
News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2021

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The Post-Pandemic City: ‘All the rules are changing, and it’s forcing us to be more creative than ever’

We’re already seeing how life – and work – will change in post-pandemic Southern California as a shift toward working from home and a renewed emphasis on health and safety impact everything from corporate culture to the homes we live in, experts said Tuesday.

Appearing at Day 2 of the 32nd Annual Demographic Workshop, sponsored by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and the University of Southern California, some of the region’s top researchers and business minds said it’s too soon to know how all of the COVID-related variables will play out in the months and years ahead, but that a number of sustainable trends are already emerging.

“What an exciting time it is to be a housing producer. All of the rules are changing, and it’s forcing us to be more creative than ever,” said Randall Lewis, Executive Vice President of Lewis Management Corp.

This year’s workshop, held virtually, was built around the theme, “The Post-Pandemic City.” During the first session, held last week, demographers discussed how low birth rates, uncertainty over immigration and long-term impacts from COVID-19 will result in a year-over-year population decline in Southern California for the first time ever. Tuesday’s follow-up session took a closer look at how the pandemic could fundamentally change how we live, and do business, moving forward.

The shift toward working from home was a central theme, with most experts agreeing that the traditional work model is undergoing a re-examination that could have profound impacts for decades to come.

Lewis, whose company develops residential communities and commercial properties in California and Nevada, identified working from home as one of several major shifts he sees arising from the pandemic. The function of housing has expanded, he said, as builders now are designing apartments and houses with offices and the infrastructure to accommodate a work-from-home model. It also impacts where people live, inspiring many to move away from traditional business centers and toward the suburbs, where they might be able to get more for their dollar and enjoy a more preferred quality of life.

All of this is having an impact on corporate workplace strategies – and the traditional office model – in ways that are still evolving, the experts said.

Amber Schiada, Senior Director of Research for JLL Strategic Consulting Group, said that while 51% of companies surveyed by JLL plan to expand work-from-home policies – mostly through a hybrid model – employers and employees are concerned about “diminished culture” resulting from a lack of in-person interaction. Although total office space demand is expected to decline slightly, as many as 50% of

tenants are planning permanent space redesigns, including more collaboration space to increase productivity and innovation.

“The physical office serves a profound purpose in meeting personal and business needs,” Schiada said.

Clint Lorimore, President of SCAG and an Eastvale City Councilmember, said the demographic and lifestyle shifts highlighted during the workshop underscore the competitive advantages Southern California has in a post-pandemic world.

“We are a resilient region, with innovative thinkers, and are well positioned to take on the unknowns that are in front of us,” Lorimore said.

One of those unknowns is the impact all of this will have on commuting and traffic patterns. SCAG, the nation’s largest metropolitan planning organization, soon will embark on its 2024 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy – a task that Kome Ajise, SCAG’s Executive Director, has described as a monumental one.

“With all that we’ve been through and all that we’ve learned in the past fifteen months would suggest we have to rethink a lot of the things we do in order to best meet the needs of the more than 19 million people who call Southern California home,” Ajise said.

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About SCAG

SCAG is the nation’s largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and more than 19 million residents. SCAG undertakes a variety of planning and policy initiatives to plan for a livable and sustainable Southern California now and in the future. For more information about SCAG’s regional efforts, please visit www.scag.ca.gov.