

Long Beach Business Journal

July 13, 2021

an edition of the Long Beach Post

lbbusinessjournal.com

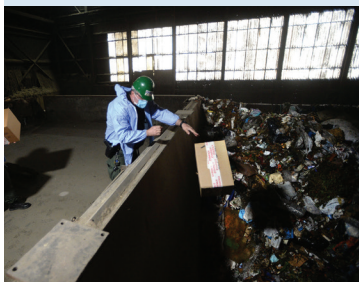
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High oil prices to bring back drilling activity in Long Beach and Signal Hill



One of Long Beach's THUMS oil islands off the city's coast, Thursday, March 11, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Increased demand has sent crude oil prices above \$70 per barrel, well above budgeted projections for oil producers who were wary after a turbulent 2020. The strong and stable prices will allow producers such as the city of Long Beach and Signal Hill Petroleum to begin drilling new wells, according to local industry leaders.

For fiscal year 2020, Long Beach budgeted for an anticipated \$21.4 million in oil revenue based on a per-barrel price of \$55. However, demand plummeted early in the pandemic amid stay-at-home orders, which resulted in a \$7.2 million shortfall, according to Bob Dowell, director of Long Beach Energy Resources.

The city, which partially owns nearly 2,400 active and inactive oil wells, budgeted for \$35 per barrel for the

2021 fiscal year, which began Oct. 1. West Texas Intermediate and Brent crude oil, meanwhile, were selling for \$73.74 and \$74.88 per barrel, respectively, as of July 6, according to Bloomberg.

But higher prices do not always translate to more revenue, Dowell said.

"Many times, when you see increases in oil prices like we're seeing now, expenditures go up," Dowell said, noting how increased activity in well workovers and drilling usually follow increasing revenue.

California Resources Corporation, which operates most of the city's wells, set a conservative investment strategy for 2021, Dowell said. The company halted drilling operations in April but will likely resume in September, he said.

Without new drilling, Long Beach oil production decreases 7-10% annually, Dowell said. In 2020, city

wells produced 8.5 million barrels of oil. Since new drilling did not occur, the city expects to generate around 7.9 million barrels this year.

Most of Long Beach's oil is produced at its THUMS Islands operations just off the coast, which pump from the Wilmington Oil Field. Even with new drilling activity, the oil field's production decreases around 5% each year. Based on the rate of decrease compared to the cost of operations, Dowell said Wilmington will reach the end of its economic life in 2035—possibly sooner or later depending on prices in the coming years.

Once operations are no longer viable, the city is on the hook for more than \$140 million for the proper abandonment of the wells. The state, meanwhile, will have to pay more than \$900 million. The city's unfunded liability for abandonment is

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Medical workers are tired but cautiously optimistic despite delta variant emergence

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Six months out from the peak of the single greatest medical crisis in a generation, medical workers are still tired and burned out, local hospital leaders say. But despite the more aggressive and dangerous delta variant, now the most dominant version of COVID-19 in the state, health care professionals remain cautiously optimistic that the worst is behind us.

"The health-care industry, our hospital, really stepped up to the challenge," said John Bishop, CEO of Long Beach Memorial. "In so many ways, we're a much stronger organization and industry than we were pre-pandemic."

While the pandemic pushed staff to learn, adapt and collaborate, they paid a toll, Bishop said. Memorial recently conducted a survey of its staff, which found that employees are proud of the work they have done over the past 16 months but they are exhausted.

Even before the pandemic, burnout was rampant in the health industry. According to a paper published by the National Academy of Medicine in 2017, more than half of U.S. physicians and 43% of nurses were experiencing burnout. From 2011 to 2014, the prevalence of burnout increased 9% among physicians while other professions remained stable.

Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, one in four health care workers have considered leaving their job, according to a Morning Consult poll published in January, the height of the pandemic. About one in 10 health care workers resigned.

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333 W. Broadway, Suite 312, Long Beach, CA 90802 - DRE #013330395

Long Beach Business Journal

Vol. XXXIV No. 14 • July 13, 2021

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The Long Beach Business Journal is a
publication of Pacific Community Media.
The journal premiered in 1987 as the
Long Beach Airport Business Journal.
The Business Journal is published every
other Tuesday, except between Dec.
25 and mid-January. Distribution is
approximately 22,000. Reproduction
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Ads: Tuesday prior to publication.
Press releases: two weeks prior to
publication. E-mail press releases to
editor@lbbj.com. The editorial calendar is
available at lbbusinessjournal.com.

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For the first-time buyer:
5 homes for \$500,000



Bonus house: The listing agent tragically neglected to point out the fact that this 817-square-foot
house on Arlington Street in west Long Beach comes with a two-car garage. Its asking price is
\$475,000. Listing photo.

By TIM GROBATY
Columnist

Last March, I wrote about the
plight of the first-time homebuyer in
Long Beach, with the general con-
sensus being that things were pretty
depressing for those hoping to get a
foothold on home ownership.
But people are still interested in
reading about first-time home-buy-
ing, so here we go again.
Asked if things had loosened up a
bit for the beleaguered buyer hoping
to enter the real estate market, Phil
Jones, managing partner for Coldwell
Banker Coastal Alliance, replied,
sadly, “No.”
“Inventory is still remarkably
tight,” he said. “Interest rates are
inching up—it’s still under 3%, but
there’s anticipation that we could see
it up to 3.5% by the end of the year.”

And, while single-family houses
are still flying off the shelves, espe-
cially those in the \$650,00-\$800,000
range, and at prices above listing, the
frenzy has abated a bit, says Jones.
“Some agents attribute it to buyer fa-
tigue. They say that buyers want to
take a break and that they don’t want
to expose themselves to more abuse,
for lack of a better term.”
That “abuse” most often comes in
the form of wealthier house-hunters
and, far worse, hedge funds such as
Blackstone and Colony Capital that
swoop in and make cash offers, again
frequently above asking price, leav-
ing the first-time buyers willing to
pay the list price outflanked and frus-
trated. Blackstone, says Jones, owns
17,000 single-family homes in South-
ern California. “And they’re holding
onto them,” says Jones. “They treat
them like stocks.”

Row of speaker portraits: MALALA YOUSAFZAI (May 16, 2022), GEORGE BUSH (Sept. 20, 2021), DOUGLAS BRINKLEY (Feb. 14, 2022), BOB WOODWARD (Jan. 24, 2022), DIANA NYAD (Nov. 8, 2021), JAY LENO (April 24, 2022).

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\$535,000 gets you this home in North Long Beach with a big front yard. Listing photo.

Ever-increasing prices is, perhaps, the most daunting hurdle that new shoppers have to grapple with as the three-bed, two-bath tract homes they grew up in and that their parents or grandparents bought for five-figure amounts are now fetching close to or over \$1 million, and the era of \$500,000 homes is disappearing in the rearview mirror.

And yet, there are a few in the half-million-dollar range, a relatively affordable amount these days. It's likely none of them are the house of your dreams, but you've gotta start somewhere.

180 E. 67th St. \$535,000

This North Long Beach home, at 926 square feet, is one of the larger homes in this price range. It's got an enormous front yard, with the house set way back from the street. In fact, the front yard is sort of the de facto back yard, with fruit trees and because it's fenced in, there's plenty of space for a dog or two to frolic.

Inside, the open kitchen gives the place a spacious feel belying its square-footage stats. The kitchen also has ample storage space with lots of handsome oak cabinetry. The house's two bedrooms and one bath are painted rather adventurously, which won't bother everyone. It's simply a matter

of taste (for the record, I like it, if that helps sway you one way or the other). There are ceramic floors throughout the house. A down payment of \$107,000 and a 30-year mortgage at current interest rates will get you a monthly payment of around \$2,500.

2245 Pine Ave. \$429,000

At this price, it's the least expensive home in this group. The Wrigley area two-bedroom, one-bath home features 732 square feet of living space on a 2,253-square-foot lot. Built in 1926, the home's Spanish style and its drought-resistant (or, rather, gravel-covered) front yard is reminiscent of the Southwestern style that was all the rage a decade or so ago. Throw around some pots of succulents and it'll spruce the place up nicely.

Its kitchen is on the small size, with the sole bathroom somewhat disconcertingly entered through the kitchen. The living room features some nice built-in cabinetry.

As with most homes in Long Beach, this one's touted as being close to the beach, but it's miles from beachfront.

A down of \$85,980 gets you a monthly payment of just under \$2,000.



A home at 2245 Pine Ave. is reminiscent of the Southwestern style. It's for sale at \$429,000. Listing photo.

230 W. 20th St. \$550,000

This remodeled 1927 home has two bedrooms and a bath in 730 square feet, and it manages to gobble up most of its 1,524-square-foot lot, with no back yard to speak of and a narrow little plot of grass in the front that you can "mow" with a Swiss Army Knife, so "minimal yard maintenance" is called into play by the listing agent as a key selling point.

The house, in the Poly High district, has a lovely little eat-in kitchen with a built-in seating booth and storage, along with quartz countertops, clean white cabinets and stainless steel appliances.

Put down \$110,000 and your payments should be a little under \$2,500.

2465 Linden Ave. \$479,900

This two-bedroom, one-bath bungalow in the cheerful-sounding Sunrise neighborhood is indeed cheerful inside, with its clean modern open floor plan that opens the kitchen into a sunny living room. The balance of the rooms are nicely painted with gray wood-laminate flooring throughout.

Slap down \$96,000 and you can get locked into a monthly payment of about \$2,150 for the next 30 years, at which time rents will be stupidly high and your house may be worth millions. Though, possibly not.

1250 E. Sixth St. \$489,000

Here's a house in North Alamitos Beach, which is about as close to the water as I can get you. And it's actually a pretty nice little house. The Craftsman-style bungalow was built in 1918 and remains pretty much original, which means it needs work (as does anyone or anything that's 103 years old).

The one-bedroom, one bath house has beautiful and coveted built-in cabinets and drawers in the living room and bedroom, a cute and, obviously, little kitchen that just makes a tiny dent in the home's 744 square feet. There's a pleasant back yard and, to make things extra cozy, a fireplace in the living room.

Keep your monthly payment at a bit under \$2,200 with a down of about \$98,000. ■



Hate yard work? Get this house with low-maintenance landscaping for \$550,00. Listing photo.



A bright and airy kitchen opens to a living room in this home at 2465 Linden Ave. Listing photo.

Relativity Space to take over massive former Boeing C-17 site

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Rocket manufacturer and launch service provider Relativity Space will take over the massive property once used by Boeing to build C-17 cargo planes, officials announced early this morning.

The company, which already has a presence in Long Beach, is significantly expanding its operation in signing a 16.5-year lease for the sprawling 93-acre site west of Long Beach Airport. The property includes a 1.1 million-square-foot hangar that is big enough to hold the LA Memorial Coliseum.

The value of the lease with Australian-based developer The Goodman Group, which owns the property, was not disclosed.

“We’ve always had ambitions and conviction that what we are doing is important to humanity,” Relativity co-founder and CEO Tim Ellis said in an interview. “It’s humbling to walk through this facility, which will be the second-largest factory in the private space sector.”

Construction on the company’s new headquarters is expected to begin in the coming weeks, with move-in slated for January 2022. The existing hangar, in which aircraft such as the B-18 bombers of World War II and the C-17 Globemaster III were assembled for decades, will be completely reimaged and reinvented, the company said.

Goodman acquired the C-17 property from Boeing in 2019, about four years after the plant was shuttered, but could not move forward with any improvements or lease agreements until the city adopted the Globemaster Corridor Specific Plan, which informs land-use along Cherry Avenue and Spring Street by the airport.

