STRONG REBOUND EXPECTED FOR RETAIL, OFFICE REAL ESTATE, WHILE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR STAYS HOT

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

As Long Beach and the world prepare to enter year three of the coronavirus pandemic, local real estate experts predict 2022 will be a year of rebound and growth for the retail and office sectors—which faltered as a result of the virus—while industrial real estate continues to thrive amid the chaos.

Retail
After taking a pounding due to forced closures, retail real estate has rebounded and is expected to have a strong 2022, according to Pat Weibel, senior vice president at SRS Real Estate Partners. Weibel said there continues to be demand for high-quality retail space in Southern California, which is backed by the recent sale of Long Beach Exchange and the offers he has seen on the Vons in the East Village.

The Vons location was listed for $43.3 million in November, and Weibel said there have been numerous offers on the property. A buyer is expected to be announced before the end of the month, he said.

Retail that proved itself throughout the pandemic—namely grocery stores and markets, fast and fast-casual food, and outdoor retail centers—continue to be attractive to investors, Weibel said. Drug stores also are popular retail options, Weibel noted, saying the recent announcement that CVS is closing nearly 10% of its stores over the next three years has caused some movement in the market despite the company not announcing which locations will be shuttered.

For these types of locations, leasing teams have seen big growth in rents and sales prices, Weibel said. The limited availability in Southern California continues to drive rents up for national chains.

“Groups like In N Out, Chick-fil-A, Raising Cane’s, Starbucks—drive-thru users—are fighting each other for that space,” Weibel said. “Rent has gone up a good amount and it’s been a very, Work set to begin on long-awaited project in North Long Beach

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

A major new project is slated to break ground in North Long Beach early this year as developers continue to pour money into the area.

LAB Holding, the company behind the The LAB Anti-Mall in Costa Mesa and the Anaheim Packing District, expects to start construction on The Beat—a project that will redevelop the Atlantic Avenue corridor in North Long Beach—in the first quarter of this year, according to the firm’s CEO Shaheen Sadeghi.

The project will include new housing, retail, performance and gallery space. LAB Holding plans to both revamp existing buildings and build new construction, including an 84-unit townhome development that will be anchored by three new restaurants and an outreach center for Long Beach City College.

“Atlantic is in real desire of some love, and that’s the opportunity that excites us,” Sadeghi said. “I think the

Continued on page 8

The World Trade Center office tower in Downtown Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Continued on page 10

Long Beach eyes simpler approval process for ADUs

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Long Beach will look into creating a program that could provide pre-approved accessory dwelling unit layouts to interested property owners in an effort to speed up housing production in the city.

The City Council voted last week for a plan to be brought back in the coming months that outlines how the permitting process for ADUs, commonly referred to as “granny flats,” could be sped up, possibly by supplying pre-approved layouts to cut down the approval

Continued on page 4
Real Estate
Vol. XXXV No. 1

In This Issue:

Real Estate

Long Beach Exchange sold to San Jose firm

Affordable housing project to break ground in Central Long Beach

LBUSD board moves forward in process to sell 2 vacant properties

NEWSWATCH

Fernando Haro

The revival of the former Verizon building in Downtown Long Beach, a 1986 structure on Ocean Boulevard that has sat vacant for the better part of a decade, is nearly complete.

Work to reinvigorate the building as a residential space began in 2017, and now the 11-story, 106-unit apartment building is slated to open in the spring.

Michael Bohn, senior principal for the project’s design firm Studio One Eleven, said converting the building at 200 W. Ocean Boulevard — rather than creating an entirely new structure — produced a unique project.

“People just didn’t seem to work with the bones of the existing building,” he said. “We ended up being a building where we have a great variety of unit types.”

The ground floor, for example, has higher ceilings than the rest of the building, which lent itself to creating lofts rather than the traditional apartment units that can be found elsewhere in the development.

“We have those lofts so you kind of live, eat, work on the ground floor,” Bohn said, “and then there’s a staircase that takes you up to your sleeping quarters.”

Particularly now, when many people have made what may be a permanent transition to working from home, he said, the loft units can provide the best of both worlds. But not everyone prefers that style of living, and the project offers more traditional living quarters as well.

“The idea of having ground floor lofts is that somebody that occupies that space — if they were working from home, they can feel connected to the street,” Bohn said. “If you were in a commercial vibe to it than when you’re on the upper floors. Those can feel more residential and are less connected directly to the street.”

And if neither lofts nor the traditional studio, one-bedroom or two-bedroom apartment units appeal, there’s yet another option: two-story penthouse townhomes.

“The roof originally had all of the original mechanical equipment, and you have to think about: With a building this old, the mechanical was out-of-date and much heavier than what you need today,” Bohn said. “So we made to the retail center, saying that if the firm would increase the value of LBBJ through “best-in-class management, leasing, marketing and placemaking” the firm didn’t respond to a request for comment.

