

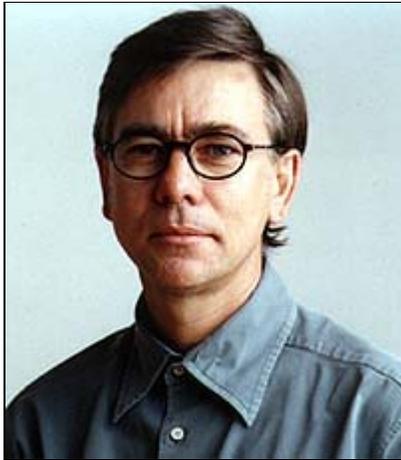
## Santa Monica Architect Hank Koning Talks About His New Role as Planning Commissioner

*First of two parts*

By Gathering Marbet

*August 4* -- If Santa Monica looked the way Hank Koning, the City's newest planning commissioner, envisioned, traffic would lessen, because instead of driving, people would be walking, bicycling and riding the bus.

Development would coincide with public transit routes so that it would be second nature to jump on a bus instead of in a car, and people wouldn't have to travel long distances for necessities.



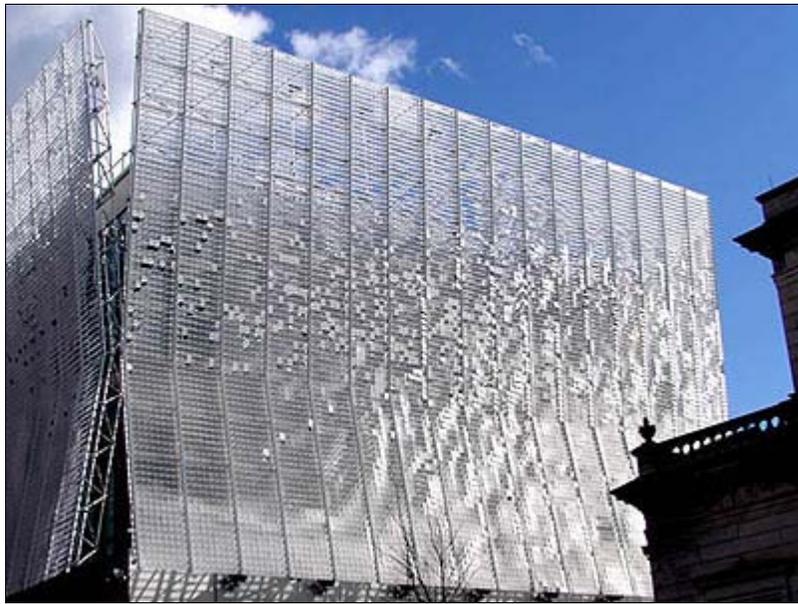
A native of Australia, Koning has lived in Santa Monica for 24 years, building everything from commercial to residential properties, both locally and regionally.

His accomplishments include the Pittsburgh Children's Museum, the remodeled Downtown Standard Hotel and parts of the Fairfax Farmer's Market.

In Santa Monica Koning's firm designed the Ken Edwards Community Center, 5th Street Housing and the Virginia Avenue Park expansion slated to open in November.

On a sunny Tuesday morning The Lookout paid a visit to Koning Eisenberg, the firm he runs with his partner and wife Julie Eisenberg, to talk about architecture, planning and his vision for Santa Monica.

Koning sat, unassuming and accessible, inside his modern wood and corrugated steel building, amidst the bustle of his 18-employee firm.



*Pittsburgh Children's Museum*

*Q: What would you like the people of Santa Monica to know about you as a person who now represents them in the Planning Commission?*

A: I imagine some are concerned that because I'm an architect that they will see me as being maybe one-sided on development, and sometimes the decisions that we make are difficult that way. But I am a resident, and I have my office here, so I'm obviously concerned about the well being of Santa Monica.

I think that something that we have to do is not just look at the short-term, but look at the long-term benefit to the City. And I think that maybe we might have to make some difficult decisions in the short-term that have huge long-term benefits. And I'll tell you specifically that getting things to work so that we can have viable and effective public transportation is essential. Because all the cities that we look at, and that we love, typically have good transportation systems.

Of course that's often viewed in the eyes of the tourist where public transportation is very important. But most of our cities, when you think of public transportation systems, there's a huge mix of people. It's not just for those who don't have cars or can't afford cars, its because it's the best and most effective way to get around. It would be wonderful to see that in LA. But I know that that is something that we have difficulties with.