The Long Beach City Council unanimously approved the Globemaster plan on May 18, with a vision for a blended commercial-industrial business park that could include a mix of manufacturing businesses such as Relativity, hotels, retail and restaurants.

“Long Beach has historically always



A rendering of the new Relativity Space headquarters at the former Boeing C-17 site. Rendering courtesy of Relativity Space.

been one of the aerospace centers, not just the Los Angeles area but in the nation,” Ellis said, adding that the “redevelopment and reinvigoration” of the Globemaster Corridor with Relativity will continue that tradition.

Growing space sector

Relativity is one of the newest additions to Long Beach’s growing space sector. The company currently occupies a 120,000-square-foot office and manufacturing facility in the Pacific Edge industrial park at East Burnett Street and Redondo Avenue.

Other rocket manufacturing and launch service providers in Long Beach include Virgin Orbit, Rocket Lab and SpinLaunch. The space and launch sector accounts for more than 6,500 jobs, according to local economists.

“Relativity is a growing leader in our world’s space economy, and we’re proud they chose Long Beach as home,” Mayor Robert Garcia said in an email. “This new HQ will bring thousands of great, good-paying jobs to Long Beach

and strengthen economic growth for the entire region.”

The state recently awarded Relativity the largest tax credit out of 16 companies in the latest round of California Competes, an income tax credit given to select businesses looking to relocate to the state or grow their already existing California operations. The state awarded Relativity a \$30 million tax credit on the conditions that it increase its staff to nearly 1,100 and invest nearly \$320 million by the end of the 2025 tax year.

Since moving to Long Beach in the summer of 2020, the company has more than quadrupled its workforce to more than 450, according to spokesperson Nicole Ryan. But further growth is coming, she said, adding that the company expects to surpass 600 staff by the end of the year, with ample room to continue expanding. The new facility will have capacity for more than 2,000 employees, she said.

“Los Angeles has the highest density for private space talent in the world—not just those who already know how to build and fly rockets but also colleges that have a great pipeline of talent,” Ellis said, noting Long Beach’s ideal location to pull from both the LA and Orange County labor markets.

With a small number of employees working at the NASA Stennis Space Center, Vandenberg Air Force Base, in Washington, D.C., and in Seattle, Ellis said the proximity to Long Beach Airport also is beneficial for business travel.

The expansion into the former C-17 facility will allow Relativity to ramp up production of its two rockets—the Terran 1 and the recently announced Terran R, which are the first entirely 3D-printed rockets.

Both rockets will be used to deliver satellites to orbit that could be used for communications, global positioning

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Stargate is a 3D printing system developed by Relativity Space used to print 95% of its rockets. The system uses lasers to melt a metal also developed by Relativity into each component. Photo courtesy of Relativity Space.

systems (GPS), weather tracking, environmental monitoring and more. In the future, the Terran R also will offer point-to-point space freighter service with missions between Earth, the moon and Mars, the company said.

Many aerospace companies have utilized 3D-printing technology for years to create rocket components but Relativity took it a step further, creating a proprietary machine, dubbed Stargate, and its own metal alloy.

The company has five of its specialized printers operating at its current headquarters, which will continue the production of the Terran 1 after the expansion. The new facility will house dozens of additional printers and focus on the larger Terran R, according to Ryan. The facility also will feature a metallurgical lab, machine shop and a mission control center.

Sales for Relativity's launch services have been robust, Caryn Schenewerk, vice president of regulatory and government affairs said previously. Despite not having a single launch under its belt, Relativity already has been awarded contracts by the U.S. Department of Defense, NASA, global security and aerospace company Lockheed Martin, Momentous, Spaceflight, Telesat and more.

Ellis said that SpaceX is the only private space company with a larger factory. The Hawthorne-based company has made "inspiring and impressive" progress since being founded by Elon Musk nearly 20 years ago, Ellis said, adding that SpaceX's goal of going to Mars and making humanity multiplanetary is one he shares.

"I felt that 3D printing was inevitably required for that future to happen," Ellis said.

Faster turnaround

While a "simple" rocket like SpaceX's Falcon 9 may take up to 18 months to manufacture—below the industry standard of two years—accord-



An aerial view of the new Relativity Space headquarters west of Long Beach Airport, including portions of Cherry Avenue that are part of the Globe-master Corridor Specific Plan. Rendering courtesy of Relativity Space.

ing to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Relativity's rockets can be produced in 60 days, Ryan said. The 3D-printing process allows for shorter build times by significantly reducing the number of parts from more than 100,000 to fewer than 1,000, she added.

The two-stage Terran R measures in at 216 feet long with a 16-foot diameter, a 5-meter payload fairing, or nose cone, and the capability to deliver more than 20,000 kilograms to low Earth orbit and beyond. The Terran 1, meanwhile, is 115 feet long with a diameter of 7 feet, 6 inches and the capability to deliver payloads between 750-1,250 kilograms depending on orbit.

The company has run over 500 tests of its engine at the company's Cape Canaveral facility and expects to receive final engine qualification over the next couple of months, Ellis said. The first flight of the Terran 1 is slated for some-

time before the end of the year but a date has not yet been set, he said.

The first Terran R is expected to take to the skies beginning in 2024 and already has one undisclosed customer signed up for launch services using the new rocket.

To expedite Terran R production in the new facility, Relativity raised \$650 million in a Series E equity funding round led by Fidelity Management & Research Company. To date, the company has raised \$1.3 billion and its total valuation stands at \$4.2 billion, according to Ryan.

Originally founded in a Seattle We-Work space by Ellis and Jordan Noone in December 2015, the company quickly moved to Mountain View as part of the Y Combinator seed money startup accelerator program. Ellis said that for about six months he and Noone lived in a small Airbnb while developing the

first Stargate prototype. During that time, the new company raised \$10 million of venture capital financing, allowing Relativity to relocate to Inglewood and begin hiring staff in its first official office—a 5,000-square-foot space on Aviation Boulevard.

Relativity's relocation and subsequent expansion in Long Beach is a continuation of a recent influx of space companies calling the city home. The aerospace resurgence was kicked off when Virgin Galactic leased a building at Douglas Park in 2015, with the site becoming the inaugural home of the company's new venture Virgin Orbit in 2017.

In January 2019, SpinLaunch moved from Sunnyvale to Douglas Park. Rocket Lab came next, relocating its headquarters from Huntington Beach in early 2020. With the surge of rocket manufacturing companies in the city, parts manufacturers have followed, including Morf3D, a 3D metal printing company that specializes in aerospace and defense components that announced a new Long Beach headquarters in April.

"Most of our customer base is also transitioning to the Long Beach area," Morf3D CEO Ivan Madera said during a recent economic forum.

During the same forum, Dan Abir, director of sales and marketing for M4 Engineering, said the Long Beach space sector has become a community, working with the city and together to further strengthen and expand the sector in Long Beach.

"In the space industry, what we're doing is so challenging and so important for the future of humanity that you do see a lot of companies, while they are fierce competitors in some ways, still root each other on," Ellis said. "We're all part of building that future and there are not people cheering for the demise of any company but actually wanting the whole industry to be strong and successful and grow." ■



Relativity Space's Terran 1, left, and Terran R rockets. Image courtesy of Relativity Space.

City Council approves temporary ban on evictions driven by landlords remodeling

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Renters in Long Beach will be protected from evictions spurred by property owners' requests to remodel the units—for now—after the City Council voted unanimously on July 6 to enact a temporary ban.

The city's current law, which was largely dictated by the state, allows tenants to be evicted if their landlord pulls building permits to carry out work, provides copies of the permits to the tenant and issues a 60-day notice to vacate.

However, after months of pressure from renters and tenants rights organizations seeking to close the "substantial remodel loophole," the council approved a temporary ban that could last through December while a long-term solution is worked out.

A substantial remodel is any renovation that requires work permits to be pulled and would take more than 30 days to complete. The ban applies to evictions issued after July 6, but permits can still be pulled and work completed so long as it doesn't result in an

eviction.

The temporary ban was proposed by councilmembers Cindy Allen and Sueley Saro, who both said the ban was the product of compromise and is fair to tenants and landlords.

Allen and Saro's request also asks for the city to look at creating a "renovation administration program" that would require future renovation plans be evaluated by the city and landlords to submit a mitigation plan for how they will minimize the work's effect on tenants, and also bars rent increases for six months after tenants return to the units.

It could also remove substantial remodels from a list of approved no-fault just-cause evictions. An amendment to the motion could also seek to help tenants at risk of evictions from permits pulled prior to July 6.

"Today, I'm honoring a promise to do more for tenants to create a more fair and equitable housing climate," said Allen, who campaigned on closing the loophole, among other things.

Saro added that tenants shouldn't be evicted just because owners want to renovate units.

"This process must stop and it must stop today," Saro said.

Despite the adoption of the moratorium, disagreement remains over how broadly the ban should have applied, with dozens of tenants and activists pushing Tuesday night for the council to adopt a ban that was retroactive to when the pandemic began. Property owners, meanwhile, argued the scope should be much narrower.

Deputy City Attorney Rich Anthony advised the council that making the ban retroactive would likely open the city up to "substantial litigation" by owners who already have permits in hand to carry out renovations.

The item was opposed by a variety of property management groups and small property owners who said the agenda item was poorly timed as some landlords have not received rent payments for most of or the entire pandemic.

"There is only so much we can handle with new policies that are intended to address alleged abuse by a few of existing ordinances, but these new policies that you are proposing impact all

of us while we are trying to get back on our feet financially," Kristie Pabst, owner of Pabst, Kinney & Associates, Inc said in a letter to Allen.

Pabst added that the moratorium would deter major investments to the city's aging housing stock and suggested that the city prosecutor should be the entity penalizing those landlords that are abusing current laws.

Keith Kennedy, president of the Small Property Owners Alliance, said that civil penalties from the city attorney's office should be used instead of a blanket moratorium that applies to all property owners.

Like others, Kennedy expressed concern that the city's rental assistance program is inadequate and should also be addressed, calling it the "elephant in the room" as state and county moratoriums expire at the end of September.

"We need to change the qualifications and re-align them to be more in line with the way they qualified to defer rent!" he wrote. "Otherwise, the City will inevitably return much needed tenant funds back to the Federal Government and evictions will be unavoidable."

As of the week of June 30, the city had distributed or is in the process of distributing just over \$4 million out of the over \$50 million in federal and state funds it received to help renters pay unpaid rents. The deadline to apply for the program was July 11.

Tenants said they are feeling the strain of the pandemic and for some, the looming dread of evictions, because their buildings have had permits pulled for work.

Karen Wyrick said that her building was acquired by a new owner and the eviction notices began almost immediately, ridding one building of its tenants and another building that was partially emptied before the pandemic.

"All of us are hanging in there scared to death we might be evicted," Wyrick said.

Sylvia De La Rosa, member of the "Daisy Avenue Resistance," which is part of the Long Beach Tenants Union, said through an interpreter that not only should the council make the ban apply to all renters, but that owners should have to pay for relocation if tenants are forced to leave during construction.

"Cover people who already have eviction notices and active unlawful detainers," De La Rosa said.

The council is expected to vote on an ordinance at its July 13 meeting, but the law would be effective from Tuesday night on. The city will now begin the process of meeting with tenant and property owner groups to start working out the details of the proposed renovation administration program. ■



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City had poor accounting, lack of transparency in oversight of airport projects, auditor says

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

An audit released June 29 shows the city lacked processes and systems to properly manage millions of dollars of capital improvements at Long Beach Airport—a problem that has been found in management of other city projects.