DJM’s portfolio includes Huntington Beach’s Bella Terra, for which PGIM is also a partner, as well as Pacific City in Huntington Beach, Lido Marina Village in Newport Beach, Lakewood Square in Lakewood and five other Southern California retail centers.

“Although COVID undoubtedly impacted retail across all sectors, we’re now experiencing a tremendous return to growth across our entire portfolio, with foot traffic and sales numbers surpassing even pre-pandemic figures,” Cross said. “This rebound, which reinvigorates the ever-changing nature of retail, is largely in part to the outdoor nature of our properties as well as thoughtful community programming and relevant, region-specific merchandising.

With the exception of the large, vacant space formerly home to Orchard Supply Hardware, the center has been highly successful. Its major anchor tenants include Whole Foods Market, Old Navy, Nordstrom, Target, Macy’s, Pannell, Ulta Beauty and In N Out Burger.

The center is home to some of the area’s best fitness concepts and eateries, including locations inside the 175,000-square-foot Hangar food hall, which pays homage to the site’s past as McDonnell Douglas and Boeing facilities where military and commercial aircraft were constructed.

Burnham-Ward partners Scott Burnham and Bryan Ward did not respond to multiple requests for comment as to why they decided to sell the property.

“Long Beach Exchange is a perfect example of what retail should look like in the future,” Burnham said in the announcement. “DJM and its partners will be great stewards for this asset going forward.”

Conversion of former Verizon building in Downtown Long Beach is nearly complete

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

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**City Council agrees to sell Long Beach armory building for $5.1 million**

**BY JASON RUZI / Reporter**

The Long Beach City Council approved an agreement last month with a development group to purchase the Seventh Street Armory building that could be converted into an arts-focused facility adjacent to a new affordable housing project.

Gundy Partners, LP, which includes St. Anthony High School, Pacoima, and Howard CDEM, is expected to build a 64-unit all affordable housing unit in the parking lot adjacent to the armory building as well as various improvements to Gumbiner Park adjacent to the project.

The city’s development of the armory building will be used by St. Anthony but also available to the public as a performance space.

The construction window for the project is expected to be 18 months and for leasing to begin in the 28th month to figure out those details. Holder said he expects construction to last about 18 months and for leasing to begin in the fall of 2023.

Overall, the project includes 10 affordable-rate units mixed in with affordable-rate units in a bigger 86-unit housing development. While the total number of units has been reduced, the current plan will result in more affordable units being built. The original proposal was for about 40 of the 86 units as affordable housing. The Seventh Street Armory building is eligible to be listed in the National Registry of Historic Places due to its association with World War II and its Art Deco architecture.

The building was completed in 1930 and was one of 10 built by the California Army National Guard. The guard relocated to the Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos in 2018. It initially served as home to the 2nd Battalion, 251st Coastal Artillery unit, an anti-aircraft regiment in the lead up to World War II. The unit was called into service on September 1940, over a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor thrust the United States into the war.

Editor’s note: Pacific is the parent company of Pacific Community Media, which owns the Long Beach Business Journal.
REAL ESTATE

Island Village residents live in splendid isolation

BY TIM GROBATY / Columnist

Island life, as anyone who’s spent a lot of time on one can tell you, isn’t for everyone. Island fever can set in after any length of time as a sense of disconnection from the greater world; a separation from friends and family who aren’t inhabitants of your island; a lack of stimulation from cultural diversity; difficulty in accessing amenities that you had grown accustomed to. A feeling that you are, somehow, a territory of a country, there’s still a feeling of neglect.

Still, some find the relative isolation comforting and secure. You have everything that you really need. No Starbucks, no Walmart, no Home Depot, but, you can take whatever transportation you have access to and make the journey to town where you can find these places and, anyway, there’s always Amerson.

The residents of Island Village, a small, secure — and fairly isolated for a Long Beach Neighborhood — sometimes feel their own sense of island fever. The 184-home tract just off Second Street, east of Studebaker Road bordered by the San Gabriel River and the Orange County Flood control basin, isn’t an island in the geological sense, it’s not totally surrounded by water, though it does border on the San Gabriel River and the Orange County Flood Control Basin.

The residents of Island Village have torn allegiances between Orange County — particularly Seal Beach and Long Beach, which annexed the previously unincorporated area of LA County when its developer, Board Development Co., of Newport Beach, broke ground for construction in 1972. Since then, there have been a couple of attempts by some Island Village residents to either slip under the nearby Orange Curtain to become part of Seal Beach, or to take leave of the Long Beach Unified School District and join the Los Alamitos district. Neither efforts have been successful. Amusing to another city in another county is extraordinarily complicated and difficult, and as far as schooling goes, the Los Al district wasn’t enthusiastic about adding new students at the time when Los Alamitos High School was in huge demand.

So Islanders continue to go to the nearest sites, which, though nearest aren’t overly convenient: Kettering Elementary, 1.2 miles away, Rogers Middle School, 2.2 miles; and Wilson High School, 5 miles.