*Fairfax Farmer's Market*

*Q: Why did you decide to come to California?*

A: I came to study architecture at UCLA (graduate school) and I think I fell in love with LA. I thought it was a great place to be. Aside from the weather here, which is beautiful, it's a very lively, energetic, vibrant city with many urban design challenges.

*Q: What kind of urban design challenges do you mean?*

A: Traffic, parking, and roads. It's much worse than it was 25 years ago. But there are, in the pipeline, solutions. So I think that makes it really interesting, you know, how do you make that happen, and how do you make that happen in a very positive way? I think those are the challenges that face LA, and Santa Monica is part of that, because traffic is a regional issue.

It's like the three biggest problems in Santa Monica are traffic, traffic and traffic. People out here say it's worse than it was, but it's not that bad, it's not so bad yet that people will actually make the effort to do alternative means of travel.

*Q: Is that what you'd like to see?*

A: Absolutely. I would love to see more people get out of their cars, and either ride the bus, ride their bikes, walk, yeah. Why is it that in Holland, people don't think twice about riding their bikes to work? And the weather there really sucks, right? I think there's a certain stigma attached to riding public transportation, you know, taking the bus is for losers. When our kid was in elementary school, he was the only kid who took the bus, and there were certain people who felt that was wrong and would offer him rides home. Because they were worried about safety, and that's obviously the point, absolutely, but the buses are safe for kids to take them -- I think there's a perception that it's not, but it is.



*5th Street Housing*

*Q: Do you think that it's safer to ride the bus in Santa Monica than in greater LA?*

A: I think that obviously the danger, in some areas of LA, is waiting for the bus. I don't think it's riding the bus. I don't think that riding the bus is any more dangerous than driving. The only difference is you get in the car and drive off, so you're not hanging around for so long. But then the other thing is that the more people that are out on the street, the safer they are. It's really that simple.

*Q: What do you plan to suggest to the planning board? What is your vision?*

A: I think we have to look at really viable public transportation routes -- along Ocean Boulevard, the other boulevards, the area along the future Exposition Way -- and we need to make those areas where we can have increased density or housing opportunity. I'm thinking of San Diego, if you're x distance from public transportation you can reduce your parking requirement for housing. San Diego has very nice public transportation now; it's very easy to get around. I would like to at least study that.

I see many developments in San Francisco, in the Hayes Valley area for instance, where they are throwing out some of the rules that they think are bad. And they make interesting developments. For Instance in San Francisco, if you build a condominium, you get to build one parking space instead of two; here we have a minimum and there they have a maximum. I think the biggest deterrent of using a car is not traffic, but the absence of parking. Now that's going to be a very controversial issue for many people.

*Q: You're saying that you would prefer to reduce parking spaces?*

A: We have regulations that say we have to provide all these parking spaces that are in excess inside the city of LA. So we are probably encouraging more traffic by doing so, and discouraging people from using alternative

means of transportation. If you don't have a parking spot, what do you do? If you live in Manhattan, you don't have parking so you don't use a car. But the difficulty here in LA is that we don't have such a great transit system at the moment, but then, at the same time, we won't have a great transit system unless they have riders.



*Standard roofbar*

*Q: What about parking shortages?*

A: Some of the streets are really wide, and I think they should put 90-degree parking there. They could certainly get a lot more street parking. The wide streets they can do that, and it will also slow traffic down. And it's very inexpensive, too. So we do need parking, and that's a given. But if we have redevelopment, I think it should be done sensibly so it works in the perspective of a green city. So within the green city, people can use their cars, but they use their bikes as well. Probably in this office we have six people who ride their bikes, and then my wife and I, we either walk or carpool.

*Q: What about the danger of riding bikes with so many cars around?*

A: The difficulty is that people aren't used to driving their cars around bicycles.

*Q: You mean it's a matter of education?*

A: Yeah. It's the 40 years in the desert thing. The Israelites believed that it had to be forty years in the desert so that the old generation would loose its bad habits, and the next generation would follow the example. It's that effect that it sometimes takes a generation to change a mind set -- the way people think. It's the way we used to do it; it's the way my dad did it. And some of these changes are going to be difficult for people to get used to.

*Q: So you would like to concentrate development where mass transit can be the most helpful for people, and that's the way you would like to see Santa Monica build?*

A: Yes, yes. Its called smart growth. You build stuff so that you don't have to walk far to get to a grocery store.