The report by PMA Consultants, which was contracted by City Auditor Laura Doud, found numerous inadequacies in the oversight of more than \$45 million worth of construction projects that were recently completed or remain underway at the municipal airport. Over the next five years, the airport's capital improvement plan was more than \$105.6 million.

The audit focused on five construction projects that were started, complete, or still underway from Fiscal Year 2016 through Fiscal Year 2019: improvements to Taxiway C, Runway 12-30 rehabilitation, parking structure elevator and entrance improvements, terminal wall beautification and the new TSA check baggage inspection station, which is part of the airport's more than \$110 million Phase II Terminal Improvements project.

LGB is a “self-supporting” enterprise in the city, meaning it does not use local tax dollars.

PMA's findings include:

- A lack of a clear capital improvement plan prioritization process, which makes it hard for stakeholders—residents and businesses—to know if the right projects are being identified and completed, or how effectively.
- No tracking of changes to the plan, meaning it's difficult to monitor true project-level performance or progress.
- A need for a project management office, which has been found to lead to more successful projects.
- No documented risk management processes, which greatly increases the likelihood of project budget and schedule overruns.
- Project contingency is not driven by risk, which may result in increased cost and delays.
- The project management information system (PMSI) is not fully configured or used consistently, meaning not all project cost information is in one central location, which can result in increased cost due to poor management.
- Standards for cost management and reporting such as monthly expenditure forecasts are not defined, which makes it difficult to effectively control a project's finances or provide transparency.
- A lack of change order logs making it difficult to manage change proactively and reduce liability and risk on the project.
- The PMSI invoice module is not consistently used, which is important for tracking payments and invoices.
- No quality management policy or plans, which could result in a lack of satisfaction for clients, including airlines, the Federal Aviation Administration or passengers by not meeting



Passengers board a Southwest flight at Long Beach Airport, Thursday, May 20, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

their expectations.

- No formal project performance reviews, which increases the chances of poor performance as it relates to budget, schedule and standards.

Long Beach Airport's procurement process, meanwhile, falls in line with the city's procedures, which are meant to ensure “fair and open competition,” PMA found. However, the list of recommendations to address the deficiencies are reminiscent of a larger, citywide issue, Doud said.

“Audits over the years have highlighted the ongoing critical need for contract and project management best practices across the city to ensure that public dollars are spent wisely and as they were intended,” Doud said.

The deficiencies seen in the airport project management were consistent with the other audits of projects in park maintenance and oversight of the bonds used to pay for repairs aboard the Queen Mary, Doud said in her report.

The city recently resumed control of the historic ocean liner for the first time in decades after the former master leaseholder, Urban Commons, filed for bankruptcy. Even before the bankruptcy announcement, Doud's office began an audit to examine Urban Commons' use of \$23 million in bonds for critical repairs.

The investigation into Urban Commons' bond usage as well as a 2012 audit of Queen Mary financial activities showed similar oversight and transparency issues as the airport report, Doud said.

The airport and city manager's office have agreed to and have started implementing the audit recommendations, according to Doud.

“We've worked closely with [Doud's]

team to make immediate changes to our construction program that will deliver the greatest value for our travelers and

the general public,” airport Director Cynthia Guidry said in a statement. ■

CITY OF LONG BEACH BID OPPORTUNITIES

TITLE	BID NUMBER	DUE DATE
John Deere Construction Parts & Service	ITB FS21-075	07/14/2021
Development Opportunity at the Long Beach Airport	RFP AP21-042	07/19/2021
Cummins & Detroit Engine Parts & Services	ITB FS21-077	07/21/2021
Cyber Security Software License, Subscription, and Services	ITB TI21-072	07/22/2021
Airport Landscaping Services	RFP AP21-053	07/22/2021
Fire Boat CBRN Detection and Telemetry Equipment	RFP FD21-060	07/26/2021
Engineering Consulting Services for LBWD 2021 New Well Project	RFP (O-0750)	07/26/2021
Long Beach Justice Fund	RFP CM21-078	07/27/2021
10 Signalized Locations on Los Coyotes Diagonal	R-7172	07/30/2021
Santa Fe Ave Synchronization Enhancement	R-7183	07/30/2021
Red Car Greenbelt Public Art Project	RFP PR21-082	08/03/2021
Board and Secure Services	ITB PD21-074	08/05/2021

Bidder Registration

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From intern to lawyer: Poly grad joins city prosecutor's office with a mission to serve the community he is from

■ By **TESS KAZENOFF**
Reporter

The Long Beach City Prosecutor's office commemorated the swearing-in of former intern Jericho Williams on Thursday, July 1, the first person to go from intern to law clerk, to prosecutor in the office.

Williams began as an intern at City Prosecutor Doug Haubert's office during the summer of 2015 after graduating from UC Riverside, following a push for more internships across the city from Mayor Robert Garcia.

Williams went on to law school at Western State College of Law, graduating in 2019, and served as a law clerk at both the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office as well as the Long Beach City Prosecutor's office.

"Jericho has changed in many ways, he's certainly matured as a person, but the legal knowledge that he's gained by working in our office and the district attorney's office has really served him well, and I think will serve the city of Long Beach well in the future," Haubert said.

However, it is the personal and real-life experiences that Williams has that truly make him special, he said.

Williams has spent his whole life in Long Beach, passing through the Long Beach school system and graduating with high honors from Poly High School in 2011, where he was also a wide receiver on the football team.

It was in 10th grade that Williams first started to consider a career in law.

"Truth be told, what actually got me interested in law was a lot of the gang violence in my neighborhood," said Williams, who grew up mostly around Central Long Beach.



Jericho Williams, center, is joined by his parents before being sworn in as a prosecutor in Long Beach, July 1, 2021. Williams began his work at the Long Beach City Prosecutor's office in 2015 before moving up as a law clerk and now joining the office as a prosecutor. Photo by Tess Kazenoff.

"I knew I wanted to get into something to address both the gang violence and homelessness."

Williams initially wanted to be a defense lawyer, but after beginning his internship in Long Beach, he was introduced to the possibilities of becoming a prosecutor.

Haubert noted that this office provides opportunities not commonly seen in other city prosecutor offices, with an emphasis on offering resources such as mental health counseling or housing.

Witnessing these alternate solutions to crime and poverty propelled Williams into a career of prosecution.

"It is a blessing to be able to—actually be able to—serve the community that I'm

from," said Williams. "The rewarding point is the fact that I am here. I could be anywhere, but Long Beach is where I'm at. And that's the biggest blessing."

Many of the cases he has observed come from Central and North Long Beach, he said, and his personal ties to the city give him a unique perspective that aided his work.

"I am personally invested. I do want to see homelessness eradicated. I do want to see youthful offenders turn their lives around and go to more of a positive path," said Williams.

As the swearing-in ceremony began, a crowd of around 25 family members and co-workers eagerly gathered around in front of City Hall, as three flags stood before them.

"Every time I talk to him, I learn a little

bit more about Long Beach, and a little more about his experience in the schools he went to, and where he is now and why that's so special," said Haubert to the group. "But I also hear from him about his vision for the future. And I know Jericho sees a criminal justice system different tomorrow than it is today."

Also in attendance was state Sen. Lena Gonzalez, who offered Williams words of congratulations before swearing him in. Williams grew up in the area that Gonzalez previously represented as a City Council member.

"I'm so proud of you," said Gonzalez. "You are a product of Long Beach. You grew up in the Washington neighborhood, which is so cool. You went to Poly High School, and now look at you."

She said that the beginning of her career was not unlike Williams', pointing out that they both started as interns. Gonzalez also applauded Williams for successfully passing the California State Bar, which received cheers from the audience.

It was actually the bar exam that was the most difficult part of his journey, Williams told the Long Beach Post following the ceremony.

But through the challenges of pursuing a career in law, Williams urged anyone curious or interested in making a change to never give up.

"There's a lot of examinations, a lot of challenges that you have to get through to become a lawyer. And you may have to take a couple L's, you may have to fail a few times. And that's fine. Do not give up. Just be graceful with yourself, be patient with yourself. And all of those things fall into place." ■

Virgin Orbit successfully delivers seven satellites to orbit

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Five and a half months after its first successful launch, Long Beach-based Virgin Orbit successfully delivered a payload of seven satellites to Low Earth Orbit during its "Tubular Bells: Part One" mission on Wednesday, June 30.

The rocket was carrying a payload of seven satellites: four research and development CubeSats for the U.S. Department of Defense, two optical satellites for SatRevolution and the Royal Netherlands Air Force's first military satellite.

"What an unforgettable experience to be here in Mojave to watch the Virgin Orbit team complete another perfect mission to space," Virgin Orbit founder Richard Branson said in a statement. "Everything went exactly to plan and the fact that we dropped the rocket from our 747 at 7:47 a.m. made it particularly fitting. Perfect timing!"

Cosmic Girl, Virgin Orbit's customized Boeing 747 aircraft took off from Mojave Air and Space Port at 6:50 a.m.,

flying out over the Pacific Ocean—about 50 miles south of the Channel Islands, before releasing its LauncherOne vehicle from under the plane's wing. After detaching from the aircraft, the LauncherOne rocket ignited and carried the payload to 500 kilometers above the Earth's surface.

The company failed its first launch attempt in May last year due to a breach in a high-pressure line carrying cryogenic liquid oxygen to a combustion chamber. The company's second showing was successful when it delivered 10 satellites to orbit in January.

"Two successful launches and two groups of happy customers in 5 months really speaks to our team's abilities. They're making air launch look easy—and I can tell you from experience that it's not," CEO Dan Hart said in a statement. "We can now proudly say that 17 satellites launched by our system are up in space exactly in their target orbits."

The June 30 mission name is a nod to founder Richard Branson's early years when, in 1973, he established Virgin Re-



Virgin Orbit's Cosmic Girl takes off in the Mojave desert carrying the company's LauncherOne rocket and nine satellites, Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Photo courtesy of Virgin Orbit.

cords to release British musician Mike Oldfield's debut record, "Tubular Bells."

Virgin Orbit constructs its LauncherOne vehicle at its 180,000-square-foot

headquarters in the Douglas Park commercial complex adjacent to Long Beach Airport. ■

Two Harbor commissioners up for reappointment as critical Queen Mary vote looms

■ By KELLY PUENTE
Reporter

Two of the five members of the Harbor Commission, which oversees the Port of Long Beach, are eligible for reappointment this month as the board later this year is expected to make a critical vote on whether to take control of the Queen Mary.

Terms for commissioners Robert Olvera Jr. and Frank Colonna ended on Wednesday, June 30, leaving their seats technically open, though they will continue to serve pending a decision by the mayor, who appoints harbor commissioners for six-year terms.

James Ahumada, a spokesperson for Mayor Robert Garcia, said the mayor has 30 appointments and reappointments to make this month for various city commissions and expects to bring the appointments to the City Council for approval in the coming weeks.

He said the mayor is planning to reappoint both Colonna and Olvera. Neither Colonna nor Olvera could be reached for comment this week.

The Harbor Commission is in the spotlight this year as the city considers shifting control of the historic Queen Mary ocean liner and the surrounding land to the Port of Long Beach. The commission would then be responsible for overseeing the ship's lease obligations for any new leaseholders, and could be faced with the tough decision of whether to put more money into repairing



A fence keeps people off of the rocky barrier surrounding the Queen Mary in Downtown Long Beach, Thursday, June 10, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

and maintaining the aging vessel.

