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Healdsburg City Manager David Mickaelian to resign after 15 years with city



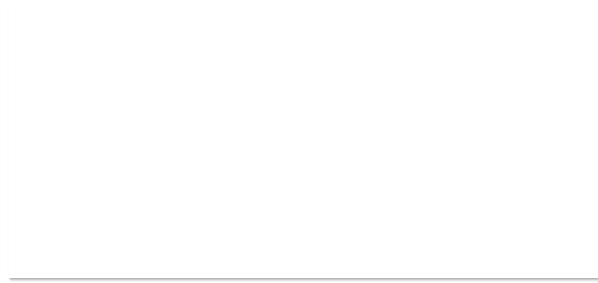
David Mickaelian, 52, will end his nearly six-year tenure as Healdsburg's city manager in July to become general manager of the Tahoe Donner Association of homeowners. (City of Healdsburg)



KEVIN FIXLER

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Healdsburg's city manager is stepping down after 15 years with the city, spurring a search for his replacement amid looming financial uncertainty for City Hall and the ongoing public health emergency.

David Mickaelian, 52, who has served almost six years as city manager, will vacate his post in July to become general manager of the homeowners association for Tahoe Donner in Truckee.

The Healdsburg City Council met online Monday in closed session and voted unanimously, "although very reluctantly" said Mayor Leah Gold, to accept Mickaelian's resignation, effective July 3.

"It's bittersweet. I couldn't imagine a better place to spend the last 15 years of my life, and raise my family," Mickaelian said in an interview. "I cherish everything here. It took a pretty amazing opportunity for me to move."

Prior to taking over as the city's top administrator in 2014, Mickaelian served nine years as assistant city manager and director of community services, which oversees the city's parks and recreation department.

The Southern California native navigated the city through a number of major disasters, including several major floods and the 2017 fires and Kincadee fire last year, all of which dealt Healdsburg's hospitality driven economy a blow.

And then came the coronavirus pandemic.

"David was an anchor for Healdsburg during a turbulent time," said Supervisor James Gore, whose district encompasses northern Sonoma County. "He provided stability and focus that has helped keep Healdsburg not just safe, but the vibrant community we all love."

During Mickaelian's tenure, Healdsburg's economy was hitched even tighter to tourism, with a number of new downtown hotels that reignited a polarizing debate among the city's roughly 12,000 residents.

Through agreements forged with several of those developers, the city was also able to expand its affordable housing stock, making some gains on Healdsburg's acute shortage of workforce housing.

Burbank Housing CEO Larry Florin worked with Mickaelian to acquire four Healdsburg rental properties to prevent them from transitioning into market-rate units under private ownership.



"He had really the best of intentions in mind for the lower-income residents of Healdsburg that we deal with," said Florin. "He was willing to take risks where others might not, and willing to be collaborative. I think government could use more of that."

Mickaelian's resignation comes in the wake of other turnover at the top in City Hall, including the departure of assistant city manager, Joe Irvin, who left in March after less than two years to become South Lake Tahoe's city manager. Hiring for that role has been put on hold amid a revenue shortfall estimated at more than \$3 million through June.

Mickaelian will stay on through the city's upcoming process to craft a spending plan for the next fiscal year. He said he was proud of building the city's roughly \$3.6 million reserve fund to weather unanticipated financial downturns, including the current crisis that has rocked Healdsburg's hotels and restaurants.

Other highlights during Mickaelian's time with the city include the acquisition and opening of the 155-acre Healdsburg Ridge Open Space and 173-acre Fitch Mountain Park preserves and the purchase of the city's community center. He also pointed to agreements for major mixed-use developments that will deliver hundreds more housing units with lodging and retail space, among them the Montage Healdsburg luxury resort, Mill District and North Village projects, all slated to be finished over the next decade.



“Mr. Mickaelian is innovative, a hard charger and smart, and he put his heart and soul into bettering the lives of Healdsburg residents,” said state Sen. Mike McGuire, D-Healdsburg, who as a City Council member in 2004 helped hire him as director of community services. “He’s going to be missed.”

Mickaelian’s move to the Sierra Nevada is a return to the area after annual visits and a winter during college working at a ski rental shop at Squaw Valley Resort. Once he and his family settle into a new home, Mickaelian said he’s looking forward to more skiing, getting back into mountain biking — and starting work with the Tahoe Donner Association, which manages 6,500 residential properties, a downhill and cross-country ski area and golf course.

“It’s just a beautiful area up in Tahoe. I’ve always gravitated toward the amenities and the lifestyle,” Mickaelian said. “It’s not just about the lifestyle, though, and I’m excited about the work. A lot of it translates very well to what I’m doing right now.”

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