

OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

Future-Proofing Our Public Spaces



By **Yehudi Gaffen**
Founder and CEO
Gafcon Inc.

When I moved to Southern California from South Africa in the 1970s, what could have been a culture shock felt like a homecoming. I fell in love with the California coastline that reminded me so much of my roots in one of the most scenic coasts in the world. I started my firm, Gafcon, in 1987, and we've often been involved with ocean-front projects and feel a deep responsibility for how we develop our precious shorelines.

My thesis at Cape Town University was to work on a mixed-use vision for the city's historic working waterfront. The project was an inspiration that stayed with me throughout my career. As my work at Gafcon has grown to involve major coastal assets, I notice an alarming trend in how we plan and build places where we live, work and play.

Consider how we use our phones today: email, photos, ridesharing and viewing the world through the tech-tinged lens of augmented reality. A decade ago, these were germs of an idea, and 50 years ago they were science fiction.

Contrast this with public spaces: The process of building things hasn't changed much over the past century. But emerging trends will take the design, construction and operations of physical assets into the 21st century just as mobile devices have done over the past decade.

Orange County businesses and residents must be advocates for the best use of our spaces. I have seen the importance Orange County places on investing wisely in our future. Gafcon's work with the Orange Unified School District tasked us with finding savings of cost and time as the district implements its \$288 million bond program of new buildings and renovations at the district's four high schools.

Gafcon saw the region's focus on teaching the leaders of tomorrow while leading a preconstruction engineering process as part of the classroom renovation effort at Congregation Shir Ha-Ma'alot in Irvine. In Santa Ana, we are providing construction management services to support the Magnolia Science Academy in building for new recreational space and expanded outdoor space. The region is investing in education, and it must renew its focus to provide young people with the tools to make their communities thrive.

Agencies that oversee California's waterfront assets need to have a Triple Bottom Line: sustainability, public education and economic viability. At Gafcon, we have seen this promise delivered on waterfront projects in prime public spaces: the North Embarcadero in San Diego, the Los Angeles Waterfront, San Francisco's China Basin Landing and San Diego's Central Embarcadero.

Today, Dana Point is pursuing a major harbor revitalization. The project will be a bellwether for future coastal investment. The site is beloved by locals and tourists and presents tremendous opportunities for retail, hospitality and coastal beauty, in addition to its marina. Cal-

ifornia's sustained economic expansion has many coastal communities looking at the next phase of redevelopment along their waterfronts. It is important to approach the opportunities with a vision for more than the status quo.

Integrating cutting-edge Building Information Modeling (BIM) allows streamlining project management while saving time and reducing costs. Integrating BIM into our project management processes has reduced project time and accelerated project closeout timelines by two months on average, a good savings for taxpayers.

New modeling technology also provides robust outreach opportunities to involve the public in immersive digital representations of building plans. Why look at a printed flyer or static website when you can explore a planned development in full 3-D with a VR headset?

Beyond expediting processes, technology empowers designers, contractors and owners to find new cost savings through efficiencies from the implementation of Virtual Design and Construction technologies.

That approach was taken in San Diego, where the city developed a partnership between our firm, universities and technology companies to integrate Smart Cities planning into public projects.

The education, research and technology sectors of the Orange County market should be encouraged to unite behind those forward-thinking efforts. The region is rich with intellectual and financial assets. Now is the time for public leaders to unite those groups behind a common cause.

Decisions made today will guide how we address traffic congestion, parking, energy, security, pollution, sea-level rise, noise, etc. Planning for the challenges starts now.

Orange County has incredible physical assets, but how many of its custodians are fully adapting the technology of today? Our communities should be built to be durable, environmentally friendly, flexible in form, and adaptable to innovations undreamed of today.

The cities of tomorrow are being planned today. Will they be future proof?

Editor's Note: Gaffen is chief executive of Gafcon Inc., a construction project-management firm based in San Diego. He has more than 35 years of construction and program management experience and holds a bachelor's degree in Construction Management from the University of Cape Town-South Africa. In addition to the aforementioned OC projects, Gafcon provided design-management services for Orange County Great Park. Gafcon has been a repeated entrant on the Zweig Group Hot Firms List, a national ranking of the 100 fastest-growing architecture, engineering, planning and environmental consulting firms in the U.S.

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