The decision comes as the ship's operator filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in

January after a string of financial problems. Last month, the operator chose to give up the lease in a sudden decision in bankruptcy

court, giving the city of Long Beach control over the ship's daily operations for the first time in more than 40 years. ■

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Bankruptcy judge gives Long Beach legal control of Queen Mary; owner of Russian sub still a mystery

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Reporter

The city of Long Beach has gained official, legal control of the Queen Mary following a judge's approval in Delaware bankruptcy court on Wednesday, July 7.

Long Beach took physical control of the Queen Mary last month when former leaseholder, Urban Commons Queensway, chose to give up the lease after the ship received no qualified bidders at bankruptcy auction.

Long Beach owns the Queen Mary but for years has leased the ship as a hotel and tourist attraction to various operators that have struggled to make a profit.

In January, Eagle Hospitality Trust, the parent entity of Urban Commons Queensway, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy with a total of more than \$500 million in debt. The city, meanwhile, remains in a legal battle with Urban Commons over a litany of failed lease obligations, with a court hearing scheduled for August.

The bankruptcy judge granted Urban Commons' request to officially cancel the Queen Mary lease, a move that gives Long Beach complete control of the vessel for the first time in more than 40 years.

The city is now tasked with deciding

how much to invest in critical repairs for the aging vessel. An inspection report in April determined the ship would need at least \$23 million in critical repairs to remain viable in the next two years, while a marine survey released in 2017 found that the ship could need nearly \$300 million in critical repairs to stay viable.

The ship remains closed to the public as the city plans for millions of dollars in safety repairs.

Long Beach, in the meantime, is exploring possibly transferring control of the Queen Mary to the Harbor Commission, which oversees the Port of Long Beach. The city is expected to release a feasibility study on the plan in the next several weeks.

The city had also asked the judge to rule on who is responsible for the corroded Russian submarine moored next to the Queen Mary. But in Wednesday's court hearing, the city said that Urban Commons has agreed to give details on who possesses or owns the rusting relic.

City officials have said the owner of the Scorpion is somewhat of a mystery as the vessel was supposedly sold in a private transaction and is not part of the bankruptcy hearing. Urban Commons in court documents has said it does not own the sub.



A rusted and dilapidated Russian Scorpion submarine sits beside the Queen Mary in Downtown Long Beach, Thursday, June 10, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

In 2019, the sub's then-owner, a Palm Springs-based company called Newco Pty Ltd., was reportedly in the process of selling the vessel to a mystery buyer, but it is unclear if that sale went through. Robert Lisnow, a lawyer for Newco Pty, could not be reached for comment.

The Cold War-era Scorpion, which

has been closed to visitors since 2015 due to safety concerns, has been largely neglected over the past several years as city inspection reports revealed rust and even a raccoon infestation.

The city in court documents said the sub has become a hazard and that removing it will likely cost millions of dollars. ■

Long Beach doesn't know how many city employees are vaccinated, hasn't decided on mandate

■ By **JEREMIAH DOBRUCK**
Reporter

Long Beach in late June began gathering data on how many of its employees are vaccinated, but until that process is complete, the city does not have an accurate count of how many firefighters, police officers and other municipal employees have been immunized against COVID-19.

Until now, Long Beach had only gathered partial data on its employees' vaccination status. Getting a full picture could take two to three weeks, city spokesperson Chelsey Magallon said in an email.

"Although we held City staff-specific vaccine clinics, these represent only a proportion of those vaccinated as many were vaccinated at other publicly available sites," Magallon said.

This month, however, Cal/OSHA told employers they must document workers' vaccination status if they're allowed to work inside without masks. Long Beach has been meeting with unions representing city workers to hammer out how that will work.

"We are in the process of requiring all employees to indicate vaccination status with the City per Cal/OSHA rules, which will provide an accurate picture of vaccination status," Magallon said.

She said the city expected to start gathering information on employees' vaccination status the week of July 5, but at least some firefighters and police officers have already



A walk-up patient receives her COVID-19 vaccine at the Terrace Theater, Monday, January 19, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

been sent brief questionnaires about the topic. The self-attestation forms ask them to indicate whether they're vaccinated, unvaccinated or decline to say, according to union representatives.

"For us, it's not a big deal," said Long Beach Firefighters Association President Rex Pritchard. He said his members are used to filling out vaccine attestations because county health officials have required them in the past for the seasonal flu vaccine.

Long Beach Police Officers Associa-

tion President Rich Chambers said the city's self-attestation process was less invasive than other acceptable options Cal/OSHA outlined, which included employees showing proof of inoculation through a vaccine card or health care document.

Workers who say they're unvaccinated or decline to state will be required to wear masks in most situations, but vaccinated workers will be allowed to go mostly maskless, according to Cal/OSHA rules.

Both the LBFD and LBPD saw surges

in infections earlier in the pandemic, but they've since tapered off with tighter rules around masking and the availability of shots. First-responders have been eligible to get the vaccine in Long Beach since mid-January and all city employees became eligible on March 15, according to Magallon.

"I can't remember the last time one of our members had a positive COVID test," Pritchard said. "I think the vaccine has really done a great job in protecting our members, which in turn protects our patients."

But the issue has taken on new urgency recently with the new more contagious coronavirus delta variant circulating locally.

Although vaccines appear to offer strong protection against the variant, the Long Beach Health Department warned it poses a grave danger, "especially to unvaccinated people."

Whether Long Beach will require workers to get the vaccine is still an open question, one that could become controversial. Both Pritchard and Chambers said they've pushed their members to get the vaccine, but they'd be opposed to a mandate.

"I think people have a right to make decisions for themselves on that," Pritchard said.

Long Beach is "closely following" the city of San Francisco's decisions to require vaccines for employees with limited exceptions for health and religious reasons, but the city hasn't yet made a decision whether it will follow suit, Magallon said. ■

LBUSD passes booming budget thanks in part to COVID funds, but declining revenue looms

■ By **MIKE GUARDABASCIO**
Reporter

July 1 officially marked the start of the Long Beach Unified School District's 2021-22 fiscal year, a year that looks a lot brighter than the district and its labor unions once feared.

At the LBUSD Board of Education's most recent meeting on June 23, the board unanimously approved the district's \$1.12 billion budget for 2021-22, as well as its Local Control and Accountability Plan, its blueprint for how it will spend locally controlled money.

After a year-long budget process, the board and LBUSD executive staff were united in talking about a need to simplify things to make it easier for the public to understand the district's finances. Some programs, such as English Learner Support, are funded from multiple sources, which makes it difficult to track exactly how much is being spent on students.

"This gets complicated when you talk about a \$1.1 billion dollar budget but this integrates one-time COVID resources from state and federal, it incorporates (Local Control Funding Formula), other state and federal revenues, and Title I funding," said LBUSD

Superintendent Jill Baker.

Baker said a modernized budget tracker is coming to the LBUSD website this summer, which will make parsing things out easier.

LBUSD's chief business and financial officer, Yumi Takahashi, reminded the board that as the state finalizes its budget some revenue could go up or down and that the district will have 45 days to revise the LBUSD budget after that.

Takahashi had been the bearer of bad news last year by presenting a bleak financial picture that anticipated the district dipping into deficit spending and quickly burning through its ample financial reserves. At the most recent board meeting, she painted a different picture, one filled with mostly good news.

"Last year, there was an expectation that there would be a protracted dip in state revenues. That has not materialized," she said. Instead, the district received a roughly 5% cost-of-living increase from the state, as well as approximately \$150 million in one-time COVID-19 relief funds from the state and federal governments, which is being used to combat learning loss as well as supporting programs to help kids with learning and emotional support as they return to campus

in the fall.

Takahashi did point to some dark clouds still on the horizon in the form of declining enrollment. The district has been losing students—and thus state funding—at a rate of about 2% annually for the last several years. This year that jumped to a 3% decline, with a projection of the student enrollment dipping down to 64,418 in the 2023-24 school year. Takahashi also acknowledged that there's still a lot of uncertainty about the pandemic's long-term effect on enrollment.

"We're making aggressive outreach to returning families and to new families," she said. "This projection is very challenging in light of the current circumstances."

The district's financial reserves have been building since the 2008 recession when layoffs rocked the district and pushed then-Superintendent Chris Steinhäuser to start saving money for the next big financial hurdle. Those reserves reached a high of \$292 million at the end of 2020-21, and they are projected to crest \$309 million in the 2021-22 school year. Declining enrollment is projected to push the district into deficit spending after that, and Takahashi's presentation showed reserves beginning to drain rapidly to \$177.5 million in 2023-24.

The district praised community engage-

ment as a driving force for the budget, with programs benefiting English learners, Black students, and emotional support during the return to campus all receiving strong public support in the public.

The district's executive director of equity, access, and college and career readiness, Robert Tagorda, said the district had 4,967 participants in its budget engagement outreach as well as 3,472 participants in the Local Control and Accountability Plan engagement.

"As it relates to the pandemic, it's been a monumental achievement for our stakeholders and our community to be as engaged as they have been," said Tagorda.

Boardmember Juan Benitez has been a year-long advocate for more transparency, simplicity and engagement in the budget process, and he said he was pleased with how the district's budget aligned with what he heard from his constituents in the Downtown area.

"It's tough to participate right now in our systems, but our budget reflects in the most intentional way how important community voice is in making decisions over that \$1.1 billion dollars," he said.

A summary of the district's financial allocations and the entire budget can be found at lbuschools.net. ■

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Costs of recounts and fate of Measure A could hinge on challenge to county's new election recount rules



Staff work around-the-clock at the Tally Operations Center in Downey where all of LA County's ballots are counted for the November 2020 election. Photo by Cheantay Jensen.

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

A lawsuit challenging the recount process of a 2020 vote that permanently extended a Long Beach sales-tax increase is headed to trial in the coming weeks and the outcome of the case could determine how costly recounts could be in going forward.

Measure A, a 1% sales-tax increase that the city originally said would last for 10 years, was made permanent by a margin of 16 votes during last March's municipal election.

The city has used the roughly \$60 million the tax generates annually to fund road and infrastructure fixes and also to maintain staffing levels for the city's fire and police departments.

It faced vocal opposition from community groups like the Long Beach Reform Coalition, which seized on the measure's slim victory to request a recount from Los Angeles County election officials.

However, a new \$300 million voting system that allows ballots to be turned in from anywhere in the county, and a global pandemic that created a shortage of workers and mandated physical distancing for those who were available, complicated the recount and pushed the projected cost of it well over \$200,000.

Ian Patton, the executive director of the coalition, said he had originally calculated he would need between \$15,000 and \$24,000 to pay for a manual recount based on estimates included in the county's recount handbook.

However, that number quickly ballooned to \$238,000 after county election officials notified him the coalition would have to pay for the cost of locating Long Beach ballots

among the entire county's ballot pool. Over 2.1 million people cast votes in the March election and the county estimated it would cost over \$187,000 to track them down. He criticized the system created by state legislators through the California Voters Choice Act for not accounting for how to avoid having to hunt down individual votes amid millions of ballots.

"Everything is now very modern, slick and wonderful but if you want to have a recount you have to go back to the stone ages," Patton said. "I can't believe that's an accident."

After two days of trying to conduct a recount using digital images, the cheaper option made possible by the new voting machines, Patton called off the recount and filed a lawsuit against LA County Registrar Recorder Clerk Dean Logan in May demanding the county pick up the tab to locate the Long Beach ballots so a manual hand count could be conducted.

