

## **New Mayor Has Big Plans for Planning Chief**

'We are going to have to rethink and re-imagine what the city looks like,' Villaraigosa says. He will reignite the hunt to replace retiring director.  
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By Patrick McGreevy and Steve Hymon, Times Staff Writers

Striving to put his mark on how the city looks and functions, Los Angeles Mayor-elect Antonio Villaraigosa said Thursday he is restarting the process of recruiting and hiring a new city planning director.

Planning Director Con Howe announced in December that he would retire as soon as the city could find a replacement, a process he expected to be completed early this year.

Seven months later, Howe is still on the job and Mayor James K. Hahn will soon be looking for a new one.

"I'm going to redo the effort, frankly, for a new planning director," Villaraigosa told 50 businesspeople at a breakfast put on by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. "I want to seek out the best and the brightest, people who understand what great cities look like."

The mayor-elect said he wants to involve the city's network of neighborhood councils in the selection process — the same promise Hahn made.

Villaraigosa also gave some indication of his thoughts on city planning. He said the city should not wait until rail lines were finished and then try to get more housing built along those routes. Rather, he said, housing should be built concurrently with mass transit.

He also hinted that the city would have to somehow change to accommodate a growing population, meaning that some areas would have to be denser and more vertical.

"In a city that is going to grow, maybe not to the extent San Bernardino and Riverside are, we are going to have to rethink and re-imagine what the city looks like," Villaraigosa told the business leaders.

Over the winter, Hahn was criticized by planning activists who said he was leading a lackluster search for a planning director and that he wasn't turning over every stone to find a visionary. As a result, a March deadline was pushed back until after the election.

Five days before the election, City Councilman Ed Reyes held a public hearing to see what constituents expected from the next planning director. At the hearing, Renata Simril, a deputy mayor for economic development and housing, said 30 people had applied for the job and 13 were serious candidates.

Now the search appears to be suspended until Villaraigosa takes office.

"We've been sitting with the transition team and working very well with them, and this is one of the issues that we went over," said Tim McOsker, Hahn's chief of staff. "What we've offered, and what they've agreed to, is to hold off on the planning director.... It will

be in his hands when he's inaugurated."

McOsker also said that Howe had offered to stay until a replacement was found.

Earlier in the day, Villaraigosa gave some more clues about the focus of his administration. He said he probably would "reconfigure" the structure of the mayor's staff. Also, the emphasis on economic development would include seeking to expand use of the port and airports.

Villaraigosa said he wanted to proceed with the first phase of modernizing Los Angeles International Airport, "and then I want to figure out how we can grow Ontario ... and Palmdale, two airports we own in a part of the region that has seen growth."

The city controller disclosed Thursday that the Villaraigosa transition team had received its first contribution toward a \$200,000 fund to pay for the transition and inauguration. The first check, for \$1,000, came from the Central City Assn. Political Action Committee.