

Long Beach Business Journal

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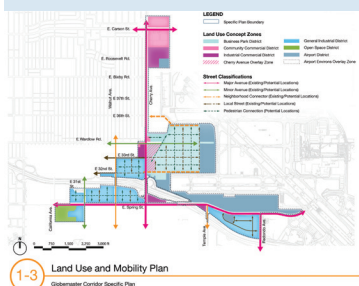
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Post-pandemic wedding boom: After a yearlong wait, couples rush to celebrate their love



Catherine Gorka glances into the mirror as she gets fitted for a wedding dress at Strut Bridal Salon in Long Beach Tuesday, May 18, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

For Kevin Guadamuz and Angelica Diaz, their 2021 wedding had been a decade in the making. The two met on OkCupid in late 2010 and made plans to be wed on Jan. 29, 2021, the 10th anniversary of the day their relationship became official.

When restrictions were eased and businesses like bars reopened in June, they felt confident—they sent out invitations to their guests. Then, the second wave of coronavirus infections shut down LA County again, squashing their plans for a big celebration.

After a year of near-complete standstill, the wedding industry is preparing for a late summer bloom. Couples like Kevin and Angeli-

ca, who have long waited for their special day, are eager to celebrate as soon as possible.

According to the market research firm The Wedding Report, this year will see a surge of 650,000 weddings nationwide, bringing the total number of weddings to 2.77 million compared to the average of 2.12 million weddings taking place in a normal year.

Industry professionals are equally elated that events will finally resume.

“Everybody’s excited to get back to work,” said wedding planner Marni Farmer of So Smitten Special Events. “Things were pretty bleak there for a while.”

Farmer and her husband, photographer Michael Farmer, used the downtime created by canceled and post-

poned weddings to grow their studio photography business. Now, they’re preparing for weddings to return in full force.

“The last half of the year is going to be insane because everyone is still trying to get married this year,” Farmer said.

While couples in other states might be more inclined to postpone their wedding to next summer, California’s climate allows for outdoor celebrations to take place year-round. “Even in winter our weather is pretty mild,” Farmer said. “We’re booked through the end of the year.”

Photographer Stacey Adams said she’s also seen her calendar fill up at a record pace. “I’ve been booked like crazy, every weekend,” Adams said.

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Pandemic cargo surge continues at the San Pedro Bay ports amid ongoing trade war

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of manufacturing plants in China slowed goods movement through San Pedro Bay for much of the first half of 2020, throwing a shroud of uncertainty over the trade sector. But the subsequent resumption of manufacturing and an explosion of e-commerce across the U.S. resulted in 10 straight months of record-breaking cargo movement at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

“The last big shock to the economic system, the Great Recession, caused a 10-year respite to get back to the volumes we had before,” Port of LA Executive Director Gene Seroka said. “So [the pandemic] was pretty unnerving to say the least.”

Nonetheless, the Port of LA has moved an average of 900,000 20-foot equivalent units—the common unit of measure for shipping containers—every month for the last 10 months, the longest streak at that volume of any port in the western hemisphere, according to Seroka. In March, the LA port moved 113% more containers than the same month in 2020.

In Long Beach, which historically handles less cargo than LA, the port has moved more than 700,000 TEUs every month since July, a feat accomplished only once in 2019 and six other times in the port’s history. In October 2020, the port moved over 800,000 TEUs for the first time ever, a record it quickly broke in December and again in March of this year.

“I do think there will be a
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Community Hospital celebrates



From left, Community Hospital Long Beach Foundation Chairman Ray Burton, hospital CEO Virg Narbutas, Mayor Robert Garcia, hospital operator John Molina and Councilman Daryl Supernaw cut a ribbon marking the official grand reopening of Community Hospital, Thursday, May 27, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

By BRANDON RICHARDSON Reporter
After years of work, challenges and delays, city and hospital leaders celebrated the grand reopening of Community Hospital Long Beach Thursday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in front of the nearly century-old facility.
During the event, Matthew Faulkner, executive director of the Community Hospital Long Beach Foundation, recounted the history of the facility starting in 1922 when the prominent Bixby, Bryant, Davis, Foresythe, Hastings, Tichenor and Walker families got on board with Fillmore Condit’s dream of opening a community hospital. Two years and \$364,000 later, the facility opened and earned the moniker “The Miracle on Termino,” Faulkner said.
For decades the facility served the community—caring for the old, treating the sick and welcoming new life into the world. In attendance Thursday was retired Long Beach Firefighter Raymond Bays, who was born June 1, 1928, and is believed to be the oldest living person who was born at Community Hospital.
Just shy of three years ago, the East Long Beach hospital was shuttered, much to the dismay of the community.
“When the city heard the hospital was going to be closed, it rose up,” John Molina of operator Molina, Wu, Network said during the event. “We took up the mantle that all of you laid down when you said, ‘We’ve got to get this open.’”
The city signed a contract with Molina, Wu, Network to reopen and operate the hospital in December 2019. Since then, and even before, the operator has

Real estate advertisement for SAGE REAL ESTATE featuring property photos and details for 1114 Magnolia Ave. and 126 Esperanza Ave.

grand reopening with city, hospital and community leaders



Dozens gathered for the ribbon-cutting ceremony and grand reopening of Community Hospital Long Beach, Thursday, May 27, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

been working to open its doors.

“The city has a responsibility to ensure that it always remains open, that it always serves the public and it remains the people’s hospital,” Garcia said of the city-owned asset. “There was no way, no way we were going to let this hospital remain closed. That was not an option.”

Then, in March of last year, COVID-19 highlighted the need for additional medical beds in many parts of the country, including Long Beach. Early in the pandemic, state, city and hospital leaders pushed to reopen Community Hospital with an emergency permit, an effort that ended up taking months.

After numerous delays at the state level, the hospital admitted its first patient, a transfer from College Medical

Center, on Jan. 5, at the height of the pandemic. Two weeks later, the facility was given state approval to reopen its behavioral health ward with 28 beds.

But still, the hospital could only receive transfer patients from other facilities.

On May 12, the hospital celebrated the reopening of its emergency department, a crucial department that allows the facility to accept walk-in patients. County approval for Community to be designated a 911-receiving hospital came 12 days later, allowing ambulances to deliver patients to the facility for the first time in nearly three years.

“The opening of the ER at Community Hospital has a direct benefit to the pre-hospital care system in Long Beach,”

the Long Beach Fire Department said in a statement. “The return of this resource provides additional beds and access to services that our community needs.”

The hospital currently operates 99 beds, including 40 medical/surgical, 11 ICU, 28 behavioral and 20 in the emergency department. However, the full capacity of the facility is 158 beds. The hospital is working to expand services but no details are currently available, according to spokesman Brandon Dowling.

Community Hospital has a staff of over 210.

“The notable physicians and staff here are our lifeblood,” hospital CEO Virg Narbutas said. “I have closely watched the care they provide and, with-

out reservation, these are some of the most attentive, compassionate and capable medical professionals I have worked with.”

Over its long history, Community Hospital became a place of “healing, innovation and compassionate care,” Faulkner said, noting that Community was home to the nation’s first convalescent facility and that its doctors helped develop the defibrillator and 911 services.

“It was truly the little hospital that could and did,” he said.

Community Hospital closed its doors in the summer of 2018 after a fault line was discovered running under the facility and former operator MemorialCare Health System determined the necessary retrofits were too expensive.

The hospital is currently up to seismic code but Molina, Wu, Network is working with the state regulators to meet more comprehensive standards that take effect Jan. 1, 2025. The city will reimburse Molina, Wu, Network up to \$25 million for seismic-related work, which is estimated to have a price tag upward of \$50 million, over the next 15 years.

The upgrades will be the third seismic retrofit in the hospital’s history.

The hospital operator has already invested millions of dollars into the facility, including deferred maintenance, equipment replacement, supplies, utility systems, and facade and interior room updates. Fourth District Councilman Daryl Supernaw’s office donated \$250,000 for critical elevator repair.

“We are not the ownership group. We are merely the caretakers of a legacy that stretches back 100 years and will stretch forward 100 years,” Molina said. “Many people think of this as a place to go when you are sick but we’re going to transform it into a place to go to stay well.”

Editor’s note: John Molina—of Molina, Wu, Network—is the primary investor in the parent company that owns the Long Beach Post. ■



Community Hospital CT Tech Dom Phouma watches operator John Molina speak during the facility’s grand reopening ceremony, Thursday, May 27, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



Community Hospital staff watches Mayor Robert Garcia speak during the hospital’s grand reopening event, Thursday, May 27, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

After a devastating year, L'Opera is rising from the ruins

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

Restaurateur Terry Antonelli has opened 27 restaurants in his career, including the Madison and Alegria on Downtown's Pine Avenue. But his "baby," his crowning achievement, has for 30 years been L'Opera, in the historic former First National Bank of Long Beach building.

He spent two years and well over a million dollars transforming what was then a Bank of America branch into an opulent and world-class restaurant at 101 Pine Ave.

The high-dollar Italian restaurant was loaded with luxury: Original artwork abounded, including a \$125,000 mural in the main dining room, rich wood cabinetry and marble pillars, brass double front doors, an immense wine cellar in the private La Scala and Wine Cellar rooms in the subterranean level, and the finest kitchen equipment and walk-in refrigerators and freezers money could buy.

When the transformation was complete, Antonelli opened L'Opera on Thursday, April 19, 1990, on Grand Prix weekend, when his customers included a virtual racers hall of fame—the Andrettis, the Unsers, the Penskes and actor-racer Paul Newman.

For the next 30 years, L'Opera was the go-to restaurant for the finest in elegant dining in Long Beach, filled with conventioners, wedding dinners and rehearsals, wealthy regulars

and common folk splurging for a special occasion.

Then in March 2020, COVID-19 forced L'Opera and every restaurant in the city to shut down. But the end for L'Opera came swiftly and viciously on the afternoon and into the evening of May 31 last year, when a peaceful protest sparked by the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis devolved into looting and vandalism concentrated in Downtown. Shops were broken into and ransacked; windows were shattered in storefronts and other buildings; fires erupted.

And L'Opera, in particular, was brutally vandalized. Antonelli had the place boarded up as a precaution against violence, but it appeared, after a couple of hours, that the protest was going to be a peaceful event, and Antonelli went home at around 4 p.m. feeling that all would be well.

At about 4:30, a throng of looters attacked the restaurant, ripping the plywood off the front, shattering glass doors and windows and pouring into the restaurant. For three and a half hours, the mob utterly destroyed virtually every part of L'Opera.

Walking through the restaurant recently, Antonelli pointed at, well, everything. "They broke all the glass, graffitied all the walls, all the paintings, they tore off the refrigerator doors, took all the wine and liquor and what they didn't take away, they threw against the walls."

The \$125,000 mural? Torn and



Long Beach Italian fine dining restaurant L'Opera reopened in Downtown after being closed for more than a year. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

spray-painted. Cabinets reduced to kindling and splinters.

"They had crowbars and hammers that they took to the bars and the marble columns," Antonelli said.

Later, looking at security camera video, Antonelli counted 63 people making havoc with his restaurant for three and a half hours. "They were taking armloads of liquor and food out to vans in the garage and they'd fill them up and the vans would drive away. It

was all very orchestrated."

The police, throughout the melee, stood down, milling on a street corner just yards from L'Opera.