Both Patton and the county said that four votes changed during the short process but the county said that the change was a net-zero, which is typical during recounts, but Patton alleged that making the use of physical ballots economically impossible is illegal.

With the new voting system that LA County participated in for the first time last year individual neighborhood precincts were eliminated in favor of fewer voting centers that were open for 11 days prior to Election Day. LA County voters could vote anywhere in the county, or by mail, but if the county is not sorting them as they're being counted it could raise problems for this recount and others, Justin Levitt, a political science professor at Cal State Long Beach, told the Post last year.

Unlike statewide contests, for which the governor can initiate a recount, county and citywide elections have no trigger for recounts. In the case of Measure A, Logan would have had to call for the recount if he suspected there were inaccuracies with the count, but he did not.

Attorneys representing Logan and the county argued in court documents that Logan's office has the right to pursue full compensation for the recount because the cost of conducting one was never intended to be covered by public dollars.

They also argued that Patton's lower estimates were based on a table "inadvertently included" on the county's website at the time he requested a recount and those prices were no longer valid under the new voting system.

Logan's office declined to comment citing the ongoing litigation.

The biggest price difference hinges on how votes are now collected. The old system that saw voters cast ballots at predetermined precincts allowed for quick retrieval of ballots because they were sorted as they were turned in. However, the new voting system that allows voters to cast ballots from anywhere in the county does not.

Patton alleges this has illegally made recounts financially unattainable for most people. The county's lawyers claimed economical recounts were never ingrained in county law. "The petitioners' grievance is premised on an incidental benefit recount requesters presumably used to enjoy but are not entitled to under law," they wrote in a response to the lawsuit.

They contended that recounts historically have not been a "low-cost endeavor" with it not being uncommon for recounts in large

counties to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A spokesperson for the county clerk's office told the Post in May 2020 that the previous high charged by the county was for a tobacco tax measure that cost "more than \$100,000."

Because the city consolidated its elections with the county in 2016 it no longer is in charge of conducting recounts for city elections. However, the city clerk estimated last year that a citywide recount of Measure A could cost up to \$84,000.

The July 7 bench-trial of the case could set a legal precedent for the cost of recounts for the 15 counties in the state that have already adopted the new election model that allows voting from anywhere in the county.

If the judge rules in favor of the county those pursuing manual recounts could be charged for a larger cost for retrieving ballots before the counting even begins, but if they rule in favor of the coalition, the Measure A recount could begin again.

The coalition held a fundraiser July 1 in anticipation of a ruling in its favor with Patton saying any donations will go toward the cost of recounting the ballots.

Patton said he doesn't feel any remorse for what might happen if Measure A is overturned and the city loses access to \$60 million a year to use for infrastructure and public safety noting that it's not "free money coming out of the sky" and that the elimination of the tax could help businesses still hurting from the pandemic. He's optimistic that the judge will side with the coalition.

"I feel about as good as you can feel about something that is inherently uphill," Patton said. ■

Nurse Bobbie Barraza doesn't just hand scalpels to surgeons in the operating room—she uses them



Nurse Bobbie Barraza is a certified registered nurse first assistant at Long Beach Memorial. Photo courtesy of Memorial.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

For 17 years, Bobbie Barraza has cared for patients through her position as a registered nurse. But for the last eight years, Barraza has operated in an expanded role as registered nurse first assistant, or RNFA, with additional training that gives her the ability to perform surgical procedures independently.

“It’s beneficial because there are situations where we have emergencies and a patient is coming straight out of the emergency room and we have a very little amount of time to get ready before surgery,” Barraza said. “I’m able to jump into three different roles at once and I’m only one person. It’s really helpful for my team.”

The road to the operating table was a long one. Barraza first attended East LA College and then Mount St. Mary’s University and Western Governors University. From the latter two, she earned bachelor’s degrees in business and nursing, respectively.

Once a registered nurse, Barraza was accepted into a perioperative residency program at UCLA that included additional classroom education and hands-on training in a hospital. Her focus was on

the OR, so she was educated in surgical service lines, including general, pediatric, orthopedic and neuro.

During the residency, Barraza learned to be a circulating nurse who manages the OR outside of the sterile field to maintain a safe, comfortable environment for the patient, as well as provide updates for the family. She also learned how to be a scrub nurse who assists within the sterile field, ensuring the patient and surgeon have everything they need during the procedure.

After graduating from the residency in about one year, Barraza completed another one-year residency in cardiothoracic surgery. Then she spent two years working in the operating room before she was ready to take a certification test to become a certified perioperative nurse or CNOR. Once certified, Barraza applied to UCLA’s RNFA program, one of only two such programs in California and 13 nationwide.

The one-year RNFA program included additional classroom and practical education where Barraza learned to assist surgeons in the OR beyond handing them instruments. Once she became an RNFA, Barraza took it one step further: one more year of education to specialize in and be able to perform certain aspects of cardiovascular surgery—heart, lungs, esophagus and other organs in the chest.

gus and other organs in the chest.

“Up until then you’re still just assisting,” Barraza said. “But now in cardiac surgery and in vascular surgery, if there’s a need for bypass, I can harvest a saphenous vein independently.”

Barraza’s first nursing job was at UCLA, where she continues to work as a per diem nurse.

Having gone through the rigors of furthering her education, in a pinch, Barraza can serve in the scrub and circulating nurse positions as well as the first assistant role during the same procedure, she said.

“It’s extremely stressful but if you have a passion for what you do, then the benefit outweighs the stress,” Barraza said.

“I really love my team; we are in it together like a family,” she added. “I want to give 100% every time because of them—they are giving that much, so I need to, too.”

Long Beach Memorial, where Barraza has worked since 2010, has about a half dozen RNFAs but Barraza is the only one certified for cardiovascular surgery. In April, Barraza submitted her professional portfolio to become a certified registered nurse first assistant and in May she was credentialed.

Barraza said she wanted to become a nurse ever since she was a child. Her mother managed a medical office and also performed a lot of medical assistant responsibilities, which was her gateway into the profession, Barraza said.

At Memorial, Barraza has been integral in developing cardiac and thoracic robotic surgery programs.

“It’s really cutting edge stuff and it’s awesome to be a part of it,” Barraza said. “Our programs just took off.”

She has even been awarded as a distinguished employee by the institution.

But her goals and ambitions do not stop at the operating table. Barraza, 43, said she could continue in her current position for another 10-15 years but that she has her eye on a role as a nursing teacher or hospital administrator, which would allow her to groom the next generation of RNFAs, a position she advocates for hospitals to hire more of.

“Every time we get a new perioperative nurse, I advocate for them to see what my role entails to see if they like it,” Barraza said. “I’m willing to mentor them. I can see the potential in [certain] people—the way they are in surgery, how they’re able to manage everything under the pressure and stress of an intense surgery. I can see that.” ■

MemorialCare's pediatric pulmonary program gains recognition as among best in the nation

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

When Tiana Lawrence's son Aayden was born, it felt like a miracle. Diagnosed with a hormonal disorder, Lawrence had been told she would never be able to have children.

"He was my miracle," the 28-year-old mother said. But so far, Aayden's life has been anything but easy.

In the first three years of his life, he suffered constant asthma attacks, a result of a condition called meconium aspiration syndrome, caused by a fetus's ingestion of gastrointestinal secretions in the womb or shortly after birth.

His attacks were so severe he would end up at the hospital three to four times a year, Lawrence said. At some point, doctors considered placing him in the ICU, hooked up to a ventilator. Life was a minefield, his mother remembers. "Any little thing triggered an asthma attack."

The care Aayden would receive at MemorialCare Miller Children's and Women's Hospital saved his life, Lawrence said. "I think I probably would have lost him a long time ago."

For the second year in a row, the Long Beach hospital has been ranked among the best in the nation for its pulmonary care program.

"It's an example of the progress of the Memorial system," said Dr. Inderpal Randhawa, the medical director of the hospital's pulmonary institute, who has been working to increase the collection of patient data. This wealth of data, he said, has allowed Miller Children's to compete for a spot in the renowned list with some of the largest and



Dr. Cyrus Shahriary examines Olivia Wusstig, 2, at the Cherese Mari Laulhere Children's Village on the Long Beach Memorial campus, Wednesday, July 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

most well-funded hospitals in the country.

U.S. News and World Report began ranking pediatric hospitals in 2007, in an effort to help families find quality medical care. The report, which is one of the most well-publicized in the nation, takes into account a hospital's clinical outcomes, efficien-

cy in coordinating patient care and resources, such as the amount of nursing staff and outpatient programs offered.

After years of data collection and creating new programs—including a clinic treating Primary Ciliary Dyskinesia, a rare genetic disease—the Children's Pulmonary

Institute at Miller made its first "serious submission" for the 2019 nationwide ranking, according to Randhawa. Last year, the hospital ranked 49th in the nation for pediatric pulmonary care, this year it moved up to the 46th place.

"Our goal here is very clear: we want to keep going up," Randhawa said.

Gaining recognition through the ranking brings with it a number of benefits, the medical director said. Most notably, it comes with a reputational value that can help the hospital attract talent and form collaborative networks with other medical institutions.

For example, Miller Children's and Women's was recently asked to join the BPD Collaborative, a network of medical institutions nationwide, created to close knowledge gaps in the treatment of infants with bronchopulmonary dysplasia, a chronic lung disease that can be fatal in newborns.

"We stay active and present and put Long Beach on the map," Randhawa said. The invitation to join the collaborative is a sign that their approach is working, he added. "We are being noticed."

For Aayden Lawrence, the 6-year-old patient with severe, recurring asthma attacks, it was his doctor's effort to have him placed in a clinical trial for an antibody injectable that turned things around. He has been receiving the treatment regularly for three years now and will be entering first grade soon.

"He's able to play now, he can run with the kids. He can be a normal kid," his mother, Tiana Lawrence said. "We're actually able to have a somewhat normal life." ■



Aayden Lawrence, 6, plays at Bolivar Park, Wednesday, July 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Clinic focusing on trans, non-binary care marks one-year anniversary with expanded services

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

The Transgender and Non-Binary Clinic at Long Beach Memorial is celebrating its one-year anniversary by expanding its services through a partnership with the LGBTQ Center Long Beach.

“Visiting the doctor’s office should be a safe experience in a caring environment,” the hospital said in a statement. “However, for many transgender and non-binary patients, that is not the case.”

Many within the community feel there are limited or unavailable resources that impact the quality of care they receive, the hospital said. Barriers to care include a lack of medical professionals who understand trans and non-binary health care, a lack of insurance coverage for patients with needs specific to the trans and non-binary communities, and an unfriendly office environment due to social stigma and lack of education, Memorial said.

“Our team is aware of these injustices,” Dr. Odrin Castillo, director of engagement, community outreach and diversity for Memorial’s Family Medicine Residency Program said in a statement. “We take a multi-disciplinary approach where we make sure the patient is getting the complete package of care. Patients



The Family Medicine Team at Long Beach Memorial shows their support of Pride Month and celebrate the one-year anniversary of the clinic opening. Pictured from left: medical assistant Alex Mota Murillo, Director Odrin Castillo, medical assistant Ashley Torres, Dr. Phoebe Smith, licensed vocational nurse Liz Alvarez and Dr. Nam Thai. Photo courtesy of Memorial.

can be assured knowing that here, they have a safe medical home.”

