

# ORANGE COUNTY

## Ordinance, Funds Sought for Housing Crackdown

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Santa Ana City Manager Robert C. Bobb on Thursday said he has asked the city's attorney to draft an ordinance that would require owners of rental housing in Santa Ana who live outside Orange County to have a registered agent residing in the county.

He said he would also seek funds from the City Council to hire five additional housing investigators to accelerate the city's six-week-old crackdown on substandard housing.

Bobb said he would make the requests at the upcoming council meeting on Monday. His remarks came during a "forum" at a joint evening meeting of the Orange County and Santa Ana Human Relations commissions in which he and Phil Freeland, the city's director of planning and development services, discussed the crackdown with commissioners and the public.

Bobb and Freeland were at the meeting to explain the history of and reasons for the crackdown and its potential impact on low-income residents. Since the intensified enforcement program began in early April, nine buildings, comprising about 27 dwelling units, have been ordered vacated.

### Program Called Vital

Bobb called the code enforcement program "vital for Santa Ana. As we begin to improve our housing stock, we'll find that it aids the overall quality of life."

A proposal for loan assistance to needy tenants who will be relocated under the crackdown again will be presented to the City Council at its May 21 meeting, Bobb said, adding that Santa Ana is "at a crisis stage."

The request for the five additional employees will cost the city \$240,000 per year, which includes salaries, benefits, training and equipment.

Bobb told the meeting that the reason for having a property owner or agent residing in Orange County is that "when we begin to prosecute, we will have someone to go to."

Freeland circulated a memorandum to the commissioners describing "truly horrible situations" uncovered by investigators since the crackdown began. The memorandum was accompanied by photographs of many of the targeted residences.

### Conditions Called Deplorable

"These kinds of conditions are deplorable," Freeland said. "It is totally inhuman for people to have to live in this kind of squalor."

He said that investigators are continuing to find individual houses that generate up to \$2,400 in monthly rent without any evidence of maintenance or improvements in years. Freeland said that the first targeted area south of the Civic Center is "one of the worst areas of the city," in which the impact will be most extreme.

He told the commissioners that he has been "somewhat taken aback" by the negative reaction of many factions within the community to the expanded code enforcement. "The truly bad guy," he said, "is the landlord. We can't continue to

house people in the conditions we've found."

Freeland said the city will look to private industry for help in solving the problem, calling private industry "an untapped resource." He said the city will also seek federal funds for the effort, adding that he was encouraged by an announcement by federal officials Tuesday that \$2.5 million will be made available for improvements in Buena Clinton, a section of neighboring Garden Grove that is considered the county's worst slum.

Joe Caux, a housing specialist for the Community Development Council, a federally funded anti-poverty agency, also addressed the meeting and called for a "radical" solution, similar to the eminent domain strategies assumed by the cities of Berkeley and Santa Monica against slumlords.

### Displacement May Spread

Caux, who also is president of the Orange County Renters Assn., predicted that the current displacement of tenants in Santa Ana, Buena Clinton and Anaheim's Chevy Chase area will soon spread to other areas of the county.

Alan Baldwin of the Community Housing Corp., a private developer of low-income housing, discussed the impact of redevelopment projects on Orange County and how the lack of development in the county and dwindling supply of housing relate to code enforcement programs.

Rabbi Henri Front, a member of the Orange County Human Relations Commission, scolded Bobb and Freeland, saying that instead of displacing the tenant the city should "go after the slum landlord. I'd rather see the displacement of owners."

Front said the city should consider an ordinance in which slum units rents would be immediately lowered to atone for past excessive rents.

In response to a question from a commissioner as to what alternative is left to a tenant who is forced to vacate a slum dwelling, Bobb said: "As callous as it may sound, they just have to leave."

Bobb also suggested that the worst scenario would be a fatal accident resulting from the dangerous conditions found in many of the slum dwellings.