"I'll never understand that," said Antonelli. "I've been assured by everyone in the city that that won't happen again," he said. And maybe it won't, but it happened on May 31.

The following morning, Antonelli sat in his ruined restaurant. "I sat there for three hours thinking, 'Do I really want to do this again, after the way I was treated?'" He talked it over with two of his longtime employees, executive chef Walter Cotta, and general manager Nicole Lira, and the decision was made to rebuild. It would take a lot of time and a lot of money, though he was lucky that his insurance covered the disaster.

"It took a month just to clean up the mess," said Antonelli. Downstairs, the vandals had broken so much glass that there were big shards of it sunken into the wood everywhere. Antonelli had the wood flooring pulled out and put in travertine.

"That's better, anyway," he said. "It's easier to care for and it won't buckle or warp when it gets wet."

The entire process of rebuilding L'Opera, as it turned out, was full of those sort of little silver linings.




"In a way it was a blessing in disguise," Antonelli said. "Instead of a 30-year-old restaurant, I now have a new restaurant. Instead of just covering things with a Band-Aid, I rebuilt everything, put in all new kitchen equipment, all new furniture and cabinets, new flooring. I just improved everything."

That includes a new mural in the dining room—this one is a massive painting of the stars of Martin Scorsese's 1990 mob epic "Goodfellas," with the addition of Antonelli.

Antonelli opened the restaurant rather quietly on May 24, just a week shy of the one-year anniversary of the looting.


"It went well," he said. "The kitchen did well, the staff worked well. We were about half full like we were told to be. We turned away a lot of people. I'm just waiting until we can operate at full capacity and get Pine open again."

Antonelli says he'll throw a grander opening, a sort of belated celebration of L'Opera's 31st year, in August or September. ■



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CITY OF
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From permits to park rentals, Long Beach just raised the price of some city fees

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Fees that Long Beach charges for things like building permits, renting park space and even getting a soft-serve ice cream business license are changing thanks to a City Council vote Tuesday, May 18, that approved an update to the city's master fee schedule.

The city's policy requires fees to be set at the cost of the service provided unless there is "greater public benefit through the use of a lower fee." A recent consultant's study prompted this week's changes.

The analysis is not complete but changes to the city's fees for Development Services, Health and Human Services and Parks, Recreation and Marine departments were approved Tuesday night. The city expects a second round of analysis on fees charged by Public Works, the Long Beach Police Department and Energy Resources could be completed by the summer.

Updating this first round of fees is expected to result in a \$2.2 million increase

in city revenue with about \$767,886 ending up in the city's general fund. Not all the fee changes were increases.

What's changing

Short-term rentals: The city's short-term rental ordinance—governing things like Airbnbs—included an opt-out clause in which residents could gather signatures to ban short-term rentals from specific neighborhoods. Now, any neighborhood going through that petition process will also have to pay a \$1,000 fee.

E-scooters: Violations by scooter vendors will cost them \$100 per scooter. The violations include scooters left outside of designated areas where scooters are allowed to be operated and for scooters that exceed the maximum speed limit set by the city. The city previously charged a \$100 impound fee for discarded scooters in the public right-of-way.

Appeals to city commissions/City Council: It will be more expensive for applicants and third parties to appeal projects to the city's Planning Commission, Cultural Heritage Commission and City

Council. Appeals by project applicants jumped to \$4,820 for Planning Commission and \$4,735 for an appeal to the City Council.

The fee for a third-party appeal jumped from \$105 to \$400 per appeal to the Planning Commission and City Council. An appeal to the Cultural Heritage Commission will now cost a third-party appellant \$1,000, or \$1,500 if it's an appeal of a 100% affordable housing project.

An appeal to the Planning Commission over a Cultural Heritage Commission decision, like the one made over a proposed mural earlier this month, will now cost a third-party applicant \$1,000.

Historic/landmark designation: A Mills Act application increased from \$1,400 to \$2,500. A new fee was added to cover the cost of having a landmark designation rescinded. That will cost \$13,760.

Conditional-use permits: These permits that allow businesses to engage in activities not allowed in a given part of the city, like obtaining an alcohol license or constructing a specific type of business, are doubling in price. Conditional-use per-

mits will now cost \$8,400 per application.

Animal Care Services: The cost to apply to become a dog breeder is increasing significantly. An application that used to cost \$230 will now cost \$5,255. For people who started urban farms in their backyards, the cost to have chickens or goats is increasing from \$28 per animal to \$240.

Field rentals: The cost of renting a sports field is going up slightly. An hour on a city-owned baseball/softball or soccer/football field will cost \$25-\$40, and renting an artificial turf field will cost \$25-\$80 per hour depending on if it's being used for youth or adults, nonprofit or for-profit entities, and if players are residents or visitors to Long Beach.

City inspections: While many permits for construction did go down, there were some that saw dramatic increases. Fire alarm inspections that used to cost \$169 plus \$4.14 per alarm are now a flat \$780 fee. Sprinkler-system inspections also jumped to \$780 and an underground piping inspection is more than doubling from \$407 to \$904 per permit. ■

Top Treasury official meets with local business owners impacted by COVID-19

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

A top White House official in the U.S. Treasury Department visited Long Beach Wednesday, May 19, to meet with small businesses that were shuttered by the pandemic.

Wally Adeyemo, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, along with city officials including Mayor Robert Garcia, met with business owners Wednesday also to discuss the American Rescue Plan, which would provide relief to Americans such as direct paychecks as the economy recovers from the pandemic.

Among the businesses invited to attend a meeting with federal and local officials was Walter Farfan, owner of J.W. Goodson Salon and Tanning on Broadway and Junipero Avenue.

Farfan said he got an email late Tuesday night from the mayor's office asking him if he wanted to attend a small business roundtable at George's Greek Cafe.

"I told them I'd be there," he said.

When he sat down in George's Wednesday morning alongside other local business owners, Farfan sat right in front of Adeyemo during the meeting, which was closed to media. He said the official was taking suggestions from business owners about what the federal government could do to help them financially.

"He wanted to know how things are now that people are returning to work," Farfan recalled in his conversation with Adeyemo. "I shared with them that we are optimistic that things will be getting back to normal."

One suggestion he called for was to make federal loans tax deductible. Farfan said it would be a good idea for businesses because it would help them clear



Wally Adeyemo, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, left, talks with Mayor Robert Garcia in Downtown Long Beach during a visit to meet with business owners. Photo courtesy of the mayor's office.

debt and look favorable for future loans.

With more clients coming back to trim their long quarantine hair, it seems things are starting to get back to normal for the beauty industry, but a few months ago Farfan was nearing the permanent closure of his business. He closed his shop three times and took out federal loans and grants to keep up with salaries and rent for his location.

He said he lost a barber, a nail specialist and a skin care specialist. To

keep his remaining staff busy, Farfan said they volunteered with the American Red Cross to host blood drives as a way to help the community and promote his business. After taking out federal loans, Farfan is now facing \$10,000 in debt.

Adeyemo said there may be opportunities to qualify pandemic loans for tax write-offs at the end of the year to help, but Farfan said nothing was concrete.

"The guy was very down to earth and approachable," Farfan said. "He knows where we're coming from."

Adeyemo said he plans to return to Long Beach in six months, according to Farfan, to host a follow-up meeting with local businesses.

Other local businesses at the meeting included Rainbow Juices, the Bamboo Club and Honduras Kitchen, as well as the head of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce. ■

A house in Long Beach that's a steal at \$375,000—but would you live there?

By TIM GROBATY
Columnist

Take a look at this house. Does it have charm? Does it have the potential for charm? If you close your eyes can you imagine it having been charming when it was young and new? The house is fairly hidden on Smith Place, a tiny dead-end spur jutting east of the 2100 block of Orange Avenue. It's affordable, after a fashion, relative to most houses for sale in Long Beach. Weird that we think of \$375,000 as being affordable, but in a city awash in \$1 million homes that a couple of generations ago cost in the mid- to low five figures, it is, in fact, affordable. Put \$75,000 down and you can probably keep your monthly payment to about \$1,700. That's a pretty good rent payment equivalent and one that will never go up. Still. Would you live there? Maybe. Probably not. It's lacking windows, with boards nailed over what used to be windows, both inside and out. Wiring is exposed. It could use paint and who knows what else. "It needs a bit of work," is the understatement by listing Realtor

William Vinter, of Refined Realty. When asked if the house is a tear-down, he insisted it is not. "You put a few dollars into it and you'll have a nice place." Still, you might look at the property and fail to see the potential. Historically, this house, at 1201 E. Smith Place, with its one bedroom and its one bath in 564 square feet, likely never held high aspirations. Who's it kidding? It was aware of what it was: a place for a cozy family of two and a dog, tops, to live in and call their own. Maybe Mrs. Harry Laughran, who lived there when the house was new in 1922, proudly planted a bed of roses and zinnias in the front yard and shared coffee with her neighbors. Soon after she moved into the house, perhaps with her husband, but maybe she was alone, the gas company came and hooked up the utility. Now she could cook and heat with gas. The house was getting modernized and gussied up for the impending Great Depression. When that economic disaster came a few years later, Harry J. Swarz and his wife Margaret moved from Dallas into the house on Smith Place. Maybe they were happy at



This home at 1201 E. Smith Place is on the market for \$375,000. Screenshot.

first in the little house, but the walls might've closed in on them at some point toward the middle of 1929. They needed space, maybe, and the little house was simply unable to give it to them. In June of that year, Harry filed a divorce complaint against Margaret, charging she treated him with "extreme cruelty" in following him to the Los Angeles Coliseum during a Shriners convention and "cursing and reviling him in front of his brother Shriners causing great humiliation and mortification," according to a notice printed in the Los Angeles Times. Harry threw in the accusation that Margaret, the firecracker that she was, "took a potshot" at him in Dallas once and many times threatened to kill him. In the mid-1930s, the home's owner apparently bred wire-haired terriers and took out several ads in the newspaper for a couple of years offering them for sale. A real estate advertisement in the Long Beach Independent in 1948 offered the house for \$5,950, describing it as, "1 bedroom plus garage sleeping room. Will exchange for 3-bedroom." "Garage sleeping room?" OK, this was 72 years ago, so it's possible to imagine this garage could have provided a nice place to sleep back then, but those days are gone now. It's reduced to what it would look like if I tried to build a porte cochère, when I can't even build a planter box. In 1952, Vera Fordham lived in the house, where she penned several letters to the editor to the Press-Telegram, urging Congress not to accept the U.N. Bill of Rights ("it will take precedence over our own cherished Constitution"). In another letter, Fordham referenced a quote from Adlai Stevenson who said that if he got the Democratic presidential nomination "I'd shoot myself." (Though a reluctant candidate, he did win the nomination in 1952, and again in 1956 and never once shot himself). What Fordham wondered in her let-

ter to the editor was, "Have you any idea when and where the event will take place?" Perhaps because they were so familiar with their loyal reader and correspondent, the editors of the Press-Telegram published a short piece to help Fordham retrieve a short, red flannel coat that she left at a picnic in Bixby Park. "The coat is the only one I have," Fordham is quoted as saying. "And I need a coat—even in California." Fordham's last appearance in the paper was her obituary published a few days after her death on New Year's Eve in 1953. She was 67. And so it went for the little house in the middle of town, riding the wild rollercoaster of home values, though not to the dizzying heights of some homes in the high-dollar neighborhoods along the coast. It's gone up, but just to what now seems to be a perfectly reasonable price. The listing does mention that it's close to the beach, though it would still be handy to drive to the ocean or at least be transportation-savvy enough to know how to grapple with a bus ride, because it's more than a few steps. But that's about as glowing as the usually-rhapsodic real-estate description gets for the Smith Place house. In fact, the description is less of a hyperbolic sales pitch than a dire warning: "Listing agents do not represent or guarantee accuracy of the square footage, lot size or lot lines/ dimensions, permitted or unpermitted spaces, school boundary lines or eligibility, or other information concerning the conditions or features of the property. Buyer is advised to independently verify the accuracy of all information. Property to be sold As-Is, no repair credits to be given to the buyer." Forget all that. At \$375,000, and a couple of bucks in repair work, go ahead and click on "add to cart."

