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Bixby Knolls Enters A Renaissance Period, So Long As Redevelopment Remains Intact

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With members of the community, business owners and city staff present, Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association (BKBIA) Executive Director Blair Cohn explained at the annual State of the District how Bixby Knolls is in a budding renaissance.

At the February 24 event, Cohn reviewed the work of the board and his team at the BKBIA, and the fruitful efforts of the community that have made Bixby Knolls the business improvement district it is today. However, he emphasized that those efforts would not have been possible without the Long Beach Redevelopment Agency (RDA) – an entity currently threatened by the budget proposal put forth by Gov. Jerry Brown.

“The potential take from the state and the dismantling of RDA would just grind us to a halt,” Cohn told the Business Journal. “It could affect me being here and my staff. We don’t want to stop. We don’t want to go in reverse. We can point our fingers to all the things redevelopment has done for this community and North Long Beach as well.”

The RDA brought on consulting firm HyettPalma – a group that specializes in economic enhancement of older business districts – to re-evaluate Bixby Knolls a few years back, Cohn said. The purpose was to help survey the district and develop a plan to first activate the community, then beautify the business corridors and finally seek out new businesses.

Phase one of this plan, Cohn said, was to engage the community. The BKBIA has done that through programs like its Strollers walking club, literary society, community happy hour and supper club. Hosting events like First Fridays – a family friendly evening event where businesses open their doors to the community on the first Friday evening of each month – has brought people from the surrounding area out of their homes, activating the business corridor on Atlantic Avenue, Cohn said. Other engaging events are the annual Dragster Expo & Car Show and the performances and meetings in the Expo Building.

Phase two could be considered the streetscape phase in which Cohn, the RDA and members of the community made business façade improvements, added signage and address numbers to businesses, developed landscapes surrounding businesses, activated business windows, updated the BKBIA online business directory and worked to keep the Atlantic corridor clean and safe.

Today, Bixby Knolls is prepared to begin its third phase toward a renaissance, Cohn said, which means outreach to brokers to help bring new business to the area. “Now we’re trying to do some outreach to the brokers and to other businesses saying, ‘Look, Bixby Knolls is getting better. We’re in a renaissance. It’s a great place to either expand or relocate or open your new business,’” he said.



The Long Beach Clothing Co., 4218 Atlantic Ave., relocated from The Pike at Rainbow Harbor in 2010. According to Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association Executive Director Blair Cohn, a Long Beach Business Journal article last year highlighting the work of the association helped the owners decide on Bixby Knolls as their new home. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Thomas McConville)

The business district has already attracted several new businesses in the past year, including A Castle of Books, About U Boutique, Handy’s Smokehouse Delicacies, Paper Crew, Suba Sushi & Tapas and big box retailer Marshalls. One notable business that vacated The Pike last year discovered Bixby Knolls and chose the district as its new home after reading a Long Beach Business Journal article about Cohn and his efforts in 2010. “Long Beach Clothing was the first example of it, and that was kind of passive because they came to us because of this article,” he said.

Future developments to coincide with phase three include getting an administrative use permit from the city’s planning department for the Expo building to make its events there officially supported by the City of Long Beach. Merchandise, including sweatshirts, t-shirts and buttons with quirky sayings about Bixby Knolls area, is coming out soon. The stores along the business corridor are getting blade signs, and feature banners are to be hung on street lamps to tell passersby that Bixby Knolls has shopping, dining, First Fridays, a literary society and more.

“We are working on five canvases at once, because to do one thing at a time would never get us to what I say is this gentle renaissance that we’re in,” Cohn said. “We still have a long way to go, but the good news is we have the support to do it, and of course we’re doing it with a watchful eye on Sacramento that it [RDA] doesn’t go away because I think, in my heart of hearts, that things can only get better if we can stay the course.” ■