To somewhat mollify the residents of Island Village who were feeling isolated from the rest of Long Beach, the city in 2003 extended the Second Street name to replace Westminster Boulevard past Studebaker and eastward up to the entrance of the island.

The planned community of Island Village, which opened in the summer of 1973 with four home models with three or four bedrooms priced from $40,950 to $46,950 (at 7.25% interest or more), features a security gate and private streets that wind their way through 20 acres of wandering greenbelts and past some of the complex’s amenities — two community pools, a large clubhouse and a tot lot and other greenspaces for the kids.

The homes are detached but built close together, which gives them a bit of privacy while being close to each other. The homes have two or three stories, depending on the floor plan.

The fact that homes don’t go on the market very frequently might indicate that people are content to live in the area, despite having to hop in the car to go just about anywhere other than a swimming pool or a clubhouse. Given that, many do their shopping and dining in Seal Beach.

There’s one Island Village home on the market now, at 7029 Mariner Way, listed by Realtor Craig Smith at $849,900. With four bedrooms and three baths spread over 1,813 square feet, it’s the largest of the four floor plans in Island Village.

The home has a covered patio accessible from the kitchen and the downstairs bedroom. The roof is tile and the front of the house faces a large greenbelt. The homes in Island Village don’t have big backyards but, instead, private courtyards along the side of the house.

In addition to your mortgage payments, there is a $250 per month HOA fee.

The living room of the Island Village home at 7029 Mariner Way. Listing photo.

One of two community pools in Island Village. Listing photo.

Planning Commission clears way for new 90-unit building at Century Villages at Cabrillo

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Demolition for new housing at Century Villages at Cabrillo has begun as the affordable housing community makes way for a new development that could result in a net gain of 50 new units on its 27-acre campus in West Long Beach. The Villages at Cabrillo offers permanent and short-term housing for 700 veterans as well as families and other individuals. Brian D’Andrea, the senior vice president for Century, said that the 40 units being demolished were vacant and the resulting project will replace them at a more than two-to-one rate.

The proposed project will replace old Naval housing stock that had been rehabilitated with newer, more energy-efficient apartments, D’Andrea said. The resulting building will provide tenants with private units instead of the congregate-living where rooms were private but residents shared a kitchen and bathrooms.

Villages at Cabrillo has roughly 1,500 people living on its campus on any given night, D’Andrea said, and because some of its housing is transitional, it actually serves over 1,900 people on an annual basis.

The city’s last homeless count showed that 175 veterans were either unsheltered or in some other form of shelter, and D’Andrea said the project could help bring some of those people off the streets and into Cabrillo’s campus.

“This will address 50 of those, incrementally, but the reality of this is that these units are all going to be leaned up,” D’Andrea said of the 90 new units proposed in the project. “This should move the needle significantly in addressing the incidents of veteran homelessness.”

Part of the project’s process was having the Long Beach Planning Commission approve a lot split at the property, a technical move that will redraw the parcel lines on the campus to allow for the project to move forward with construction. The commission voted unanimously on Dec. 16 to approve it.

D’Andrea said that the roughly $44 million project is being financed through a variety of vouchers issued by the federal government to support veterans being housed, along with other commitments from the state, county and even the Long Beach Community Investment Company.

With all of the funding committed, D’Andrea said the group could break ground in the spring and complete the project by 2023.
**Commercial Real Estate**

**Continued from previous page**

very competitive pricing.

Even before the pandemic, there have been closures of some large big-box stores locally and across the country, including K-Mart and Toys R Us. And COVID-19 did not help that situation.

“Throughout the pandemic, there have been some very sad and vacated stores, like movie theaters and other large tenant holdings have gone out of business,” Weibel said. “And traditional leasing teams have really shown the ability to backfill those spaces as long as they have future emerging tenants.”

“So even when there have been some sort of closures announced, we believe there is opportunity to fill those voids with new exciting retail/food propositions.”

New fitness concepts and small-format grocery have proven popular, including smaller big-box locations, as is the case with LA Food Co. in Southeast Long Beach.

“The former Orchard Supply Hardware store at Long Beach Exchange has sat vacant since Lowe’s closed at OSLA locations in August 2018, months after the Long Beach location opened. Thursday, April 1. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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Long Beach eviction ban for major remodels extended through end of next month

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Evictions issued so landlords can remodel their units will continue to be banned through the end of February as the Long Beach City Council waits for a new ordinance to be prepared and to vote on later this year.

The council first initiated a temporary ban in July after the state issued similar rules to protect tenants from being displaced during the pandemic. The state law blocked a previous “loophole” that tenants’ rights groups said allowed landlords to game the system to evict tenants if they pulled papers for construction and issued a 60-day notice to vacate.