CITY OF LONG BEACH
BID OPPORTUNITIES

Table with 3 columns: TITLE, BID NUMBER, DUE DATE. Rows include Construction Management & Inspection Svcs, Professional Engineering & Recycling/Solid Waste Management Consultant Services, One-on-One Advisory Svcs for Cannabis Entrepreneurs Pursuing Cannabis Business Ownership in Long Beach, etc.

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Parklet program to be extended through September; some could become permanent

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Long Beach's parklet program, which gave restaurants and other businesses a lifeline to expand service outside during the pandemic, will be extended through the end of September.

The extension approved by the City Council on May 18, will also allow many of the businesses that opened parklets to apply to make them permanent, including those along a section of Pine Avenue in Downtown that was closed to traffic completely.

The parklet program was set to expire June 30.

As part of the May 18 decision, the businesses that apply for permanent parklets will have to go through a permitting process and adhere to guidelines established by the city.

City Manager Tom Modica said that about 70% of Long Beach parklets could be eligible to become permanent while some will have to be removed due to safety concerns. The extension would only apply to existing parklets.

Modica said the parklets that would have to be removed exist in areas of the city that have traffic safety concerns or are blocking important infrastructure like storm drains. Some of the parklets that could be eligible to stay have aesthetic issues, accessibility and insurance issues, he said.

"They were done on an emergency basis," Modica said. "They don't have the final materials."

Modica added that this extension would apply to other businesses that have expanded operations into their parking lots, but those types of outdoor extensions would have to end in September because they're currently against zoning codes, he added.

The application process could include



A group of bikers rides down Pine Avenue while others dine at outdoor parklets, Thursday, May 6, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

review of safety concerns due to traffic conditions on the streets they're located, effects on parking in the area and feedback from residents who live around them.

There are over 100 temporary parklets throughout the city but some have already begun to come down. The extension of the program would apply to parklets and to the complete street shutdown of Pine Avenue, something that members of the council have expressed interest in making permanent.

But the city already announced that it would be reopening lanes on Atlantic Avenue in Bixby Knolls that had been temporarily closed to allow area restaurants to expand out into the street. Those lanes are expected to reopen next week.

Another parklet that was granted to a real estate office will not be covered by the extension.

There have been concerns over the safe-

ty of parklets as lanes of traffic and parking have been removed. In some cases this has put diners in close proximity to traffic and there have been a number of accidents involving vehicles crashing into parklets.

Councilwoman Suzie Price asked that the traffic engineer consult on parklet locations. Price, who represents a district that includes Belmont Shore and Naples, said that there have been five accidents in parklets in her area of the city.

"Thankfully nobody got hurt but those

accidents did take out two parklets completely," Price said.

Mayor Robert Garcia asked for the plan to be developed after a big push from local restaurateurs, who said the outdoor areas could allow them to continue to recover from the pandemic-closures.

Garcia said that customers have also expressed a hesitance to head back to indoor dining despite the city's "yellow" tier status in the state's reopening plan that allows for 50% indoor capacity for restaurants. Restaurants and other retailers could seat more people inside if they require proof of negative tests or vaccination.

"I know folks who will not eat inside right now, they still want to eat outdoors and I know that for a lot of folks, that for them, that's what works," Garcia said.

Garcia added that he hoped that the parklets that are eligible to stay could become permanent.

"We understand that there has to be a process in place, but my personal opinion is that as many parklets that want to stay permanent should be allowed to stay in place," Garcia said.

The state is expected to lift most of its remaining COVID-19 guidelines on June 15.

June 15 is also the day that California will loosen mandates on wearing masks in public settings for those who are vaccinated. ■

Long Beach libraries spring to life as guests are welcomed back

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

Libraries in Long Beach began welcoming guests back inside the week of May 17 following months of closures brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since June, the city's library system had been offering to-go services for books ordered online, but now families and residents can visit the library in person.

Senior Librarian Mara Pearce at the Michelle Obama Library in North Long Beach said her staff was excited to see patrons come back inside using some of the services, such as computers and printers, and simply just hanging out.

Things were a bit different inside the library, however. Certain colorful corners designed for children were still closed off to promote social distancing. Libraries are requiring guests to wear a mask inside and to limit their stay to 30 minutes.

As of Wednesday, Pearce said the library had not seen a large number of peo-

ple show up in person yet. She believed it was because people haven't heard that they are open for in-person services again.

Some services are still unavailable, including after-school programs and storytimes for children. Pearce hopes they can resume sometime in the fall, but there has not been official word from the city's library system as to when those services would come back.

Schedule of libraries:

Billie Jean King Main Library

- Tuesdays, noon to 8 p.m.
- Wednesdays, noon to 6 p.m.
- Thursdays, noon to 7 p.m.
- Fridays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Bay Shore, Mark Twain and Michelle Obama Neighborhood Libraries

- Tuesdays, noon to 7 p.m.
- Wednesdays, noon to 6 p.m.
- Thursdays, noon to 7 p.m.
- Fridays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. ■

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‘A sacred space’: Pandemic restrictions have hampered, but not stopped, religious weddings

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

When Nitasha and Jalpen Patel began planning their wedding in January of 2020, they had their sights set on celebrating in their families’ home state of Gujarat, located on India’s northwestern coast. As is traditional for Hindu weddings, it was going to be a massive event, with roughly 1,500 guests expected to attend.

But, like many other couples, the Patels had to drastically change their plans when the coronavirus swept the world just a few months later.

The ceremony, normally a multi-day event involving rituals performed by uncles, aunts and other relatives to celebrate the union of two families, had to be toned down, in part because not all family members would be able to attend.

“We were not able to do all the ceremonies we would normally do in an Indian wedding,” Patel said. “We had to reduce—we basically did everything in half a day.”

For followers of many religions, matrimony is an important stage in life, one that is celebrated and sanctioned by their religious institutions. Churches, temples and synagogues have had to make adjustments during the pandemic—and so have religious couples. Still, for some, a religious wedding was non-negotiable.

“We stress the importance of church weddings for the simple fact that they lay the base of a lot of other sacraments in the church,” said Sam Christi, business manager of St. Barnabas Catholic Church in California Heights.

While weddings don’t constitute



Nitasha and Jalpen Patel during their wedding ceremony at the Gayatri Consciousness Center in Anaheim. Photo courtesy of Stacey Adams.

a significant source of income for the church, Christi said they fill an important role in the spiritual journey of its members. “You are expected, as part of being a Catholic, to follow the Catholic ceremonies and all the rules and all the sacraments. Getting married in the church is one of them,” he said.

But until recently, couples who wanted to get married in the church had to do so in an outside tent, set up after the state’s public health department issued opening guidelines for houses of worship on July 29, 2020—not an ideal environment for a spiritual milestone, the church’s pastor said.

“For me, as a priest, it’s important to have the wedding in the sanctuary of the church, because it creates a sacred space,” said Father Antony Gaspar.

Now that weddings in the interior of

the church are possible again, requests for wedding ceremonies have begun to pick up. The church has also been performing blessings, a re-statement of vows in the church that allows couples to have the church wedding they were denied during the pandemic.

“They feel a sense of sacredness and holiness in the church,” Gaspar said. “That the sense of solemnity was taken away in the tent.”

In the Jewish faith, weddings generally take place outside of the sacred space of the synagogue.

Rabbi David Cantor, of Temple Beth Shalom in Bixby Knolls, said wedding requests have always been rare within his small congregation and he hasn’t received any requests for post-pandemic ceremonies so far.

Anecdotally, however, Cantor said

he’s heard of couples who have made adjustments to the spiritual portion of their wedding as a result of the pandemic.

“Some people have delayed their weddings. Some people have chosen to have a secular wedding now,” he said. “Life goes on, but the public celebration is being put on hold.”

The Jewish faith did away with priesthood several thousand years ago, meaning that a rabbi isn’t required to sanction the union between two people for them to be married. Most couples, however, opt to have a rabbi present to guide them through the ceremony, Cantor noted.

“I’m just there to make sure that they marry each other correctly,” Cantor said about the rabbi’s role at Jewish weddings. “And I kinda feed them their lines,” he added, smiling.

Still, Cantor said he enjoys officiating weddings and witnessing the union formed between two members of the faith. As a conservative rabbi, Cantor only officiates weddings for couples where both partners are Jewish.

“Everybody’s happy at a wedding,” he said. “It’s not just a transaction, It’s two people being best friends for life.”

For Nitasha and Jalpen Patel, celebrating their union under the ceremonial guidance of a priest was non-negotiable, despite the many hurdles they faced in planning their wedding.

“The temple that I normally go to wasn’t allowing ceremonies, so I had to find one that did,” Nitasha Patel said.

“We always wanted a traditional Hindu ceremony—that’s what felt would actually unite us,” she added. “Doing it in a temple, we knew that God would be present there.” ■

Pandemic pinch: While couples crunch the numbers on their postponed weddings, vendors up their prices

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Love doesn’t come cheap, especially in California.

Couples in the state spend an average of \$39,000 on their wedding day, according to The Knot Real Wedding Studies, an annual survey of thousands of couples nationwide.

But the pandemic has kept many couples from celebrating their wedding as planned, with some opting for smaller celebrations or postponing them altogether.

A survey, conducted by market research firm The Wedding Report, found that wedding spending dropped significantly in 2020, largely due to restrictions on large gatherings, and is unlikely to return to normal levels until 2024.

Megan Papageorge, a wedding planner and owner of Long Beach-based Sweet Peach Planning, said some of her clients have lost money on deposits they paid to venues that didn’t survive the pandemic. Others have simply reconsidered their priorities and timing over the year-long delay.

“When they were completely focused on the wedding before, now they’re thinking of maybe having a baby or buying a house,” Papageorge said.

As some couples are crunching the numbers on their planned festivities again, vendors are doing the same.

In addition to a year of lost revenue, caterers, event venues and rental companies all returned to a market that presents new challenges, such as labor shortages or supply chain issues.

The price of lumber used to build

arches for wedding ceremonies, for example, has increased 300% in just one year, according to market data collected by the National Association of Home Builders.

Caterers and venues have also seen costs rise. Recently, prices for chicken have soared. A national labor shortage means they have to pay higher wages to attract waiters, ushers or bar personnel.

“We have no choice, we have to increase our pricing,” said Sofia Riley, owner of the Long Beach catering company Thank Goodness It’s Sofia. Still, demand hasn’t let up. “Our industry was hit so hard, but now the phones have been ringing off the hook,” Riley said.