Originally opened in July 2020, the clinic offers a wide range of services for the LGBTQ+ community, including gender-affirming hormone therapy, primary care, preventative care and medical screens at Memorial. From July through May, the clinic saw 58 patients with 119 visits.

Now, the medical care provider has established an LGBTQ Primary Care Free clinic that will begin seeing patients every Monday at the center beginning July 13.

The first visit to either clinic is a one-hour intake appointment, which includes assessment questions about the patient’s gender journey, hormone treatments and goals, according to the hospital. Patients

are seen regardless of insurance type or ability to pay and staff works with patients to connect them with health care coverage if needed.

More than half the patients who have utilized the clinic were uninsured or underinsured, according to spokeswoman Beatrice Jimenez. Fifteen patients were seen free of charge and seven were ultimately enrolled into insurance with the help of clinic staff.

The wait time for appointments is about two weeks, Castillo said.

The on-site and auxiliary clinics are part of the hospital’s LGBTQ curriculum that strives to train all its family medicine residents in LGBTQ competency. The clinics are funded through the hospital’s Graduate Medical Education Department and the MemorialCare Medical Group.

“If there was something I could say directly to this community: We see, and we know, that some of you have been mistreated by the medical community,” Castillo said. “Please put your trust in us. It’s important to us that our patients receive the best care possible. We’re always here for you.”

The Transgender and Non-Binary Clinic is located at Long Beach Memorial, 2801 Atlantic Ave. Appointments can be made by calling 562-933-0050. The LGBTQ Center Long Beach is located at 2017 E. Fourth St. ■

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Medical workers

(Continued from Page 1)

To combat burnout, Bishop said the hospital has made a host of resources available and asked staff to look out for one another should a coworker be showing signs of distress. The hospital’s spiritual care department for staff has been very active, Bishop said, adding that the hospital hosts weekly events. Employees are also being encouraged to take time off, Bishop said.

“There’s a sense of responsibility that caused people to probably take less vacation,” Bishop said. “They realize how important their work is and how much it matters. It was really inspiring to see.”

But despite the efforts by hospital leadership and the pride felt by staff, the pandemic was an extremely challenging time. The survey indicated there is a portion of staff considering transitioning into a different field and others are contemplating early retirement.

At Lakewood Regional Medical Center, COVID-19 brought on a higher number of early retirements and staff leaving the organization, according to CEO John Grah. Staffing has rebounded somewhat but the hospital continues to hire in clinical areas as patient volumes ramp back up, Grah said.

Emergency department patient volumes at Memorial are trending upward

but remain about 20% below pre-pandemic levels as people continue to delay doctor visits, Bishop said. Overall hospital volumes are about 90% of pre-pandemic levels but the patients who do come in are having longer stays because their ailments have been exacerbated by putting off care. These issues are particularly prevalent in pediatrics, Bishop said.

“Parents are understandably very protective of their kids,” Bishop said. “But my fear is that someone would delay their care with an outcome that was otherwise avoidable just because they were scared to come into the hospital.”

Lakewood is having a similar experience, with patients coming in with higher acuity than they should due to delayed care. But volumes are going up and postponed procedures are getting back on track, Grah said.

After having extremely long emergency department and admission wait times throughout the pandemic, Grah said both have returned to pre-pandemic levels. At Memorial, wait times have actually decreased due to fewer patients coming in and the introduction of an expedited “super track” model that greatly improves patient triage and throughput, Bishop said.

Telemedicine remains more prevalent today than before the pandemic, Bishop said, but has declined compared to when the virus was surging most.



An ambulance leaves Lakewood Regional Medical Center, Thursday, July 8, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

For now, insurance companies are reimbursing hospitals for telemedicine the same as in-person visits thanks to expanded emergency access during the pandemic.

“We are watching how the regulations shake out over the coming months to understand what its best use in the hospital setting may be,” Grah said. “Clearly people are more comfortable today than we were pre-pandemic with telemedicine. I would expect in the long term we will continue to see a higher usage of telemedicine for outpatient services.”

If telemedicine insurance reimbursement does come back down in the coming months and years, Bishop said he expects it will still remain above pre-pandemic levels.

Another consequence of COVID-19 is a severe blood shortage, according to the American Red Cross. In late June, the organization issued a plea for LA County residents to donate blood for use over the Fourth of July weekend and beyond.

“Summer is traditionally a tight time for the blood supply and it has been aggravated this year by COVID and fewer opportunities to donate blood,” Grah said. “We have implemented the conservation strategies as requested by our blood supplier and to date have not had to postpone any elective surgery.”

The shortage is so critical, the Red Cross is incentivizing residents of all blood types—but especially type O and those giving platelets—to donate. Those who donate by July 31 will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card and will be entered for a chance to win gas for a year. Memorial has offered paid time off to staff members who donate, Bishop said.

As a result of the blood shortage, some hospitals have been forced to slow the pace of elective surgeries until the supply stabilizes. Fortunately, Memorial and Lakewood have not had to take such drastic measures.

Despite the continued challenges brought on by the coronavirus, the outlook for the health system is looking up and looking forward, Bishop said. The connection between the community and medical facilities has been strengthened through the trials of the past 16 months, he said.

But both Bishop and Grah continue to advocate for more residents to get vaccinated, noting that it is critically important that society reach herd immunity. As of July 6, 56.7% of Long Beach residents have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to city data.

“We highly encourage those who have not yet been vaccinated to do so,” Grah said. “But we are cautiously optimistic and believe the worst is behind us.” ■



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Trash ‘smoothies’ could be future sources of fuel, but cities first need a plan to process organic waste



A Long Beach Waste Management truck picks up recycling in the Lakewood Village neighborhood, Wednesday, July 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

At a water pollution control plant in Carson, a trash “smoothie” is fed into a six-story tall “stomach” where an anaerobic digestion process will allow methane to be extracted and turned into fuel for cars and other biosolids like fertilizers.

The plant is operated by the Los Angeles County Sanitation District and it uses the extracted methane for a nearby gas station it operates in Carson that’s open to the public. The plant produces about 1,300 gasoline-gallon-equivalents per day.

Will Chen, a supervising engineer for the Los Angeles County Sanitation District, which operates the Carson site, said that they expect more and more “smoothie” trash to be delivered to the plant as new laws take effect in the coming months that require cities to divert organic waste from landfills and into facilities like this.

“The more slurry we receive in the coming months and coming years the more RNG [renewable natural gas] we’re going to be able to produce,” Chen said, estimating that about 4,000 tons of organic material could soon have to be processed in the region per day.

The reason why Chen is expecting such an increase is because a new state law

requiring that food scraps and yard waste be diverted from landfills to reduce methane emissions in California goes into effect Jan. 1.

Senate Bill 1383, otherwise known as the Short-Lived Climate Pollutants Organic Waste Methane Emissions bill, was signed into law in September 2016. It requires organic waste such as food scraps, yard waste and fibers from papers and cardboard to be separated from regular trash and recyclables and processed in ways similar to the plants in Puente Hills and Carson.

CalRecycle, the state agency in charge of the program, estimates that 20% of California’s methane emissions are generated from organic waste in landfills and that organic waste makes up half of what goes into the state’s trash dumps.

Lawmakers hope that the law can reduce organic waste disposal by 75% while also saving 20% of surplus edible food from being thrown out by 2025.

The law will be enforceable starting in January, but its passage did not include any funding from the state. That means cities like Long Beach have to figure out how it will comply with the new state law without the aid of state funding, which will likely result in increases to residential refuse bills.

Like other cities, Long Beach is expected to miss the enforcement deadline that is just months away, according to a recent city memo. But it will have to come into compliance soon.

Erin Rowland, a waste diversion and recycling officer in the city, said Long Beach is still trying to figure out how much the new program is going to cost.

It could include buying new trucks, issuing new green bins to customers and paying for haulers to transport the material to processing plants that accept organic waste. This month the city announced a pilot program that includes 115 local businesses that will collect food scraps that will be delivered to the Puente Hills facility.

Galindo Calderon owns one of those participating businesses. His East Long Beach Flame Broiler location has been part of the program since June and every night they take the leftover carrots, broccoli, beef and chicken that doesn’t make it into their bowls and put them in a bin that the city collects. Calderon said it’s been a painless experience.

“If I can do something to help, I’m OK with it,” Calderon said of the program that will soon become mandatory. “I hope it helps reduce the pollution.”

While the Carson facility can only handle food scraps, others can handle both

yard waste and food scraps and paper fibers, while newer technology at some private plants that the city doesn’t currently have access to allows for unsorted trash to be processed in compliance with the state’s new law.

“The technology does exist but if it’s feasible for us to access it is a different question,” Rowland said.

This could complicate things for Long Beach since it will likely only be issuing one new green can to customers who will be instructed to put all three types of materials into them. Rowland said that things could get easier as more sites are developed but the state currently has a need for about 150 more processing sites.

Rowland said the city is hopeful it can partner with a site that can handle all materials that will end up in the new green cans the city could soon be required to issue.

While there could be flexibility for cities like Long Beach in bringing its program online, the law allows jurisdictions to enforce the separation of organic materials with fines that can range from \$50 to \$500 depending on the type of violation starting January 2024.

Any violations occurring before that can be addressed with educational material, according to the law. ■

Heat-related blackouts less likely this year than last, experts say

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Less than a year after Long Beach residents experienced the first rolling blackouts in nearly two decades, the state's utility companies recently asked Californians to conserve power once again, voluntarily this time. As temperatures increase, should Long Beach brace for more blackouts in 2021?

The short answer: probably not.

The California Independent System Operator, the agency that's tasked with overseeing and ensuring the reliability of the state's power grid, said that it's better prepared to handle the heat this time around.

"We expect electricity supply conditions for the upcoming summer to be in better shape than last year," agency spokesperson Anne Gonzales said in an email. "But the power grid is still susceptible to stress during extreme heat waves that extend across the West."

With more power generators and battery storage coming online, the capacity of the grid to supply electricity during times of peak demand will be higher this year, leading experts to be more optimistic about its

reliability this summer. Still, this year won't be without its challenges.

The extreme drought the state has been experiencing since April 2020, high temperatures in neighboring states and wildfires all play a role in the reliability of the power grid.

Last year, hydroelectric power accounted for just over 10% of California's in-state power generation. With 85% of the state in a condition of extreme drought, there will be less water available to power hydroelectric generators than in previous years.

Heat waves affecting neighboring states, like the extremely high temperatures that hit the Pacific Northwest in recent weeks, mean those states have less power to export. This is bad news for California, which imported a quarter of its total electricity supply from out of state in 2019, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

"We need to be trading power with neighboring states," said Severin Borenstein, professor and faculty director of the Energy Institute at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business. "That is how we make the grid work. We are not first in line when they have a tight market. They only

sell to us what's left over."

Lastly, wildfires can interrupt transmission from outside and within the state. "That might make it difficult to get electricity from one area available to another area of the state where it's really needed," said Tyler Hodge, senior economist with the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Despite these challenges, experts are cautiously optimistic that the state will get through the year without another round of rolling blackouts.

According to a preliminary analysis of grid reliability by the state's independent system operator, chances for a Stage 3 alert, which commonly results in rolling blackouts, are lower this year than they were in 2020.

To improve the reliability of the grid, the agency said it will quadruple its battery storage capacity over the course of the summer, going from 500 megawatts at the end of April to 2,000 megawatts by August 1. Battery storage can absorb extra energy from solar generation during the day and inject it back into the grid after sunset, when energy demand continues to be high.