Long Beach’s temporary ban expired at the end of 2021. A fight over what “substantial” means when it comes to home improvements or relocation assistance required of landlords found in violation of the city ordinance.

The council voted to extend the temporary ban to the end of February at its Jan. 4 meeting. Evictions that were served due to unit remodeling between Dec. 31 and Jan. 4 would be covered by the extended ban.

The council is expected to vote on a new ordinance before the extended moratorium expires next month.

North Long Beach

Continued from cover

Michelle Obama library that the city had developed was obviously a great start, so we are right across the street.”

Sagedish said he hopes to both pay homage to the history of the neighborhood and create an environment where local businesses can thrive.

“I think our job is to deliver the goods and the services to the beautiful people that are there already, and I think it’s important—I can’t do this with another Starbucks and a Subway and a happy meal,” he said. “I don’t think that’s going to move the cultural needle. So what we’re trying to do is bring in things that bring people together and create an area for them to have a home and have a conversation.”

Sagedish said work is underway to bring in a local coffee shop, a brewery, a jazz museum, a ceramic-making school and music venue.

“We have a good list of people that, quite honestly, we have been working with for a couple years,” he said. “Unfortunately, COVID hit the pause button, and we’re kind of back at it, but now it’s starting to come back, and we’re excited!”

LAB is not the only development fund, though, that has been attracted to the neighborhood in recent years. Uptown Commons, a project at Artesia Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue that brought new restaurants and the neighborhood’s first bank to North Long Beach, celebrated its grand opening last year.

And this is the way: Despite some coronavirus-induced setbacks, Westland Real Estate Group President Yanki Greenspan said he is still committed to The Uptown (not to be confused with Uptown Commons), an expansion and redevelopment of the historic retail center at Atlantic Avenue and Harding Street.

“We’ve got our plans out for a couple years, and unfortunately the pandemic has really messed up the plans for gym openings, and so we’re sort of in a holding pattern now until we see where things go with construction on the project that began in the fall,” Greenspan said. “And that’s the kind of momentum that is likely to be a significant advancement for the neighborhood.”

A rendering of one parcel that will make up The Uptown, an expansion of the building center at Atlantic Avenue and Harding Street.

Michael Brandt/Long Beach Business Journal

The council is expected to vote on a new ordinance before the extended moratorium expires next month.

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

The Bixby Knolls-based software development company Laserfiche is slated to move into its new headquarters in early February or early March—but the firm’s plans for the property look a little different than when construction on the project began in 2019. “It’s an open seating environment,” Bohn said. “So I think this is kind of the cherry on top that says, ‘Hey, this is still laser-focused on making this a user-friendly, high-quality space for the people that work there.”

The new Laserfiche headquarters in Bixby Knolls Friday, Jan. 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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The new Laserfiche headquarters in Bixby Knolls Friday, Jan. 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Laserfiche

here's essentially a physical presence, but there are an important aspect of the project that has become newly important amid the pandemic. Wacker also said he was excited about the way the layout will foster more collaboration.

“Now, Laserfiche officials expect to offer a hybrid workplace for the foreseeable future, and Wacker estimated that 50-to-60% of the site’s employees will be in the office at any given time.

Laserfiche CEO Chris Wacker told me. “So I think this is kind of the cherry on top that says, ‘Hey, this is still laser-focused on making this a user-friendly, high-quality space for the people that work there.”

The new Laserfiche headquarters in Bixby Knolls Friday, Jan. 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Laserfiche

"Long Beach Boulevard, in the ’50s and ’60s, was this creative corridor, which really represents technological innovation, is kind of a milestone because there haven’t been any new buildings built on Long Beach Boulevard for over 30 years," Bohn told me. "I think this is kind of the cherry on top that says, ‘Hey, this is still a relevant creative corridor,’ and this is an investment of a brand new building—which was inspired by a Killington-based designed building next door—I think says a lot about the continuity of history and moving forward.”

"Long Beach Boulevard, in the ’50s and ’60s, was this creative corridor, which really represents technological innovation, is kind of a milestone because there haven’t been any new buildings built on Long Beach Boulevard for over 30 years," Bohn told me. "I think this is kind of the cherry on top that says, ‘Hey, this is still a relevant creative corridor,’ and this is an investment of a brand new building—which was inspired by a Killington-based designed building next door—I think says a lot about the continuity of history and moving forward.”
Virgin Orbit now on Nasdaq; first mission of 2022 to blast off this month

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Long Beach-based manufacturer and launch service provider Virgin Orbit is now officially a publicly traded company following the completion of its merger with special purpose acquisition company NextGen Acquisitions.

NextGen stockholders approved the previously announced business combination on Dec. 28. Two days later the space company was listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange as VORB.

“This marks another major milestone for Virgin Orbit in a year that has seen us prove our technology and place satellites successfully into orbit for commercial enterprises, the US government, and for our allies,” CEO Dan Hart said in a statement.