High demand itself might also lead to increased prices for services like photography or planning, said Papageorge. A photographer who’s booked one day out

of every weekend for the rest of the year might decide to charge higher prices for additional gigs, she explained.

“That’s one thing in the wedding industry that a lot of people don’t understand: Part of what we sell is our availability,” Papageorge said.

In addition to increased hard costs, many planners and vendors have been working with clients throughout the pandemic—clients who had plenty of time to rethink everything, from their choice of hairstyle to their flower arrangements.

Ever-changing regulations to limit the spread of COVID have done their part in keeping planners and vendors busy.

“When there’s a new regulation, we try to reimagine as best as we can,” Papageorge said. “The wedding vendors have been doing a lot of work for free.” ■

Wedding boom

(Continued from Page 1)

While the pandemic gave her an opportunity to experiment with more intimate projects like creative portraits, the photographer said she's ready to return to the fast-paced, high-energy environment of weddings.

"I'm not a nature photographer, I'm a people photographer—and weddings are these celebrations of people," she said. "It was really hard not to do that for a year."

Caterers, reception venues, even seamstresses specializing in wedding gown alterations are flooded with requests.

"It's been a state of constant and consistent phone calls," said Daniel D'Sa, director of The Grand, a popular event space near the Long Beach Airport. "COVID didn't take away people's love for one another and their desire to commit to each other for the rest of their lives."

Even venues that don't normally focus on hosting weddings are taking advantage of the high demand. Jennifer Pak, director of sales and marketing at the Hilton Long Beach, said as the hotel's main source of guests—conventions—remain on

hold until August, weddings have been a welcome source of revenue.

"We would always be picky on the kinds of weddings we take, because we're a convention-focused hotel," Pak said.

Now, she noted, the hotel's availability is wide open and after being furloughed for months, staff were happy to see events resume, albeit on a smaller scale.

The state is slated for a full reopening on June 15, but most celebrations will likely include fewer guests, especially through the end of this year, planners and vendors say. In its nationwide survey of couples and vendors, The Wedding Report found that 58% of couples were planning to cut the size of their wedding party down to almost half the number of guests.

Farmer said the average wedding planned by her in 2021 has around 50 guests, compared to an average of 150-200 in prior years. "Pre-pandemic, it was pretty rare to do a wedding with so few people," she added.

Like many couples, Kevin Guadamuz and Angelica Diaz decided to elope, tying the knot in a small ceremony at Blufftop Trail on the Palos Verdes peninsula.

"We're not going to let a pan-



Kevin Guadamuz and Angelica Diaz are being wed by their friend and officiant, Danny Rangel, at Blufftop Trail on the Palos Verdes peninsula. Photo courtesy of EveRox Photography.

demic stop us from keeping the date we decided on," Kevin Guadamuz remembers thinking.

But they aren't going to let the pandemic take away their chance to celebrate with their friends and family either. Both Kevin and Angelica were raised by immigrant parents who sacrificed a lot to give their children the chance of a better life,

the groom said, and the reception is an opportunity to honor those sacrifices and celebrate their success as well as their love.

"It's just going to be a big party," Guadamuz said about the wedding, which is currently scheduled for August. "[We're] celebrating something we've wanted for a long time." ■

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‘People are ready to party’ after difficult year for wedding venues

■ By **TESS KAZENOFF**
Reporter

It wasn’t enough for COVID to force the cancellations of dining out, sporting events, festivals and just about everything else people do during the course of what was once termed everyday life. It also put weddings on hiatus.

People who had planned to pledge their eternal undying love to one another for the rest of their lives were told to have a seat and put off their wedding plans until this whole thing blows over. Some couldn’t wait and went ahead and did their “I do’s” in their backyards with a handful of masked attendants and guests, while others decided to put their love in abeyance altogether until things became safer. That time is now.

Wedding venues around Long Beach have suffered almost as much as long-engaged couples, and now they’re beginning to rebound after a brutal, loveless year. Some are making changes to attract more couples and adjusting their business model to bring in more safety measures.

Most are also trying to keep up with an influx of business from couples hoping, however cautiously, to finally make their devotion to one another nice and legal.

The Grand

“It was lifeless,” said Dan D’Sa, director of The Grand in Long Beach about the past year. “It was a beautiful shell that didn’t have a heartbeat.”

Among the multitude of licenses that the luxurious venue has, its restaurant license allowed the outside space to open as a parklet, functioning as a restaurant and a space for micro-weddings, brought to popularity by pandemic safety protocols.

“It felt so weird seeing just a sliver of what the celebration typically and historically has looked like when it comes to weddings,” said D’Sa.

Last year, The Grand hosted only five weddings, two of which only had three people.

“You have people going into something, probably the worst thing that this world in our lives have ever experienced and will ever experience. You have something so tragic and traumatic happen and people are really still wanting to connect for the rest of their lives,” said D’Sa.

Even as restrictions ease, D’Sa anticipates caution surrounding wedding planning indefinitely.

“I don’t want to overcome someone’s fear. I want to sympathize with them. And I want to do everything I can, so they can still entertain and have this experience,” he said.

D’Sa said he anticipates that Zooming in friends and relatives will likely continue to be a part of future weddings.

Rather than creating specific wedding packages for couples to select based on COVID-19 safety protocols, The Grand has instead become more involved in the design process of weddings, creating a personal, but social-distanced, experience for each wedding.

Now, D’Sa said that the “phone hasn’t stopped ringing,” with around 75 weddings scheduled for 2021 into 2022. The Grand has maintained its 2019 pricing, D’Sa said.

Hotel Maya

When pandemic restrictions eased a bit to allow for cultural and religious ceremonies, Hotel Maya adapted a new “Minimoni Package” that proved to be quite successful, said Lisa Duncan, director of catering and convention services.

Although the package limited the ceremony to no more than 25 guests, and did not offer food or beverages or any of the typical festivities usually associated with weddings, 15 couples utilized the package in the second half



The Hotel Maya. Courtesy photo.

of 2020, and the package is continuing to be offered for this year, said Duncan.

“It might have looked a little bit different but the important thing was that the couples were officially able to get married in front of a smaller group of family and friends,” she said.

A lot of couples are still trying to minimize, said Duncan, and she anticipates a trend of smaller weddings continuing.

Other changes include food and drink service; buffets and family style meals are a thing of the past, and servers now take drink orders at the table rather than having guests congregate at a bar.

Generally couples plan their weddings nine to 12 months out, but Duncan has seen many couples plan for late 2022, out of an abundance of caution. On the flipside, Hotel Maya has also accommodated weddings only a couple weeks in advance, for couples eager to marry as restrictions lift and their family members become vaccinated.

Hotel Maya has strived to be accommodating to guests through the unpredictability of the pandemic, including allowing flexibility in changing dates.

Pricing has not fluctuated in order to compensate for lost revenue over the past year, said Duncan, aside from “small incremental increases here and there to accommodate for the updates to the service style that we have to follow,” such as more servers, for example.

In April of this year, Hotel Maya saw a 40% increase in inquiries compared to April of 2019.

“Even if it’s a smaller dinner for 25 people, it’s just really nice to see people celebrating and doing it safely, and having our staff here. Everyone’s just really happy, it’s just a really good vibe and a good energy, and we certainly missed it,” said Duncan.

Long Beach Museum of Art

The Long Beach Museum of Art initially had 46 weddings scheduled for 2020, a number that shrunk down to only one last year, said executive director Ron Nelson.

It was a five-minute ceremony, with just the couple, the officiant, and one of the grooms’ mothers in attendance.

Despite this, Nelson said, “It’s uplifting, spiritually renewing. I got married here and I think the place sells itself.”

Amid the museum’s financial concerns over the past year, after witnessing vendors such as photographers and florists not return any deposits to couples, Nelson ensured that each couple received 100% of their deposit back from the museum.

“And it’s not that I had the money to do it, but I really wanted to make sure I could find that money and make sure they were whole. I know what the cost of weddings are, I can’t imagine being that close to it and then all the money you had is for naught,” said Nelson.

According to Nelson, 30% of museums across the United States had to either close or use their reserves to survive the pandemic, but luckily the museum was able to receive a “large influx” of money. “Everybody really wanted to make sure we were OK,” he said.

As restrictions have eased, wedding bookings have increased, with events scheduled “every day,” said Nelson.

“If everything holds, June 15 is indeed the day that we go back to a real world. I think weddings are going to get larger. I think they’re going to be more celebratory,” Nelson said of the date the governor has slated to lift most COVID-19 restrictions.

While the museum already offered a micro-wedding package prior to the pandemic, it just wasn’t advertised until the pandemic created an increased need for lower-occupancy weddings.



The Grand. Courtesy photo.



The Long Beach Museum of Art. Courtesy photo.

Additionally, prices have increased slightly, to compensate for the losses of the past year.

Rancho Los Cerritos

Rancho Los Cerritos, “a hidden gem in Long Beach,” according to special events coordinator Mallory Rydell, is unique in that it was able to remain open to the public for the majority of the pandemic as a public garden and museum.

Although its weddings were drastically reduced over the past year, with a shift toward small, intimate, and mostly livestreamed events.

To accommodate for the changing and social-distanced needs of couples, Rancho Los Cerritos developed an elopement and micro-wedding package, complete with a livestream add-on.

As an already outdoor-only venue, not much had to be modified, said Rydell. Changes including a shift in

food service, and of course an increase of COVID-19 safety precautions.

On an average year, the gardens host around a dozen weddings per year, but in 2021, that number has doubled, said Rydell.

While guest counts have downsized drastically over the past year, Rydell said most couples have kept their budgets the same.

“That allows them to have more amenities or customization for their guests, more elaborate party favors, more elaborate meals, even providing customized masks or PPE for their guests. So it gives them a little bit more leeway to have kind of more elaborate customized experiences,” she said.

While the micro-wedding has become the go-to style amid the pandemic, Rydell said she foresees a return to large events.

“I think people are ready to party,” she said.



Rancho Los Cerritos. Courtesy photo.

The Wedding Center

The Wedding Center is not a venue, but instead offers affordable and efficient weddings to couples throughout Southern California, providing both the marriage license and the ceremony on the same day, without a reception or other festivities.

Many of the couples served by the center have urgent needs to get married, such as for immigration or health insurance reasons, said Peter Otto, manager and officiant at the center.

Through the pandemic, the center instituted “drive-up” weddings, which will continue to be offered even as restrictions ease. Typically, weddings could occur at the site, or at various other locations such as the beach or at the couples’ home. The center has served over 10,000 couples in its 14 years, said Otto.

According to Otto, the Long Beach location had to temporarily close amid

the pandemic, and it now solely operates out of its South Bay location, but he hopes for a return to Long Beach soon.

Since the pandemic, the office has only been managed by two people including Otto, which he said was difficult particularly when the county clerk’s office was closed, and people instead called the center for marriage licenses.

“That was hard taking all those calls during the time, but overall we found that people during the pandemic were very nice, very understanding, very grateful for the service we’re providing. And we had, I would say, a pleasant time serving people during the pandemic,” said Otto.

Prices have remained consistent through the pandemic, except special discounts that were previously available will no longer be available. ■

Shutdown by the pandemic, a local wedding venue began serving meals to formerly homeless residents

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, celebrations and gatherings came to a screeching halt. For event venues like The Grand, this meant bookings were canceled or postponed, sending them looking for alternative revenue sources to keep the lights on.

A majority of the venue’s revenue comes from weddings, most of which were canceled or postponed.