The independent system operator expects another 2,468 megawatts of capacity to come online by Sept. 21, mainly from new solar and wind generation. For comparison, one megawatt—if delivered consistently—can power an average of 750 homes.

"We have left no stone unturned to preserve reliability for Californians this summer," Elliot Mainzer, CEO of the California Independent System Operator, said in a multi-agency meeting in May.

But the agency will also be relying on individual consumers and businesses to help preserve the reliability of the power grid by reducing their usage as much as possible during times of peak demand. At times when the stress on the grid is especially high—usually on very hot days between 4 and 9 p.m.—alerts are likely to be issued, asking end users to voluntarily turn appliances off or down.

"Another extreme, persistent and widespread heat wave could cut off import supplies and make energy scarce at certain times," spokesperson Anne Gonzales said. "We expect to need to rely on consumer conservation to get us through the most difficult times this summer." ■

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Future of a locally owned utility in Long Beach remains uncertain

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

More renewable energy, lower prices for ratepayers, more local control—these are the benefits touted by proponents of Community Choice Aggregation entities, a form of locally owned, nonprofit utility that began to take hold in California during the last decade.

For years, Long Beach has studied the feasibility of forming or joining such an agency, spending \$230,000 in the process. Whether it will ever come to fruition remains uncertain. Staff has repeatedly advised the city council against the creation of a locally owned public utility at this time and recently reiterated this recommendation.

In a June 30 memo to the city manager's office, Energy Resources Director Robert Dowell and Chris Garner, general manager of the city's water department, outlined their most recent efforts in assessing the viability of a community choice aggregation entity for Long Beach.

Their conclusion: the cost savings for rate payers, which had been slim to begin with, had all but evaporated over the past year. The



Solar panels adorn the roof of the Bob Foster Civic Chambers in Downtown Long Beach. Photo by Thomas Cordova.

reasons, they said, were “complex, volatile and, as of now, unresolved,” and, according to Dowell, included financial issues caused by the pandemic and an exit fee charged by investor-owned utilities.

“The market still doesn’t warrant the city undertaking this kind of effort,” he said, noting that staff would continue to monitor market conditions to evaluate the feasibility of forming or joining a nonprofit utility in the future.

Dowell also said there needed to be more outreach to inform residents about the concept of community choice aggregation, an effort staff said has been stumped by the pandemic.

“Most people have no idea what a CCA is,” he said. When such a local utility is formed, however, ratepayers are automatically opted into the program, with little notification that the entity purchasing their power and negotiating the price has

changed, Dowell said. “They can always opt out, but they need to know that.”

An extensive community outreach campaign is necessary to create greater awareness and educate residents about the pros and cons of community choice aggregation, Dowell said. “This needs to go in front of a lot of people,” he added. “We’re coming up with a plan to do that.”

Clay Sandige, a local green energy advocate and chairperson of the Long Beach Community Choice Energy Working Group, said he agrees that there’s a need for more outreach and that he’s looking forward to the final report in August for a better understanding of city staff’s work on the issue over the past year.

Whether the result of the multi-year process will be for Long Beach to join or form a local electric utility or not, Sandige said the conversation has put more pressure on Southern California Edison to expand its sustainability efforts.

“If nothing else, it certainly got their attention,” he said. “And I do think it’s going to bring some action.” ■

AES wins highest industry award for new battery storage facility

■ **STAFF REPORT**

The AES Corporation, which recently opened one of the world’s largest battery energy storage facilities in Long Beach, recently received the US Edison Award by the Edison Electric Institute, the highest honor given in the electric power industry.

Completed in 2020 and opened in January, the Alamitos Battery Energy Storage System project made history as the first stand-alone project of its kind in the United States, built specifically in lieu of a gas peaking plant.

“We are honored to be recognized with the 2021 US Edison Award,” Andrés Gluski, AES President and CEO, said in a written statement. “Our thanks go out to Southern California Edison for their foresight and leadership in enabling this innovative project.”

Sources of renewable energy are inconsistent by nature—the sun rises and sets, the wind doesn’t blow at the same strength at all times—making the capability to store energy for use during times of low supply and high demand a crucial part of the state’s energy

transition.

Additionally, climate change and increasing population sizes have the potential to put more stress on the power grid.

AES’s 100-megawatt, 400-megawatt-hour facility provides the Southern California area with more reliable power during times of growing peak demand. When fully charged, it supplies power to tens of thousands of homes in milliseconds, the company said in a press release.

“As EEI member companies continue to advance their clean energy commitments, new technologies such as AES’s energy storage system are positively transforming the electric power industry,” said Energy Electric Institute President Tom Kuhn. “AES’s investment enhances the resilience, reliability and security of the energy grid while also benefiting the customers and the communities they serve every day. I applaud their innovative work and congratulate them for winning this prestigious award.”

This award is AES’s seventh Edison Award, the most awarded to any electric energy company in recent history. ■

SoCal Edison’s repairs to power infrastructure in Downtown nears completion, utility company says

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Extensive repairs to Southern California Edison’s infrastructure for delivering electricity to Downtown Long Beach businesses and residents are expected to be completed by the end of the year, a spokesperson for the utility said.

“They will sunset later this year,” spokesperson David Song said, while noting that maintenance will continue. “The work never stops,” Song added.

The repairs were required as part of a 2017 settlement agreement between the investor-owned utility and the California Public Utilities Commission, based on an investigation into multi-day blackouts in the Downtown area and underground explosions that sent manhole covers flying into the air in 2015.

The commission’s safety and enforcement division found significant problems with the utility’s

maintenance, inspection and management of its Long Beach network system, as well as its emergency response and communications during

the outages.

To rectify these issues, Edison and the commission agreed that the utility would invest \$11 million from its shareholder-provided settlement fund to upgrade its local network system and provide quarterly updates on the progress of the project, which was to be finished within four years after the settlement was adopted in October 2017.

According to Song, a majority of the work required by the settlement has been completed, including the permanent bolting down of manhole covers—to prevent them from becoming airborne again—and the installation of sensors monitoring the flow of power through the system.

However, Song said the total spend on those repairs only tallies up to approximately \$6.5 million so far, meaning that there is \$4.5 million left to be invested in enhancing Long Beach’s power network.

Where exactly that money will go is up to SCE and the utility commission to negotiate, but one thing is certain, Song said: “The money will be spent.” ■

With the future of Long Beach's waste-to-energy plant uncertain, so are law enforcement's options for disposing of seized drugs

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

After over three hours of driving from Wasco State Prison, a prison complex near Bakersfield that currently houses around 3,000 inmates, officers Thomas Miller and Oscar Navarro make their way up six flights of stairs to the large, odorous trash chute of the Southeast Resource Recovery Facility (SERRF) on Terminal Island.

The two correctional officers came to Long Beach to dispose of drugs. Prisons, police departments and federal law enforcement agencies all frequent the waste-to-energy plant to burn their seized contraband.

In total, the power plant has agreements with approximately 200 law enforcement agencies, with officers from 35-40 agencies visiting the plant per month, according to Bureau Manager Alan Foley.

But while law enforcement agencies seize more and more drugs every year, the future of the trash-burning, energy-producing facility remains uncertain. Currently, SERRF is one of only two facilities in the state offering that service and its contract to operate expires in 2024.

After its 30-year contract with Southern California Edison expired in 2018, the plant entered a power-purchasing agreement with the California Independent System Operator, the entity tasked with operating and maintaining the supply and demand balance of the state's transmission grid.

The revenues from that agreement, however, represent a fraction of the earnings made from the contract with Southern California Edison.

While the power plant continues to burn 400,000 tons of trash, generating enough electricity to power 35,000 homes a year, its revenues are down to approximately \$6 million, according to Foley, a quarter of the \$24 million it once earned from the investor-owned utility.

The city has extended its contract to run SERRF until 2024, but beyond that



California State Department of Correction officers Oscar Navarro, left, and Thomas Miller, throw boxes of narcotics and drug-related paraphernalia confiscated at the Wasco State Prison into an incinerator at the Southeast Resource Recovery Facility in Long Beach. Photo by Stephen Carr.

date, the future of the facility remains uncertain. "We don't have any answers yet," Foley said. "There's a possibility that it will close and there's a possibility it will stay open."

Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies have as much of a need to get rid of confiscated drugs as ever. The amount of narcotics U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, the power plant's largest law enforcement client, seized in California has increased steadily over the past three years. Last year, the agency's field offices and border patrol stations in the state confiscated 264,000 pounds of drugs, according to its drug seizure statistics for the fiscal year.

Cannabis accounts for the vast majority of contraband seized, with metham-

phetamine and cocaine coming in second and third, respectively.

SERRF doesn't closely track the amount of drugs it burns each year, but Foley estimated the current average to be about 450,000 pounds and confirmed that the weight has increased in recent years. According to a Los Angeles Times article published in June 1992, the facility expected to burn an estimated 50,000 pounds of drugs per year at the time—a fraction of the weight it burns today.

If the power plant were to close down, law enforcement agencies might find themselves in a pinch, similar to the one they were in when the state approached SERRF to start the drug-burning program.

Before law enforcement agencies came to SERRF—or its sister facility in Stanislaus County—every department followed its own policy on disposing of confiscated drugs, with some burning them in open pits in the desert, in crematoriums or hospital incinerators.

"People would try to do it any way they can, because there was no guidance," said Joseph Latta, a retired police lieutenant and president of Evidence Control Systems Inc., a company that advises police departments across the country on handling evidence.

Then in the late 1980s, California's environmental agencies decided that cocaine and certain other drugs were hazardous substances that needed special treatment. Following regulations passed in 1989, the incineration of cocaine was completely banned for a period of time, causing confiscated drugs to pile up in evidence lockers across the state.

"They basically outlawed the burning of narcotics, certain kinds of incinerators," Foley remembers the regulatory environment of the time. "So where they used to take them, they couldn't take them anymore."

In 1992, four years into the waste-to-energy plant's existence, Foley said the power plant received a letter from the state asking them to allow law enforcement agencies to dispose of seized drugs in their incinerator. "This is how we were approached: We need to do this, there's no place for us to go, our evidence lockers are getting full," Foley said.

Since then, SERRF has been the go-to place for California law enforcement to incinerate narcotics.

"I cannot remember ever going anywhere else," said Latta, who worked for the Burbank Police Department for 30 years, including in the property and evidence section, before becoming a consultant in the field. "It's just been a long-time fixture."

Property and evidence disposal is often a neglected portion of many police departments' responsibilities, Latta noted, leaving the shelves of evidence lockers in some departments lined with drugs seized anytime from the 1990s to today.

But for federal agencies like Customs and Border Patrol, seized narcotics can quickly fill entire warehouses, making disposal a higher priority. Without SERRF, all law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction in California would have to find other options, an issue they haven't dealt with in three decades. "Here in the state, nobody's even looked at anything else since the 1990s," Latta said. ■



California State Department of Correction officers Thomas Miller, left, and Oscar Navarro, unload boxes of narcotics and drug related paraphernalia for incineration at the Southeast Resource Recovery Facility in Long Beach, Tuesday, July 6, 2021. Photo by Stephen Carr.

Oil wells

(Continued from Page 1)

more than \$90 million but, despite the challenges of the past year, Dowell said he fully expected to be able to cover the full cost when the time comes.

The city also is responsible for mitigating former well subsidence—the gradual sinking of land area that occurs after oil has been extracted, which requires the injection of fluids—to the tune of \$186 million. According to Dowell, the city already has set aside sufficient funds.