Hart, along with other Virgin Orbit senior leadership and Richard Branson, rang the opening bell for the Nasdaq on Jan. 7.

Virgin Orbit was not the only Long Beach-based space firm to go public last year. Rocket Lab trading began on Nasdaq Aug. 25.

The transaction is expected to raise $228 million to fund the development of Virgin Orbit after a successful year, the company stated. In January 2021, Virgin Orbit’s LauncherOne rocket reached space for the first time, following a failed test in July and August.

In addition to delivering 19 satellites to orbit last year over two launches, Virgin Orbit announced multiple contracts for dozens of launches, including two deals with two Japan-based companies for a combined 30 launches.

“The capital raised through this transaction combined with our access to the public markets, will enable us to scale rocket manufacturing and extend our space solutions business and product development while we continue to expand globally through key partnerships with customers worldwide,” Hart said.

Aside from taking its services to Japan, the firm inked a deal last year with the Brazilian Space Agency and the Brazilian Air Force to bring orbital launch capabilities to Brazil, which has never completed a successful domestic launch to orbit. The firm also is set to bring launch to the United Kingdom for the first time, operating from Spaceport Cornwall in support of the UK Space Agency and Royal Air Force.

“The space economy is developing rapidly, and Virgin Orbit is extremely well-positioned to benefit as the industry grows in the years to come,” NexGen co-founders George Matson and Gregory Summe said in a statement. “The company’s differentiated technology drives huge benefits to customers in the national security, civil, and commercial markets around the world. We are excited to help Virgin Orbit progress into the next chapter of its exciting journey as a public company.

While traditional rockets launch from stationary platforms on land, Virgin Orbit’s LauncherOne system takes off from under the wing of a modified Boeing 747 airplane in flight.

The system allows for more flexibility since it only requires an airport, rather than a full space launch facility.

Post-launch rehearsal for Virgin Orbit’s first mission of 2022, dubbed “Show the Clouds,” has been completed, and the flight window is set to open Jan. 12.

The mission is expected to carry several research and development satellites from multiple government agencies as experiments in space-based communications and in-space navigation, as well as a univeristy payload sponsored by NASA. The Lambda Upper will carry two nanosatellites for Poland-based Satelligence.

Port of Long Beach receives $52.3 million in federal funding for massive rail project

BY CRYSTAL MEIBLA / Reporter

The Port of Long Beach was awarded a $52.3 million grant in federal funding to pay for a massive rail project at the port complex in West Long Beach, officials announced last month.

The Pier B On-Deck Support Facility, launched a decade ago, is an $870 million rail project that will reconfigure 171 acres of land south of Alamitos Street and the 705 Freeway to improve cargo movement via a rail system.

The on-deck rail will directly transfer containers to and from marine terminals by train, which would reduce truck traffic and pollution. One double-stacked train, for instance, would eliminate 750 trucks off the road, port officials say.

The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration or MARAD, the federal agency awarding the Port of Long Beach the grant, is also still reviewing a lengthy Environmental Impact Report, which must be approved before the port could receive more funding from MARAD.

“This is great news to see at the end of what will be our busiest year ever,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Curotto said in a statement. “It will help to move cargo more efficiently through the Port, getting needed products and goods to homes and businesses across America faster.”

Previously, Port of Long Beach spokesman Lee Peterson said that the port was awarded other federal funding for Pier B, including more than $30 million in 2013 from the Federal Regional Surface Transportation Program, and about $83.5 in 2015 from the Federal Congestion Mitigation And Air Quality Improvement Program, both to pay for construction.

MARAD’s Port Infrastructure Development Program is providing the grant for Long Beach as well as a $5.2 million in grants for the Port of Oakland, according to government officials.

The program’s funding is specifically designed for capital improvement projects at U.S. seaports.

“California’s ports are the busiest in America and are the gateways for the bulk of products moving in and out of the United States,” Sen. Alex Padilla said in a statement. “The pandemic has underscored the importance—and the urgency—of modernizing our port infrastructure.”

Construction for the Pier B On-Deck Rail Support Facility is scheduled to begin in 2023, with the first set of tracks expected to be built by 2025. More tracks will come in 2030, followed by a project completion in 2032, according to the port.

Korean fried chicken chain, Mom’s Touch, to open new location in North Long Beach

BY CHEANTAY JENSEN / Reporter

South Korea’s fried chicken darling, Mom’s Touch, will be opening in North Long Beach early this year, according to the company. It will mark the chain’s second location in Southern California. The first opened in Gardena over the summer.

The internationally famed chain, which boasts over 1,500 locations across South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, will be taking over the former WaBa Grill at the Plaza on the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Harding Street, according to a real estate report by Eola LA. Unlike its Gardena counterpart, the Port of Long Beach location will include a drive-thru.

“We are very excited to introduce the authentic Mom’s Touch fried chicken to Long Beach,” said Jane Kim, the business development manager for the Korean fried chicken chain, Mom’s Touch.