“Everyone was going after anything they could do,” said Daniel D’Sa, director of The Grand. “Everyone was in survival mode.”

But D’Sa said he wasn’t just looking for a way to substitute revenues; he also hoped to help fellow Long Beach residents. So he began reach-

ing out to the city, calling over a dozen times, asking whether there was anything he and his team could do to provide support.

“I just kept saying: This is Dan at the Grand, we want to get involved,” he remembers. “We weren’t looking at things as an opportunity to make money, we were looking at it as an opportunity to get involved.”

Fast forward to today, The Grand has been providing meals at the city’s Roomkey and Homekey sites, hotels turned into temporary housing for formerly homeless residents, for over a year. For D’Sa, the experience has been emotional, and he isn’t planning to quit anytime soon.

“I would do this and only this for the rest of my life and be 100% content,” he said. “I love doing weddings, I love doing large celebra-

tions, I love doing fundraisers—but emotionally, this has been the most impactful thing I’ve ever done.”

The service, which delivers three meals to each resident at the sites per day, was crucial to keeping people safe during the pandemic, said Homeless Services Officer Paul Duncan. At \$5 to \$6 per meal, The Grand provided services at an affordable rate.

“Providing food to people at the site, so that they have something to eat, was actually really vital for people to practice safer at home and self isolate,” he said. “If you want them to stay there, you gotta feed them.”

The food, which D’Sa said is modeled after the menu The Grand normally offers at its events, also helps contribute to residents’ overall well-being, Duncan noted.

“Just making sure that people get

quality food at the site does make a significant difference,” he said. “It still makes an impact in our ability to engage people.”

Michele Sommers, one of the residents of the city’s supportive housing site at the former Best Western on Long Beach Boulevard, said she was shocked when she learned that food would be delivered to the site.

“Not only are they giving us food, they’re giving us good food,” she said. Sommers still remembers her first breakfast at her new temporary home: a cheese, egg and ham croissant.

Being served quality food, she said, has helped her sense of self-worth. “It makes me feel better about myself—like: OK, I’m deserving of this,” Sommers said. “If you’re treated with class, you must have it.” ■

Union leaders are fighting terminal automation at Long Beach’s Pier T

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

A labor union is clashing with a Port of Long Beach terminal operator after plans to automate operations were announced last month.

Total Terminals International, operator of the 385-acre Pier T, met with leaders of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union on May 17 to announce its intentions to automate the Long Beach operation. Represented were ILWU Local 13, 63 and 94.

In a joint statement following the meeting, the union lambasted the plan, namely for the loss of union jobs.

“While foreign-owned corporations like TTI continue to push to fully automate their terminal operations at our publicly owned U.S. ports, they need to remember that the ports exist for the benefit of the U.S. and local economies, not the destruction of jobs and maximum extraction of foreign profit,” Local 13 President Ramon Ponce de Leon said in the statement.

TTI did not respond to requests for comment.

The Port of Long Beach, like most U.S. ports, is publicly owned. Terminals at the port, meanwhile, are leased—often for upward of 60 years at a time—to terminal operators from around the world.

Switzerland-based Mediterranean Shipping Company owns 80% of TTI through its subsidiary Terminal Investment Limited. South Korea-based Hyundai Merchant Marine owns the remaining 20%.

“The ILWU stands for America’s workers, businesses, farmers, communities and schools that rely on the ports not only for the movement of cargo but also for the tax revenue that’s generated by the men and women who work on the docks,” Local 63 President Mike Podue said in the statement. “Robots don’t pay taxes, people do.”

Marine terminal operation involves replacing manually operated stacking cranes, yard tractors and other cargo-handling equipment with driverless machines. Pier T would become the fourth automated terminal at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, including the Long Beach Container Terminal, one of the most advanced facilities in the world.

Defenders of terminal automation, including the Pacific Maritime Association, claim the upgrades are necessary for ports to remain efficient and competitive. Combined, the San Pedro Bay ports are the busiest complex in the U.S., with no other trade gateway moving even half the total volume, according to global trade data company Panjiva.

Last year, the Southern California ports moved a combined 17.4 million 20-foot equivalent units, the standard unit of measure for shipping containers. The Port of New York and New Jersey, meanwhile, handled less than 7.6 million TEUs.

Cargo volumes through LA and Long Beach have been setting record numbers for 10 consecutive months. According to Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero, cargo volumes through the San Pedro Bay ports are expected to in-



Automated cargo moving vehicles at the Long Beach Container Terminal. Photo courtesy of the Port of Long Beach.

crease to more than 40 million TEUs over the next decade.

“For some terminal operators automation is seen as vital to remaining competitive and meeting extremely stringent environmental regulations, especially at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach,” PMA said in a statement, adding that operators have the right to automate terminals per its current contract with the union.

A 2019 study commissioned by ILWU Canada claimed automation of the TraPac terminal in Los Angeles resulted in a labor reduction of 40-50%, while the automation of the Long Beach Container Terminal resulted in a reduction of 70-75%.

In its May statement, the union also claims fully automated terminals leave the economy, of which ports are a major driver, vulnerable to cyber terrorism, citing recent attacks by hackers on the Colonial Pipeline, the largest pipeline system in the U.S., and Ireland’s health system.

Terminal operators often use automation upgrades to invest in zero-emissions equipment, which is critical for the San Pedro Bay ports to meet their ambitious environmental goals. Such equipment is already featured in LA and Long Beach.

Local 94 President Danny Miranda said the union recognizes the need for reduced emissions and improved efficiency but not for “offshore corporate profit or at the expense of American workers.

“As the Long Beach Harbor Commission, the mayor of Long Beach, and the executive director of the Port of Long Beach consider TTI’s request,” Miranda said, “we ask that [they] carefully weigh the impacts that continued automation would have on American jobs and our local communities.” ■

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Marine life flourishing in San Pedro Bay ports' harbors

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Plants and animals are thriving in the San Pedro Bay harbors, despite sharing space with the largest port complex in the nation.

A 2018 biological survey released in April identified more than 1,000 species living in the harbors around the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, the highest recorded biodiversity in over two decades.

Among the animals observed in the area were 104 species of fish, 87 species of bird and five species of marine mammals. Nine fish species typically associated with areas such as reefs were observed in the harbors by biologists for the first time.

The presence of Garibaldi, sheepshead, horn sharks, moray eels and others shows shallow structured habitats such as the breakwater are providing areas for fish to grow, feed and prosper, according to the report.

"Every survey we've been seeing progress," said Matt Arms, assistant director of environmental planning for the Port of Long Beach. "Seeing the increasing abundance of pollution-sensitive species is an indicator of a healthy harbor."

Kelp coverage in the summer of 2018

more than doubled from any previous study and eelgrass has been found at deeper depths than before, both of which are essential for marine life to flourish, Arms said.

Of the 10 most abundant bird species observed during the 2013 and 2018 surveys, three—the brown pelican, the elegant tern and the double-crested cormorant—are listed or proposed for listing as threatened or endangered. According to the report, the presence of these birds indicates the port complex provides important foraging and roosting opportunities.

Since 2006 and the introduction of the port's Clean Air Action Plan, a heavy emphasis has been placed on air quality in relation to port operations. But in the 1990s, the port launched its Healthy Harbor program with a focus on water quality, Arms said.

"It may not be forefront in the news now ... but that doesn't make it less important," Arms said. "The work is continuing, we still have staff and resources devoted to this."

In 2009, both ports adopted the Water Resources Action Plan, which outlined additional programs to improve water and sediment quality within the harbors. The ports' water programs include the development of stormwater treatment



A researcher makes note of the various species in a bin during the 2018 biodiversity survey of the Port of Long Beach harbor. Photo courtesy of the port.

and pretreatment technologies that keep pollution and debris from entering the harbors.

Additionally, the ports have implemented best practices for all operators that ensure good housekeeping protocols that keep on-dock debris from ending up in the water, Arms said.

"We're the downstream sink of Los Angeles, one of the most urbanized, industrialized watersheds," Arms said. "It's been a source of a lot of pollution that settles and stays."

Legislation such as the Clean Water Act and permit programs like the EPA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System have had a tremendous impact on the amount of pollution entering the harbors via the LA River, Arms said. The reduction of pollution does not only benefit the harbors but surface water and bodies of water throughout the country, he added.

Container ships utilizing the ports are highly regulated, Arms said. To ensure shippers adhere to regulations related to vessel discharge, the ports developed a guidance document to explain the do's

and don'ts. Additionally, the port connects ships to shore power, which allows them to turn off their engines at berth and reduce particulate matter pollution of the water.

"Those particulates are coming down on the surface of the water, getting into the water column, then into the sediment and into the ecosystem at large," Arms said. "The more we can reduce those emissions, the more we can reduce what gets into the ocean."

The ports conduct biological surveys every five years but, like the never-ending job of painting of the Golden Gate bridge, Arms said the process for the next is already underway. Defining the scope of the survey, preparing and signing contracts—all things that must be done ahead of the actual survey are already in motion, Arms said.

"[Improving water quality] is the right thing to do and is part of our commitment to be a steward of the environment," Arms said. "Every year I say it, but this was our most exciting survey yet and I look forward to ... seeing even better results in the next one." ■



Researchers gather information on species of animals and plants that are thriving in the Port of Long Beach harbor. Photo courtesy of the port.

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Ex-Queen Mary operator lied about its payments

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Reporter

The company previously tasked with operating the Queen Mary misrepresented financial information to the city of Long Beach by asking to be reimbursed for critical repair work on the ship before it paid contractors to perform the jobs, City Auditor Laura Doud said last week.

The discovery shows ship operator Urban Commons “intentionally and explicitly misrepresented the truth to the City,” Doud said in a statement summarizing her long-awaited report on the ship and its troubled management.

Since 2019 Doud has been investigating how Urban Commons, a Los Angeles-based real estate and investment firm, spent \$23 million to fix some of the most critical repairs for the aging ship. Her investigation, however, has been hindered by Urban Commons’ “lack of co-operation” during the process, including not providing financial records such as bank statements, canceled checks or wire transfer notices, she said.

Nevertheless, Doud said last week that she has found that Urban Commons improperly submitted invoices for city reimbursement on repairs the operator claimed were already performed by vendors. The invoices were stamped “PAID”

to vendors for various projects, but the payments to individual vendors were not independently confirmed by city staffers, she said.

“Upon further review of these invoices, it was discovered that Urban Commons developed a ‘tracking document’ with the actual dates that Urban Commons paid their vendors,” Doud said. “When the invoices were compared to the tracking document, it was discovered that 87 of 89 invoices that Urban Commons submitted to the City with the ‘PAID’ stamp on it were in fact not paid at the time the invoices were submitted to the City. In fact, it was found that on average Urban Commons invoiced the City 51 days prior to paying the vendor.”

Urban Commons principal Taylor Woods defended his company’s work in a statement last week. He said working to maintain and restore the Queen Mary is complex, with a greater need for funding than what has been available.

“The scope of work evolves as work is being done due to discoveries along the way resulting in amendments to contracts and payments,” he said. “This creates a timing differential for payments due to the evolving scope of work during the construction process.”

