfit (Omnichanneling! Blended Use! Embrace Connectivity!), called Kosmont Companies, to tell them what every sentient being who doesn't breathe the rarefied air of City Hall somehow had already managed to grasp:

- a) Santa Barbara sucks as a place to do business;
- b) Panhandlers with vicious dogs rank fairly low on most lists of world class tourist attractions;
- c) They got this thing called The Internet now?
- d) The city has no clue about an economic plan for our future;
- e) Bureaucratic bubbleheads over at the Community Development Department should just hang an "Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here" sign over the door and be done with it.

Stop the presses, Al -- Kosmont just showed up with a big batch of blinding insights!

The silver lining here is that those of us who pay the salary, benefit and pension tab for Our Elected Leaders could not be more delighted that the mayor and council, apparently, perhaps, maybe, have finally gotten the message. These worthies now appear ready to move forthwith with

## Featured Posts



TV is Back: Oil, Climate, Shutdown, Scandal!  
January 25, 2019

## Recent Posts



City Hall: Winner and Loser of the Week  
July 26, 2019



Notebook: Latest on the Das & Laura Show  
July 19, 2019



Mr. Cranky Pants Takes a Holiday  
July 7, 2019



Critics Bash Das -- Williams Answers Them  
July 2, 2019



Calbuzz: Hold Off on Statues of Kamala  
July 1, 2019



SB Pot Wars: As the Hoop House Turns...  
June 28, 2019



New Front in Montecito Water Wars  
June 27, 2019

A Viewer's Guide to

recruiting and hiring a high-ranking economic development czar to fill a crying need for visionary planning that the city has had at least since California's Supreme Court put a halt to the Redevelopment Agency's activities half-a-dozen years ago.



**Santa Barbara**  
**Recommendations for Downtown Revitalization**  
 Presented July 25, 2019

Prepared By:  
 Kosmont Companies

The whole report is worth a read, if only to get fully up to speed, but let's be blunt: They could have saved the cash (\$84,000? Seriously?) merely by heeding the words of civic prophet and former Mayor Hal Conklin, who's been hollering the same message

from every rooftop below La Cumbre Peak for years, not least in the jeremiads of his 2017 mayoral campaign and on this very page not long ago, in a cogent essay called, "Where is Roadmap to City's Future?"

*Most of the time, people just want to know, what is the City's PLAN for the future of the downtown? My answer is always the same. What plan? I don't think the City has one.*

*Many cities the size of Santa Barbara have either an internal Economic Development Department, or an on-going partnership with the business community to implement a long-term vision for their community's economic well-being.*

*If for no other reason, it often comes down to the City Council wanting to know what their long-term tax base is going to be so they can plan out public safety and other services for their citizens...*

*While many larger and smaller cities reformed their city structures to build "economic planning departments" into their staffing, Santa Barbara made the somewhat misguided decision to forego creating a team of people to create a roadmap to the future.*

So there's that.

If the city was smart, it would put Hal's intelligence, institutional knowledge and commitment to community to good use by putting him in charge of the search for the right, high-ranking person to head up a new economic planning operation.

We might get lucky, and he'd pick himself.

**Loser: George Buell.**

Despite reams of business-speak and paper-shuffling weasel words, it's impossible to read the Kosmont firm's 86-page report without reaching the conclusion that something's terribly wrong at 630 Garden Street, which houses the Community Development Department -- as anyone who's ever tried to build anything bigger than a dog house in Santa Barbara can attest.



the Democratic Debates

June 26, 2019



Notebook: Who's Up, Down & Out in Pot Wars

June 21, 2019



Must Read: LA Times on SB's Pot Wars

June 12, 2019

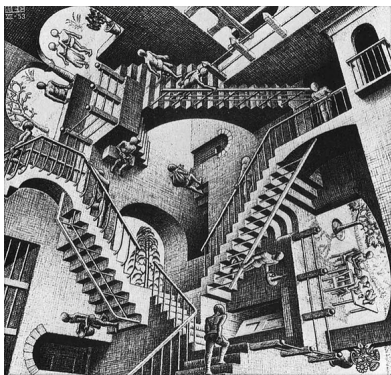
## Archive

- July 2019 (5)
- June 2019 (7)
- May 2019 (16)
- April 2019 (9)
- March 2019 (6)
- February 2019 (6)
- January 2019 (7)
- December 2018 (9)
- November 2018 (10)
- October 2018 (20)
- September 2018 (11)
- August 2018 (9)
- July 2018 (5)
- June 2018 (10)
- May 2018 (20)
- April 2018 (13)
- March 2018 (14)
- February 2018 (11)
- January 2018 (19)
- December 2017 (5)
- November 2017 (19)
- October 2017 (32)
- September 2017 (20)

## Search By Tags

We stopped counting the number of critical references when we ran out of fingers, but the report accurately makes the city's arcane and bewildering planning process sound like an M.C. Escher drawing, oh say, "Relativity."

- "City does not have a business-friendly reputation (e.g., difficult entitlement and permitting rules)."
- "City staff not enthusiastic to expedite development."
- "Permit process for new retailers is expensive and high risk..."
- "Downtown is facing significant vacancies as a result of..." a complex permitting process."
- "Problems with City zoning code and permitting process."
- "Fundamentally review/revamp zoning and permitting process."



Atop the large and costly lump of bureaucratic entropy responsible for planning, permits and building in the city sits Community Development Director George Buell, who gets a sweet annual package of around \$300,000 for perching there.

Decency and amiability aside, his not-very-dynamic management style enables, empowers and encourages his army of authoritarian subalterns, time-stamp functionaries and pedantic hairsplitters to terrorize any supplicants amid the populace with the temerity to bring matters before them.

Ultimately, of course, the buck stops with City Administrator Paul Casey and the elected council, who collectively countenance a culture of nitpicking oppositional behavior and resistance to anything resembling change.

The writer Laurence J. Peter, who first propounded "The Peter Principle," famously said that, "Bureaucracy defends the status quo long past the time when the quo has lost its status."

For many years, Santa Barbara's planning, permit and building operation has operated as a self-contained and self-perpetuating feedback loop, obsessed with process, accountable to no one outside a closed circle of planning-crats, and disdainful of results sought by those who pay the freight for the whole Rube Goldberg operation.



Unless that changes, not much on State Street will either.

Images: Hal Conklin; The Kosmont consultants' report; George Buell; "Relativity" by M.C. Escher; Newsmakers name tag.