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The problems Fern’s Garden had in Gardena continued to escalate.

Fern’s Garden in Belmont Shore closes after 17 years

BY TIM GROBATY / Reporter

The last blossoms have fallen for Fern’s Garden, the crafts shop that sold the works of local and fair-trade artisans and a must-stop location at girl-giving times over the last 17 years on Belmont Shore’s Second Street. The store closed Dec. 31.

“I’m good, but a little sad after such a nice long run in Long Beach, but I feel we made the best decision for our future,” said the shop’s owner, Fern Solomon. “Fern and her husband moved to Berkeley about five years ago to be closer to their children, all three of whom live in the Bay Area after graduating from UC Davis, Berkeley and San Francisco State..."all paid for by chimes and all of the things we’ve sold," she said proudly.

They also opened a store in Berkeley, which Solomon continues to operate.

The problems Fern’s Garden had in Belmont Shore mirror similar problems at its Gardena counterpart.

“I would like to see one of the Long Beach businesses for such a long time at least continue to sell our products,” said the shop’s owner, Fern Solomon. “Fern and her husband moved to Berkeley about five years ago to be closer to their children, all three of whom live in the Bay Area after graduating from UC Davis, Berkeley and San Francisco State...”all paid for by chimes and all of the things we’ve sold,” she said proudly.

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**CDC advises people to avoid cruise travel ‘regardless of vaccination status’**

**BY ANTHONY PIGNATARO / Reporter**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned that cruise travel should be avoided by people who are unvaccinated, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated against COVID-19. In a Dec. 30 advisory, the CDC also warned that Cruise Travel Health Notice Level 4, the highest level, means that travel to the destination is currently not safe.

In the advisory, the CDC said that the risk of COVID-19 transmission on cruise ships is too high for people who are not fully vaccinated. The advisory comes as the US Supreme Court has let stand a federal judge's ruling that the CDC had exceeded its authority when it issued guidance in July requiring all passengers and crew members to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 before boarding a cruise ship.

The CDC said that the risk of transmission of COVID-19 on cruise ships remains high, even for people who are fully vaccinated, and that the risk is further increased by the social distancing measures that are in place on ships. The CDC also noted that the risk of transmission is higher for those who are not fully vaccinated, as they are at higher risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19.

The CDC advised that people who are not fully vaccinated should not travel on a cruise ship. The agency also recommended that people who are fully vaccinated should only travel on a cruise ship if they are willing to comply with the CDC’s public health guidelines, which include wearing masks, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, and getting tested for COVID-19 before and after travel.

The CDC also recommended that cruise line operators should implement strict public health measures, including requiring all passengers and crew members to be fully vaccinated, and ensuring that ships have adequate ventilation and cleaning systems.

Bixby Knolls Crunch Fitness pleads guilty to violating COVID-19 health orders

BY FERNANDO HAMO / Reporter

The corporation that operates the Crunch Fitness, in Bixby Knolls, has agreed to pay about $10,000 in penalties to settle criminal charges that it illegally stayed open during industry-wide shutdowns meant to slow the spread of COVID-19 this past summer.

Long Beach Fitness LLC, the corporate operator behind the Crunch Fitness facility in Bixby Knolls, was cited three times in July for failing to comply with citywide and countywide health orders. City Prosecutor Douglas Haubert said.

The violations came after City of Long Beach announced indoor operations at some businesses, including fitness centers, had to close immediately after a surge in coronavirus hospitalizations. In Long Beach, the majority of businesses complied with the rules by closing, posing health protocols publicly, requiring employees and customers to wear face coverings, or — for restaurants — doing away with indoor dining for a time.

However, between April and July, seven businesses in Long Beach received administrative citations for COVID-19 violations.

“What the city did during COVID is they spent a lot of time giving administrative notices,” Haubert said. “So, a lot of the time the city did not have to operate, would they be given a criminal citation?”

Crunch Fitness in Bixby Knolls was one of the businesses that were criminally cited. The other was Restoration, a restaurant on Fourth Street, whose case is still winding through county court.

Beach, these requirements went into effect Jan. 3.

Here are the new guidelines from the Long Beach Health Department.

If you test positive:

You must isolate yourself at home for at least five days, regardless of your vaccination status, if you’ve been sick or aren’t showing any symptoms. People may only end their five-day isolation if they are asymptomatic or fever-free and notice a significant improvement in their symptoms in addition to receiving a negative COVID-19 test result on or after day five. People who don’t test or can’t test can end their quarantine after 10 days of showing no symptoms.

Even after your isolation ends, you may have to wear a mask. People who test positive are required to wear a mask for 10 days total when around other people who both indoors and outside. The city recommends the use of a medical-grade mask like a surgical mask or an N95. Children should wear a well-fitting, surgical-style mask with a face wire, instead of a less effective cloth mask.