Urban Commons began managing the Queen Mary in 2016 when it signed a lease



The Queen Mary has fallen into disrepair and needs roughly \$23 million in urgent repairs, according to a new report. Monday, May 17, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

to operate the city-owned ship. Later that year, the Long Beach City Council voted 8-1 to issue \$23 million in city bonds and Tidelands funds to Urban Commons for 27 critical safety repair projects identified in a 2016 Marine Survey. The survey projected costs of up to \$289 million for urgent repairs to keep the ship viable over the next several years.

But the funds ran out before many of the repairs were completed, and a new report released this month says most of the urgent structural work hasn’t even started as the ship slips into further disrepair. That latest report from a city-hired naval architecture and marine engineering firm called Elliott Bay Design Group, which inspected the ship on April 28, says the city would now need an additional \$23 million in urgent repairs to keep the ship viable over the next two years.

Under its lease agreement with the city, Urban Commons was to use its own funding to complete the remaining critical projects once the \$23 million in city funds was spent, but Long Beach is now locked in a legal battle with Urban Commons in a Delaware bankruptcy court over the firm’s string of failed lease obligations.

Among the issues, the city said Urban Commons failed to complete at least \$41 million in repair work on the ship and owes the city more than \$900,000 in rent and fees.

Doud’s investigation into the Queen Mary has focused on four contractors with the highest billings reported by Urban Commons: F. Roberts Construction; Benson Systems; Industrial Coatings and Fireproofing; and Vendo Oceanwide Repair.

Doud’s team of auditors asked for the contractors to provide documents showing how much they were paid by Urban Commons and when. Records from two of the contractors—Benson Systems and Vendo Oceanwide Repair, which received \$3.9 million and \$660,000—matched the details in Urban Commons’ “tracking document,” according to Doud.

The other two contractors, however,

have not yet provided any information to verify they were paid the money Urban Commons asked the city to reimburse. F. Roberts Construction, which received \$11.5 million for work, has said it is in the process of providing the city with more information, while Industrial Coatings and Fireproofing, which received \$2.6 million, has not responded, Doud said.

Doud said the city relied on Urban Commons’ “self-certification” that it had paid those and other vendors and deserved to be reimbursed.

The city of Long Beach in a statement said its process for verifying invoices for Queen Mary work is consistent with capital improvement programs for other major city facilities, like the Convention Center, and that the city has “established a rigorous process for the management and disbursement of funds for work on the Queen Mary.”

“Approval of payments required extensive review by multiple City departments with expertise in construction, accounting, and financial audit; and, required the operator to submit backup documentation detailing the work completed and certifying invoices for payment by the City,” the statement said.

The city said it requested financial documents from Urban Commons providing proof of payment to its vendors, but Urban Commons “did not entirely comply with this request.”

“As part of standard City purchasing procedures, invoices are submitted for payment and are checked against the agreement for compliance,” the city said. “However, in this and other agreements, the City reserves the right to request additional data upon commencement of an audit. That information was requested by management, but has not been provided, and as such the audit has not yet been completed.”

The city said an independent analysis from a city-hired engineer has shown that the work submitted for payment was completed, but an additional audit is being conducted to determine if “all detailed work was appropriately accounted for and

Harbor Commission approves \$622M port budget

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

The Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners unanimously approved a \$622.4 million budget for the Port of Long Beach during its meeting Monday.

Despite 10 straight months of record-setting cargo volumes, the adopted budget for fiscal year 2022 is 4.2% less than the current budget, according to a port announcement. Operating revenue is projected to be 8.7% higher based on anticipated cargo volumes.

“The scope and reach of the COVID-19 pandemic struck a serious blow to the global economy, but the port remains fiscally strong and secure,” Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement. “We plan to assist with the region’s recovery by continuing to invest in our community, our workforce and infrastructure upgrades that will keep us competitive well into the future.”

The budget includes the addition of 11 full-time positions and \$329.1 million for ongoing capital

improvement projects, including the modernization of terminals, rail, bridges, roads and other infrastructure critical to the continued growth of the port.

Over the next 10 years, the port plans to invest nearly \$1.6 billion in capital improvement projects meant to improve efficiency and sustainability, according to the announcement.

The port budget also features the single largest monetary transfer—\$20.6 million—from the harbor department to the city’s Tidelands Operating Fund. The transfer amount is required to be 5% of the harbor department’s fiscal year gross operating revenue per Measure D, which voters approved in 2010.

Tidelands pays for development projects and asset maintenance along the city’s coastline, including the Long Beach Convention Center, the recently approved Belmont Beach Aquatic Center, the Belmont Pier and more.

The Long Beach City Council will consider approval of the port’s budget later this year. ■

to vendors for ship repairs, city auditor says

properly completed.”

However, the city in bankruptcy court documents has said that some of the repair work that was done on Urban Commons’ watch was incomplete or not performed correctly and will likely have to be redone.

The city said it is committed to preserving the Queen Mary and has taken several steps to address critical repairs after “decades of lack of investment by former operators.”

“Although the current operator failed to meet its obligations and is now facing bankruptcy the City is working diligently to hold current and future operators accountable for repairs needed to keep the Queen Mary safe,” the city said.

Woods in his statement said Urban Commons has worked “very closely with the City of Long Beach to make joint decisions on a regular basis to ensure alignment of priorities and decisions.”

He said all of the city bonds earmarked for urgent repairs were properly spent.

“The initial \$23M advance was directly utilized for the purposes for which they were intended and those monies were paid to the third party vendors who provided those services,” Woods said. “Urban Commons has spent a significant amount of money out of pocket, above and beyond



An American flag and maritime flags are weathered on a mast on the Queen Mary in Long Beach Monday, May 17, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

the \$23M from the initial advance from the City, to supplement the work being done and to improve the condition of the Queen. We will continue to work with the City of Long Beach to satisfy the City and the community about our stewardship related to this majestic vessel.”

The city has said at this time “no vendor has come forth to say that payment is outstanding, or they did not receive compensation for their work on the ship.”

Long Beach owns the Queen Mary but for decades has leased the ship to a string of operators that have met financial struggles.

Current Queen Mary operator Ea-

gle Hospitality Trust filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in January. The hotel chain last week received more than \$480 million in bids for 14 of its properties, but the Queen Mary lease did not receive any qualified bidders and the bidding has since been postponed, according to documents.

Urban Commons created Eagle Hospitality Trust in 2019 to list on the Singapore Stock Exchange, but Eagle Hospitality suffered its own financial problems and later terminated the master lease agreements for Urban Commons’ hotels, including the Queen Mary—an action that essentially removed Urban Commons

as the Queen Mary’s operator.

The city hopes to know more on how it will proceed with the ship’s lease after a bankruptcy hearing, officials said.

Doud, meanwhile, said her investigation is ongoing.

“This misrepresentation of the truth and unwillingness of Urban Commons to provide the basic and required financial records is very troubling, and we will continue to pursue this investigation,” she said.

The comments from the city auditor come as the Post on May 24 reported that Urban Commons principals Woods and Howard Wu are accused in court documents of defrauding the federal government by applying for two COVID-19 relief loans last year under the Queen Mary’s name and then absconding with more than \$2.4 million in aid money meant to help employees during the pandemic.

Woods and Wu in a statement to the Post have maintained that the loan issue was an error and that they are working to make sure it is resolved.

The documents in bankruptcy court allege that the pair drained a bank account “within mere hours” of receiving \$2.4 million in loans and funneled the money into various accounts for personal gain. The case is ongoing. ■

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New bridge name voting is over. We have a ‘winner’

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

Bridge-building is easy; bridge-naming is hard. And it’s something that needs to be grappled with every time someone constructs a way to cross over a body of water or a chasm.

From May 7 through May 12, Assemblyman Patrick O’Donnell, D-Long Beach and state Sen. Lena Gonzalez, D-Long Beach gave the public the opportunity to name the new old Gerald Thomas Bridge, and now they have announced we have a winner!

The problem with this sort of democracy steeped in the freedom guaranteed to all Americans, was the fact that we were shackled with just three choices, none of which could be described as a winner.

Your choices were: International Gateway Bridge, Long Beach International Gateway Bridge and Long Beach Trans-Pacific Bridge.

Those candidates came from a doz-

en unimaginative people of the sort that you sometimes get trapped into having an awkward chat with at a mixer that you totally didn’t want to go to, all of whom were chosen by O’Donnell, Gonzalez and Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia, according to O’Donnell.

So, your winner, the name that you shall call the bridge henceforth: Long Beach International Gateway Bridge.

The new name was greeted by O’Donnell and Gonzalez with almost the exact opposite amount of enthusiasm you’re likely feeling right now.

“The community has spoken and they made a great choice,” said O’Donnell in a statement. “The name ‘Long Beach International Gateway Bridge’ appropriately signifies Long Beach as the gateway to the American economy. Thank you to the community for helping us in this very important endeavor.”

“I am very thankful for all the input we received from our community to choose a name for the new Long Beach bridge,”

gushed Gonzalez in the very same statement. “This iconic state landmark will connect us to the rest of the world for decades to come.”

The ballot was devoid of inspiring ideas.

The Golden Gate Bridge is a fine example of a great bridge name and the credit doesn’t go to whoever came up with the name of the bridge, but rather to John C. Fremont, who gave the name of Golden Gate to the strait over which the bridge spans, so it was really a no-brainer to give the bridge its name.

There have been plenty of other fine bridge names: The Bridge of Sighs, in Venice, Italy; France’s Pont du Gard; the Wind and Rain Bridge in China; Hell Gate in New York City.

Sometimes you don’t need to get fancy. There’s nothing wrong with the names of London Bridge or Brooklyn Bridge.

Ever since the idea of replacing Long Beach’s Gerald Desmond Bridge, the city and port have been fretting over what to

call its replacement, and for the duration of its construction and even after its opening, it’s been informally called either the New Gerald Desmond Bridge or the Bridge to Everywhere.

If the lawmakers had used Zencity, the artificial intelligence software platform that the city has been using to analyze residents’ social media use to help officials gauge public opinion on policies, I think they would have spent a little more time and a lot more thought into coming up with a name.

On Facebook, the comments were adamantly against all three bridge name candidates:

“Until they add ‘none of the above’ I’m not voting.”

“Absolutely none of these.”

“Your choices are dumb and boring.”

My own suggestions got a few likes. Bridge of Lights got three nods and Angels Gate got a couple. Either one, with just those few votes, beat the names on the ballot by a landslide.

Most likely, people are going to continue to call it the New Gerald Desmond Bridge, or just go with “the bridge.”

Assemblyman O’Donnell and Sen. Gonzalez have now introduced Assembly Concurrent Resolution 88 to designate the state highway Route 710 where the bridge is located as the Long Beach International Gateway Bridge. If adopted by the State Legislature, private funds must be identified for the construction of a sign.

One thing the “community” that came up with the ballot stayed away from was naming the bridge after someone, like Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, which would inevitably lead to a name change a few years hence.

“The feeling was we should focus on the physical iconicness of the structure,” said O’Donnell.

There are a few bits of the new bridge that will, in fact, be named after people. The still-unfinished bike lane will be named for the late cycling advocate Mark Bixby, and O’Donnell says the observation deck off the path at the bridge’s peak, will be named after the old bridge’s namesake, Gerald Desmond. ■



The new Gerald Desmond Bridge replacement over the Port of Long Beach in Long Beach Thursday, October 1, 2020. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Port of Long Beach awards \$409K in sponsorships

■ **STAFF REPORT**

The Port of Long Beach in May awarded \$409,430 in sponsorships to local groups that advance the arts, environment, social justice and historic preservation.