Despite not drilling since 2019, Signal Hill Petroleum, which operates hundreds of active and inactive wells in the small city, production has remained flat, according to Executive Vice President and COO David Slater. The company expects to produce around one million barrels this year and anticipates restarting new drilling in the fourth quarter, Slater said.

“From our perspective, looking at geopolitics, supply and demand, economies reopening, prices are more likely to go up than go down,” Slater said. “But we have no crystal ball.”

Global oil production has not kept up with demand, Daniel Yergin, vice chairman of IHS Markit, an information provider, recently told CNBC. The price of oil could very well break the \$80 per barrel mark for the first time since October 2014, he added.

Rapidly increasing demand outpacing supply has caused gas prices to jump, particularly in Southern California, which often sees increases thanks to the required summer blends, Slater said. Demand is actually higher now than pre-pandemic, he added.

With most of its wells a stone’s throw from residential and commercial buildings, safety remains paramount to Signal Hill Petroleum, Slater said. Even while significantly reducing operational spending amid the pandemic, the company focused on maintaining its infrastructure. With more revenue coming in, the company is redoubling its infrastructure investment.

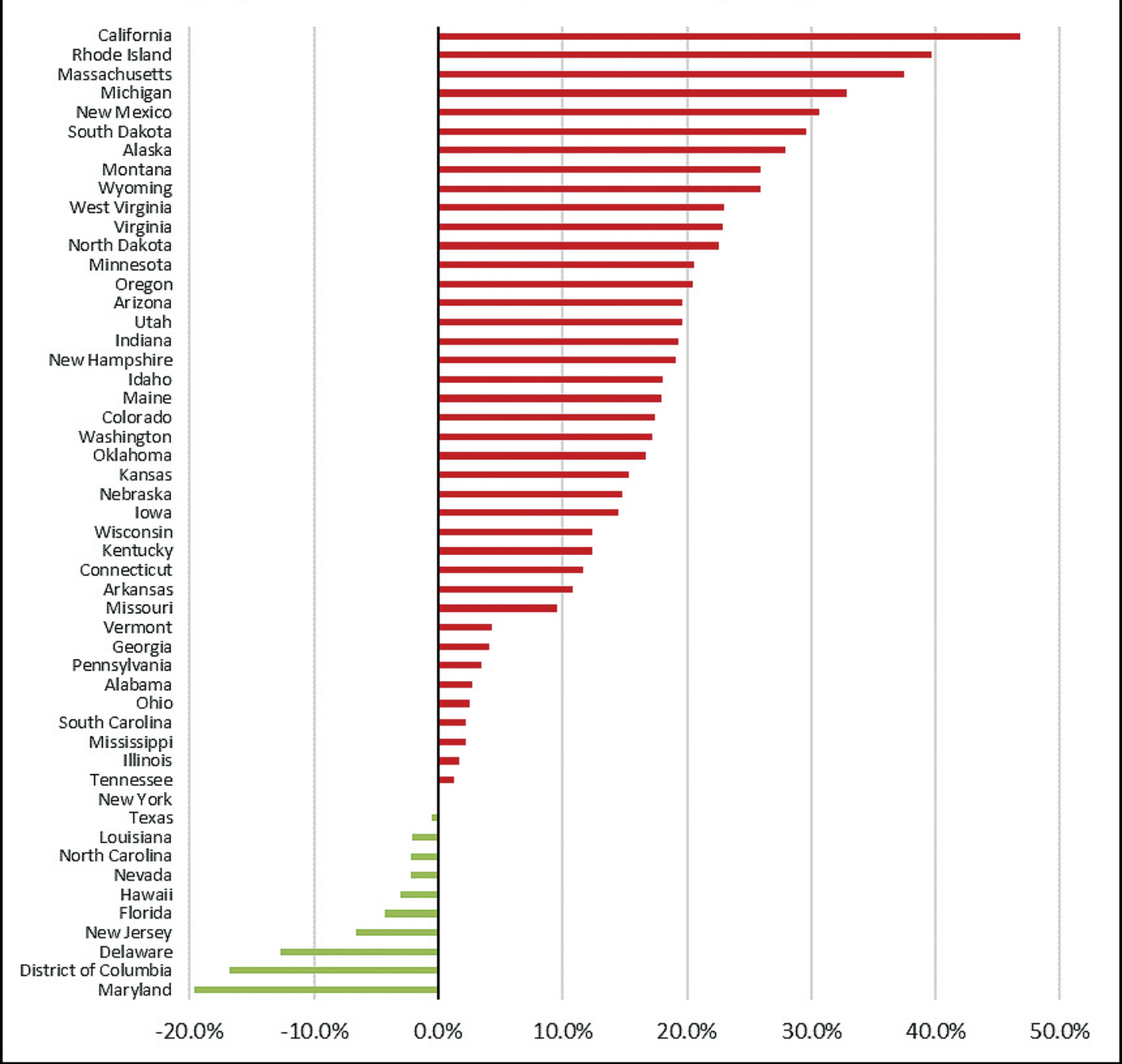
“We have several fairly significant infrastructure projects underway right now,” Slater said. “We do a high level of integrity testing of all our pipelines and facilities to ensure they are in good working order.”

Overall, Slater said the company is in great shape and is working on a number of deals to acquire smaller operators. For legal reasons, Slater did not provide details on the potential acquisitions.

While the industry appears to be thriving, oil producers—including Signal Hill Petroleum and the city—always have one eye on state and federal legislators. Slater said there are

Change in Average Annual Residential Electric Bill: April 2021 vs. 2010

Source: US Energy Information Administration, 12-month moving average



Graph by the California Center For Jobs & the Economy.

a number of active bills that would impact the industry. He declined to identify specific bills but said the company supports some and opposes others based on cost-benefit analysis.

“We are working hard to be a partner in achieving climate goals and support renewable energy in all forms,” Slater said. “But we also are very staunch advocates for having a diverse energy supply until the potential renewable energy replacements are robust and reliable.”

Some of the legislation is pushing toward renewable energy too quickly, while simultaneously pulling back on fossil fuels, Slater said. But renewable energy production has not scaled up to a level to replace traditional fossil fuels, he said, which creates concerns about blackouts due to energy shortages, especially during warmer summer months.

Californians already pay a premium for fuel and energy, according to a California Center for Jobs and the Economy report. Electricity prices

in the state are 65.2% above the national average and remain the sixth highest in the nation.

From 2010 to April 2021, the average annual residential electric bill in California increased 46.8%, compared to an average 5.9% increase in other states, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Since 2010, electricity cost increases in California have far outpaced other states, with costs actually dropping in 10 states and remaining unchanged in New York.

Commercial and industrial electricity prices are even worse, coming in at 79.6% and 128.4% over the national average, respectively.

As of July 1, California’s fuel tax increased \$0.006 for a total of \$0.511 per gallon, keeping the state’s fuel taxes the highest in the country. After a 10 cent increase from May, the state’s average gas price in June was \$1.26 per gallon above the national average, the highest in the country. At \$4.21 per gallon, the state had the second highest diesel price just be-

hind Hawaii.

Even with strong prices and forthcoming drilling, Dowell could only describe the oil production industry in Long Beach as “surviving.” In the past, the city was supported by contracted service providers mostly based in the LA Basin. Today, after many businesses moved or shuttered, Dowell said a lot of services are provided by companies as far away as Bakersfield.

California Resources Corporation filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in August and has since restructured and downsized operations, Dowell said. Similar actions by other companies are inevitable as society moves closer to the end of extraction activities, he added.

“Stronger prices help, but overall we’re one of the more heavily regulated industries to start with,” Dowell said. “Between the legislative side and the business aspect, it’s becoming more and more challenging. But we’re hanging in there.” ■



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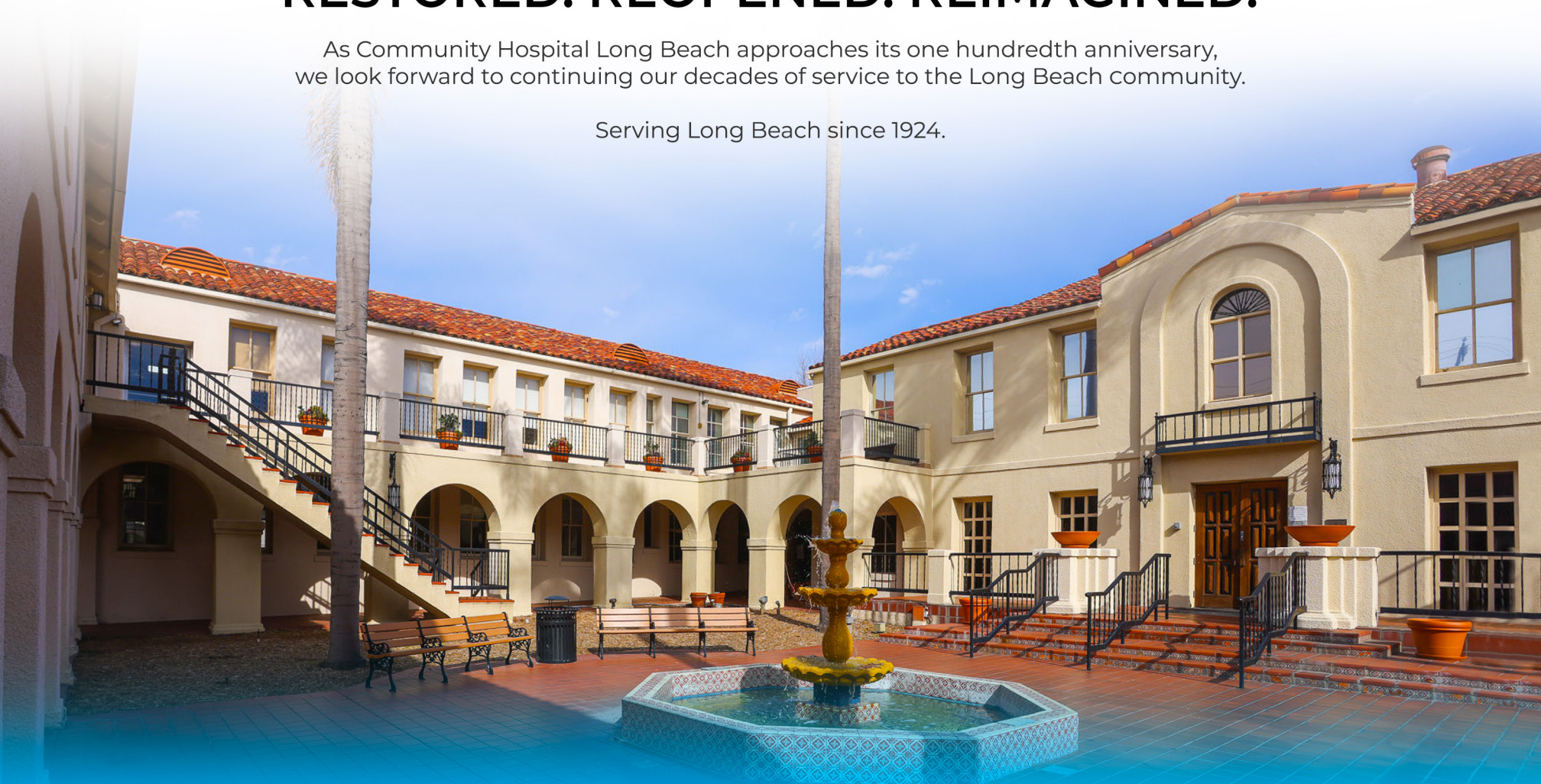


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