If you’ve been exposed but haven’t received a booster, are only partially vaccinated or not vaccinated at all:

Stay at home for at least five days and take a test as soon as possible. If it comes back negative, stay quarantined and test again on the fifth day since you were exposed. If you test positive, isolate at home as described above. If you start noticing symptoms, also stay home and get tested as soon as possible.

If you don’t show any symptoms and come back with a negative test by day five, you can end your quarantine. If you don’t take a test and are asymptomatic, quarantine may end by day 10. Everyone in this situation must wear a mask when indoors and out for a total of 10 days when around other people.

The city’s Health Department strongly recommends that people get vaccinated and receive a booster shot, especially in light of the omicron variant, which is the in-city strain.

Ther are some of the highest daily numbers Long Beach has seen since mid-January 2021,” the Health Department said in a statement.

Gilmore Music

Located at 3736 E. Seventh St., Gilmore Music is one of only two businesses that received administrative citations for COVID-19 violations.

But the owner’s stay open even in light of the criminal charges before eventually shutting down for good.

In Crunch Fitness’ case, the company immediately responded to the accusations “as soon as the issue worked its way up to the corporate offices,” according to Peter Garrett, the lawyer representing Long Beach Fitness LLC.

On Dec. 26, Long Beach Fitness LLC agreed to pay back $1,117.95 in investigative costs to the city. And in an effort to offset the negative impacts of the pandemic, Long Beach Fitness LLC will donate $3,000 worth of memberships and $4,000 worth of gift cards to the Long Beach Unified School District—an idea that was sparked during a meeting between

Four people wait toward Crunch Fitness in Bixby Knolls Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Garrett and Haubert.

“I am pleased the owners of Crunch Fitness have agreed to take responsibility for the health order violations that were committed in 2020, and have committed to making sure they follow all public health orders in the future,” Haubert said. “I think the creative agreement to settle this case not only puts an end to this chapter, but it will benefit local students who were impacted by COVID-19 shutdowns. This is a fair outcome that benefits the community and protects the public health going forward.”

In this case, because the company accepted full responsibility for its actions, it will be allowed to withdraw the guilty plea and have the case dismissed in six months, as long as the company continues to abide by health orders and other laws, Haubert said.

The two Crunch Fitness employees named in the criminal citation for the July 19 violation will also have their prosecutions dismissed. They were named in the citation because there needs to be a person present for a criminal charge, Garrett, who also represented the two employees.

Assuming they and the company comply with the plea agreement, the case against the employees will be dismissed without any further penalty for them.

“They put [themselves] to work and realized there was an individual that was on site,” Garrett said. “They [the employees] did not have the intention of violating the order.”

Crunch Fitness is a New York-based company with 150 locations centered in 30 metropolitan area franchises in three countries. There are two located in Long Beach.

The co-owners of More Music LB, a new music store by former employees of Gilmore Music, adjust the shades in the window of their Seventh Street storefront Friday, Dec. 24, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

The fine was sparked during a meeting between

Garrett and Haubert.

“We are the same people and we’re going to give the same or better product. They’re pleased with the outcome.”

They have agreed to take Gilmore, the center for Taylor and Gibson.

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City Council extends Grand Prix contract through 2028

BY FERNANDO HARO / Reporter

Long Beach and organizers of the city’s annual Grand Prix race have agreed to extend the event’s previous contract through 2028 and allow race organizers to consider development projects that may interfere with the current track layout.

The Long Beach City Council unanimously voted last week to have City Manager Tom Modica, as the city’s point person, negotiate the contract with the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach up to June 30, 2028. The existing agreement with the association was set to expire in June 2023.

“The Grand Prix extension that has been under the City Council’s consideration is the result of extensive discussions with City Leadership that we believe has resulted in benefits to all parties concerned,” Jim Michaelian, Grand Prix Association of Long Beach President and CEO, said in a statement. “The Grand Prix has always been a very strong community event and this agreement just amplifies the unique relationship with the City of Long Beach going forward. Our thanks to all those who assisted in getting this done.”

In a previous statement, Michaelian said that the biggest change to the agreement is that the association will now be given warning of potential developments along the race track, and will be a stakeholder in any potential development process in the future.

Michaelian added that it is important to point out that there is no requirement that a developer could have come with a plan that didn’t affect us as much as was possible for input or anything.

The Long Beach Grand Prix is a signature event in Long Beach that traditionally held in April and typically draws more than 185,000 fans.

The event’s Downtown racetrack spanned the area bordered by and around the Long Beach Convention Center, the Long Beach Arena and Shoreline Park, one of the largest undeveloped parcels of land known locally as the “elephant lot” because of its history being linked to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

The elephant lot is utilized during the Grand Prix for the display of the course’s turns, grandstands for fans and merchandise sale. The property has also been targeted by city officials for potential development since 2018, when Mayor Robert Garcia said the city was in the “visioning process” to decide the best course of action.