The sponsorships will go to 141 groups and events, including Ability First, Musica Angelica and Long Beach Gives.

Some of the biggest awards went to:

- The Aquarium of the Pacific’s Blue Whale Gala and Fall Aquatic Academy (\$12,500)

- The Pow! Wow! Long Beach art event by Creative Class Collective (\$20,000)
- The Long Beach Juneteenth Celebration by Helping in Service (\$10,000)
- Long Beach Opera’s 2021 Songbook UnGala (\$10,000)
- Long Beach Symphony’s Pop-Up Concert Series (\$10,000)
- Musica Angelica’s Grand Re-opening Concert (\$10,000)
- Musical Theatre West New Works Festival 2021 (\$10,000)
- Rancho Los Cerritos Foundation’s “Raíces de Long Beach: Roots of

the Rancho” (\$10,000)

The Harbor Commission, which oversees the port, approved \$800,000 this year for community sponsorships, and opens applications twice a year, in March and September.

Since 2007, the local port has doled out more than \$10 million to community groups through its sponsorship program.

“It’s rewarding to see nonprofit organizations find creative ways to serve the community, especially during this historic health crisis,” Mario Cordero, executive director

of the Port of Long Beach, said in a written statement. “We are proud to be able to support them during this time as we continue to work towards a year of recovery.”

The awardees are carrying out important work to help Long Beach flourish, Harbor Commission President Frank Colonna said in a statement.

“We are pleased that the Port is able to support their missions, while also sharing information that allows the public to better understand the Port of Long Beach and its operations,” he said. ■

Natural gas drivers to be exempt from Clean Truck Program fee at Port of Long Beach

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Drivers of low-emissions natural gas-powered trucks will be exempt from a per-container fee thanks to a 4-1 vote by the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners Monday.

The Clean Truck Fund Rate, a \$10 fee per 20-foot equivalent unit—a standard unit of measure for shipping containers, many of which are 40 feet long—is part of the San Pedro Bay ports' efforts to reach their goals of zero emissions. The fee has not yet been implemented because a third-party vendor was only recently selected to develop the collection method.

"The Port of Long Beach is the Green Port, a trailblazer in the sustainable goods movement," Commission President Frank Colonna said in a statement. "We remain confident that we can encourage the use of cleaner natural gas trucks now, and also nurture the technology that will allow us to meet our goal of a zero-emissions drayage truck fleet by 2035."

The fee is expected to generate \$80 million per year, the announcement states.



Trucks depart from Pier D at the Port of Long Beach, Wednesday, April 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Natural gas trucks emit lower levels of nitrogen oxides, which contribute to smog. The exemption will apply to trucks picking up or dropping off loaded containers at the ports that use natural gas engines meeting a .02 grams of nitrogen oxides per brake horsepower-hour standard, according to the announcement.

The vehicles must be purchased and registered with the port by Dec. 31, 2022.

Zero-emissions trucks, such as electric or hydrogen fuel-cell that are not widely available commercially, had already been exempt from the future rate. The decision to exempt certain natural gas vehicles is meant to be an interim step while zero-emissions technology catches up, according to the announcement.

When the fee was first approved in March of last year, critics claimed it was

too low to curb emissions. Months later, the fee was met with criticism from drivers of natural gas trucks, who said they should be exempt.

"These trucks will emit 90% less nitrogen oxides than equivalent vehicles today," Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement. "The question we were asking ourselves was do we reduce emissions now or do we wait for tomorrow? For our community, and our commitment to the Clean Air Action Plan, the answer is now."

The CAAP, a combined environmental effort by the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, was first adopted in 2006 and updated in 2017. The plan outlines ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 80% by 2050.

Phasing out older trucks is key to the plan, with the Clean Truck Program launching in 2008. Since then, diesel emissions from trucks have been reduced by as much as 97% compared to 2005 levels, based on port data. However, trucks remain the ports' largest source of greenhouse gas emissions and the second highest source of nitrogen oxides. ■

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Cargo surge

(Continued from Page 1)

sense of normalcy in the third or fourth quarter of this year,” said Mario Cordero, executive director of the Port of Long Beach. Peak season for the ports usually kicks off in July when retailers begin preparations for back-to-school shopping and fall fashion followed by stocking up for the holiday season, the directors noted.

There are multiple factors that have contributed to the months-long surge in cargo movement through the nation’s busiest port complex, Cordero said. When Chinese factories shuttered, orders for various goods did not stop rolling in. So, when manufacturing resumed, the subsequent backlog of orders caused ships to pile up off the California coast waiting to be unloaded.

Continued demand for medical equipment such as masks and gloves also has been contributing to the surge, Cordero said. Additionally, people being confined to their homes for months on end led to the increased purchase of electronics, indoor and outdoor furniture, and other goods spurred by stimulus money from the federal government to make isolation more bearable, he added.

Both ports remained fully operational throughout the pandemic, Seroka said, noting the fact that goods coming into the San Pedro Bay ports travel to each of the nation’s 435 congressional districts.

“We had to keep commerce in America going,” Seroka said.

In January, one of the worst months of the pandemic, Seroka said the ports were concerned about a potential labor shortage. At one point, 5-6% of the workforce was sick or in isolation, he said. But with the exception of minor spot shortages of specific skilled laborers, congestion at the terminals allowed the ports to avoid any labor issues, Seroka said.

Even before the pandemic, uncertainty clouded the ports with the years-long trade war between China and the U.S. Tariffs first enacted by the Trump administration imposed on hundreds of billions of dollars worth Chinese goods remain in place today, the port directors said. In turn, tariffs on U.S. goods entering China also remain active.

“History should teach you that tariffs



Containers await transport at the Port of Long Beach, Wednesday, April 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

do not work,” Cordero said. “They didn’t improve the trade imbalance. In fact, they made it worse.”

The Port of LA ended 2019 down 16% in the fourth quarter due to what Seroka called “ill-advised” trade policies. Cargo volumes were essentially flat in 2019 overall compared to 2018, he added.

Cordero and Seroka both said the trade imbalance that favors China—meaning the Asian country exports more to the U.S. than it receives—is certainly an issue that should be addressed but added that a trade war with tariffs only hurts American consumers and producers wanting to export their goods.

Normally, 60-70% of imports into the San Pedro Bay ports complex are from China, the port directors noted. But over the last two years, imports from China have decreased about 10%, Cordero said. Meanwhile, imports from other Asian countries have increased, he added, noting a 27% rise in goods from Vietnam.

The previous administration also had imposed tariffs on European goods, including steel and aluminum, but in a joint statement last month the European Union and United States agreed to suspend billions of dollars of tariffs related to a World Trade Organization (WTO)

dispute for four months.

“The EU and the U.S. are committed to reach a comprehensive and durable negotiated solution,” the statement reads. “These steps signal the determination of both sides to embark on a fresh start in the relationship.”

Cordero said the positive traction between the EU and the U.S. is a sign that the Biden administration is reassessing Trump-era trade policies. While Cordero said he does not expect drastic action related to China immediately, he is hopeful similar talks are looming.

Seroka said he would like to see all tariffs eliminated and for the administration to engage with countries on rules-based trade agreements that hold all parties responsible for all areas of trade to ensure a level playing field.

Despite the radical disruption and uncertainty brought on by the trade war and pandemic, the San Pedro Bay ports moved nearly 17.4 million TEUs in 2020 with a forecast to handle more than 18 million this year. By 2030, cargo moving through the ports is projected to be as high as 43 million TEUs, Cordero said.

Already, cargo volumes have strained the ports. In February, around 40 vessels were anchored off the California coast waiting for their turn to be offloaded. As of mid-May, that number was down to about 18, Cordero added.

The ports also faced equipment shortages, from truck chassis to rail cars. Even containers are in short supply due to empties being shipped back in greater volumes due to the high demand of imports. It is more cost effective for Chinese shippers to quickly get empties back rather than wait for exports to be loaded, Cordero said.

Many ports around the world operate, or are capable of operating, 24 hours per day, which can prevent or alleviate congestion. However, no port in the U.S. offers 24-hour operations, Cordero said. Cordero added that he wants to see the

San Pedro Bay ports become the first in the country to ramp up overnight operations.

“It’s not something that’s going to happen tomorrow but I would hope the next time there is a crisis ... the next time there is a surge like we’ve been experiencing, we will have the ability to pivot to a 24-7 model,” Cordero said, adding that projected cargo volume increases would likely make the model necessary even without a crisis.

Like most initiatives at the port, Cordero said enacting 24-hour operations would be a long process, likely being enacted in phases over the course of up to a decade.

Combined, the ports already support around 166,000 local jobs, a number that would be greatly expanded with operations, Cordero said. While there are additional costs associated with a 24-hour model, Cordero said the alternative would be the continued loss of market share to other ports around the country.

“For us to remain competitive, we need to change the way we operate,” Cordero said.

The ports have billions of dollars worth of capital improvement projects underway or planned with the goal of improving efficiency and preparing for larger vessels carrying more containers, the directors said. Many projects are centered around expanding rail infrastructure as well as deepening wharf depths.

As for the rest of 2021, with businesses continuing to reopen at greater capacities in the coming months, Cordero said he expects Americans to begin shifting their spending from goods to services, vacations and other more experiential activities after being cooped up for over a year.

“That’s going to cut into the retail spending that we’ve seen at a very high level in the past year,” Cordero said, “but I think we’re going to have a very good year.” ■



Ships sit off the Long Beach coast waiting to be unloaded at the port. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

189-unit residential project underway on the Promenade

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Construction is underway on a seven-story mid-rise residential building on The Promenade in Downtown—only a few feet from popular restaurants between Broadway and Third Street.

The Inkwell, a 189-unit market-rate residential development at 201 The Promenade North, has been years in the making. First approved by the Long Beach Planning Commission in October 2018, the project includes 10,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space that will add to the Promenade's activated outdoor space.

The project was entitled by Raintree-Evergreen LLC, which then sold it to Newport Beach-based Alliance Residential Company 18 months ago. Jonas Bronk, who oversees development and acquisition for Alliance, said the company likes the original branding—Inkwell—but has considered a change in the name of the building, such as Broadstone.

The company did not give a timeline for when they expect the building to be complete. A typical timeline for a project this size is 18 to 24 months.

Alliance has not altered the original project, which includes a fitness room, club room, pool decks and a pool. The building includes three levels of subterranean parking, with 268 car stalls and 40 bike stalls.



Construction crews have begun work on the Broadstone, a multifamily development at 201 The Promenade North, Friday, May 28, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

But the construction site's proximity to restaurants on the Promenade could hurt business after what has already been a devastating year, one restaurateur said.

"It's definitely going to infringe on our business," said Christy Caldwell, owner of The Ordinarie. "Coming out of the pandemic, as soon as we start getting some relief from that ... now we've got this."

Caldwell said the noise and dust generated from the construction site will likely keep

patrons from eating lunch along his stretch of the Promenade, which also is home to Congregation Ale House, Beachwood BBQ and Michael's Downtown.

Concerns regarding noise are not uncommon during major construction projects, city spokesman Richard de la Torre said. The city, along with the developer, is working with business owners and residents to proactively address concerns, de la Torre said in an email.

"We want this project to be a positive addition to Downtown now and in the future," de la Torre said.

Construction permits issued by the city allow crews to work Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. All permits allow for crews to work six days per week, which is a decision made by developers, de la Torre said, adding that a six-day work week has become commonplace.

"I saw them working Saturday and that was the first I knew there was going to be six days of work," Caldwell said. "I had hoped for five."

The Long Beach Health and Human Services Department has jurisdiction over construction noise, according to de la Torre. Should noise exceed certain thresholds, the Health Department would work with Development Services to address the issue, he added.

Caldwell said he would like to see a more substantial barrier between the construction site and the businesses, which would help mitigate noise and dust. But with construction workdays typically ending between 3 and 4 p.m., Caldwell said dinner traffic should not be impacted.

"When it's done it will be great for the Promenade. It's a beautiful looking building," Caldwell said. "But I imagine about a year and a half of not much business during lunchtime." ■

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City Council approves master plan for former C-17 site and other airport-adjacent parcels

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

The Long Beach City Council took a final step toward adopting a plan that will guide development of 437 acres of coveted land west of Long Beach Airport, saying they wanted the former Boeing C-17 manufacturing site to become a “21st century business district.”

The Globemaster Corridor Specific Plan includes parcels that run along Spring Street from California Avenue to the airport’s main runway west of Redondo Avenue. Other parcels run along Cherry Avenue between Spring and Carson streets.

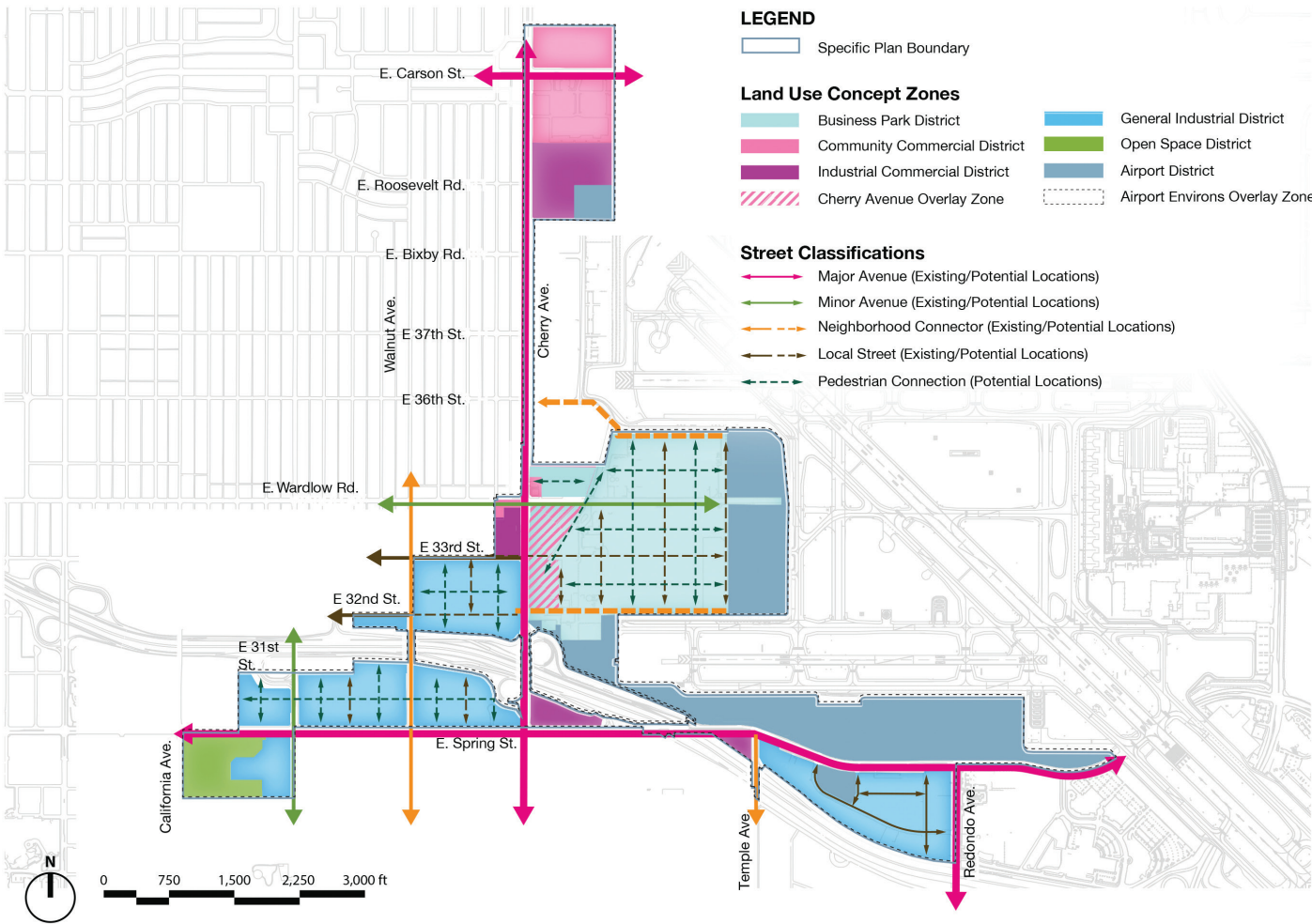
They include a blend of commercial, industrial, business park and airport parcels, which could bring a mix of hotels, retail, restaurants and newer manufacturing businesses to the area. No residential parcels are included in the Globemaster plan.

The plan has been in the works since 2014 when it became clear that Boeing began closing its C-17 Globemaster III production facility after the Department of Defense notified the company it would no longer be ordering military cargo planes.

Boeing sold the former C-17 production site to the Goodman Group in 2019.

Planned improvements to the area could include parkway landscaping and street improvements to both Cherry Avenue and Spring Street, however those changes would likely be tied to individual developments, which would happen over time. Changes would likely happen as new tenants enter into development deals, not all at once.

“This plan establishes a vision, it establishes what we want Cherry to look like in the future, but that’s not tomorrow,” Long Beach Development Services Deputy Director Chris



1-3 Land Use and Mobility Plan

Globemaster Corridor Specific Plan

Image courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

Koontz said. What the stretch of Cherry Avenue could look like is not set in stone, but Koontz said that over the years residents have made it clear that they don’t want “dead warehousing” along the corridor. A special zoning exemption could allow for retail and dining to be developed along the front of the Cherry Avenue corridor much like it is on the eastern side of the airport at the Long Beach Exchange.

There, a shopping center, restaurants and gyms are the front of a much larger commercial development where businesses like Virgin Orbit and Universal Technical Institute have leased office space. That portion of the Globemaster plan is located southeast of the intersection of Wardlow Road and Cherry Avenue.

Some minor changes were made to the plan at the request of Councilwoman Stacy Mungo Flanigan, one of two council members who represent areas near the airport. Mungo Flanigan asked that the plan bar any properties from serving as storage for shipping containers, something that roiled the surrounding communities last fall.

Mungo Flanigan also asked the city to work with neighboring cities (Lakewood and Signal Hill) on potential traffic impacts brought on by future development. The council also agreed that existing businesses that don’t conform to the zoning changes would be given a 10-year window to comply with allowed usages outlined in the plan.

Koontz clarified that window would likely only apply to a few businesses, notably the Enterprise rental car location and a car wash located at the corner of Cherry Avenue and

Wardlow Road. Koontz said the area is likely to have new tenant announcements soon. “For the large parcels we expect projects to be entitled this calendar year and for you to see new, exciting companies employing hundreds and thousands of people during calendar year 2022,” Koontz said.

Other members of the council were supportive of the plan and its potential to bring back jobs to the area. Councilman Al Austin recognized that there may be traffic impacts brought on by the development but said that the area had more traffic in past decades when thousands of workers commuted there to aerospace and aviation jobs that have since left the city.

“It was impactful, but I think impactful in a positive way and I hope we can get back to that soon,” Austin said.

A procedural vote at the next council meeting will make the plan official, but implementation will be incremental as the city works to attract new business to the area and to make improvements to the two main corridors. The city recently put out a request for proposal for one parcel earlier this year and Gulfstream’s departure last year has freed up other land in the Globemaster plan’s footprint. ■

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With two major projects wrapping up, rail takes center stage for future port capital investment



Crews work on the Long Beach Container Terminal at Middle Harbor, one of the most advanced port terminals in the world, which is slated to be completed this year, according to Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero. Photo courtesy of the port.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Capital improvement projects are never-ending at the Port of Long Beach. Projects take years, sometimes decades, from concept to completion, can cost upward of a billion dollars and bring increased operational capacity and efficiency.

The Gerald Desmond Bridge replacement project is the port's most recently completed large-scale investment. The nearly 2-mile long bridge was originally projected to cost \$1 billion but the final price tag was nearly \$1.5 billion.

The bridge has a clearance of 205 feet, 50 feet higher than the old bridge, which will allow larger container ships to pass beneath. As with its predecessor, about 15% of all imports into the U.S. travel across the new bridge.

"Imagine if the bridge had not opened in October," port Executive Director Mario Cordero said, noting the port's surge in cargo movement over the last 10 months would have caused un-

told traffic congestion on the old bridge, which had fewer lanes.

The next major project slated for completion is Middle Harbor, a \$1.5 billion makeover of the Long Beach Container Terminal that began in 2011. The project is on pace to be completed this year and will have the ability to move twice as much cargo while producing half as much air pollution as the two terminals it is replacing.

With the capacity to move 3.5 million 20-foot equivalent cargo units annually, the single terminal by itself would rank as the sixth busiest port in the country, Cordero said. Upon completion, Middle Harbor will be the world's most advanced container terminal, he added.

"Capital improvement projects are crucial to modernizing the Port of Long Beach and making it competitive," Cordero said.

The port's proposed budget for fiscal year 2022 includes \$329 million in capital expenditures, which accounts for 53% of its spending, according to spokesperson Lee Peterson. Over the

next decade, the port plans to invest \$1.6 billion in infrastructure.

The lion's share of the port's capital investment is centered on rail, with a goal of increasing the amount of cargo transported by train and decreasing the number of trucks on the road. A single locomotive can move hundreds of containers, while most trucks carry one, meaning rail has less impact on the environment.

The most expansive rail project at the port is the \$870 million Pier B On-Dock Rail Support Facility. The expanded rail system is in the planning and engineering design phase and construction is scheduled to begin next year.

The Pier B project area encompasses 171 acres south of 12th Street, north of Pier B Street and west of the 710 Freeway. It will allow for the port to configure longer trains, keeping the facility competitive through efficiency as larger vessels begin to call on the port.

The ambitious project is expected to take a decade to be fully complete but will open in phases.

Construction is underway on a \$25

million track access project on Piers G and J. The project will add a second, 9,000-foot-long rail line between the piers and is expected to be completed in March 2022.

A \$40 million project slated to begin later this year on the Terminal Island Wye tracks will reduce switching conflicts by adding a new lead track on Pier T and two new storage tracks on Pier S. The project is expected to be completed in October 2023.

And finally, a fourth track is going to be added at Ocean Boulevard that will add 2,000 feet of track near the new bridge, an area that currently bottlenecks into three tracks. The \$11 million project is set to begin next year with a completion expected in August 2023.

"Although the COVID-19 pandemic tested our resolve, we remain focused on the future by investing in strategic projects that will improve cargo flow, reliability and efficiency," Cordero said. "As an international gateway for trade, the port is well positioned to endure economic challenges and assist in the nation's economic recovery." ■



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