The elephant lot is also expected to play a role in the city’s 2016 Olympics plan. The new agreement says race organizers may have to work with city officials to adjust the 2028 race schedule if the meetings—including defending his department’s use of facial recognition technology, which has been repeatedly questioned by some city council members.

Hebeish also served briefly as acting chief of police before stepping into his current role this year while Luna was recuperating from being struck by a truck while crossing the street.

“It is a privilege to appoint Assistant Chief Wally Hebeish to the position of Police Chief for our great city, City Manager Tom Modica said in a statement. “Chief Hebeish possesses a thorough understanding of critical issues facing our city and our Long Beach community. He continues to build and inspire our police department personnel and has been instrumental in implementing programs and initiatives that increase public trust surrounding equity and constitutional policing, improve employee wellness, and address crime in our community.”

In October, city leaders sought input via a public survey asking community members what professional and character traits they would see in the new police chief, which resulted in over 1,300 responses. The survey shows Hebeish will have to respond to the public for more transparency and accountability for officers as well as with expectations that the department can help prevent crime.

In a previous statement, Michaelian said they picked Hebeish after a national search and multi-step screening and interview process, including input from a technical panel, community panel and panel management.

Mayor Robert Garcia praised the choice. “He is absolutely the right person to lead our police department moving forward. He’s a man of incredible integrity and has the respect of his officers,” Garcia said in a statement. “I’m grateful for his commitment to Long Beach and the historic barriers he’s breaking for Muslims Americans.”

While an executive with the LBPD, Hebeish “has implemented strategies to reduce crime and has increased the nationwide increase in gun violence. He is a strong leader of the Department’s Quality of Life team to provide support for people experiencing homelessness, all while also focusing key initiatives on strengthening our police-community relationships and improving public trust,” according to the city’s announcement.

Hebeish holds a master’s degree in communications with a focus in new media. His experience includes an unprecedented number of COVID-19 cases with city health officials saying last week that Long Beach was reporting over 1,700 new cases per day.

A hearing about a Port of Long Beach construction project was delayed over concerns that public participation was curtailed by the new rules, and also people’s access to being in public spaces.

“This is like it was a year ago, remember when no one left their home?” said Councilwoman Cindy Moore, who went through the curfew out of Downtown condo window the morning of Jan. 5. “It’s dead right now in Downtown. How do we balance that so everyone can participate? I think the best way to do that is to go back to virtual.”

The City Council was the last of Long Beach’s meeting bodies to keep meeting in person despite a state law implemented in September that allows all public meetings to be held virtually if telephonically or another virtual form of communication is used.

CSULB returns to remote learning due to omicron spike

BY FERNANDO HARO / Reporter

CSULB, which began its spring semester on Jan. 20, will be primarily offering remote instruction to students for two and a half weeks, delaying most in-person classes until Feb. 7.

“The safety of our community has always been our chief concern throughout the pandemic,” CSULB President Jane Close Conoley said in a statement. “Delayed-in-person instruction was not what we had intended for this spring, but the rise of the omicron variant warranted this adjustment.

CSULB spokesperson Toni Molle said that 223 campus presidents have been delegated to make changes to their campus plans based on conditions in their regions.

As of Jan. 6, nine of 23 CSU campuses made the decision to transition to virtual instruction for the first few weeks of the semester: Sacramento, Los Angeles, Channel Islands, Sonoma State, San Francisco, San Marcos, East Bay Long Beach and San Francisco.

CSULB will remain open during the first two weeks of the semester, however, some university staff will be asked to work remotely over the next few weeks in an effort to reduce the number of people on campus.

Campus facilities such as the University Student Union, the library, bookstores, the Horn Center and Student Health Services will continue operations while maintaining proper health and safety protocols in place.

Some other campus operations may face short-term changes as well. Modification details regarding athletic events, audiences for the performing arts, facilities and programs and hours at the Student Recreation and Wellness Center will be shared in the coming days, Conoley said.

“We’ve had a strong record of safety at Cal State Long Beach, which we intend to continue,” Conoley said. “I’m confident we will still have a rewarding and enriching spring semester even as we make these temporary modifications.”

In accordance with the CSU’s recent updated policies, Conoley announced that CSULB faculty, students and staff would be required to receive a booster shot by Monday, Feb. 3, if they plan to access university facilities and programs.

“This is an appropriate modification to our approach given the current surge in the infection of the omicron variant,” Conoley said. “omicron is now the most prevalent form of the virus in the United States. In fact, the number of infections nationwide has increased five-fold in just the last week.”

Conoley said that the policy will be immediately applicable to students and non-represented staff. However, represented employees will be exempt from the booster requirement until the CSU concludes its meet-and-confer process with labor unions.

CSULB officials said they will continue to monitor prevailing conditions and public health recommendations over the coming weeks.

Long Beach City Council to return to virtual meetings

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The Long Beach City Council’s first meeting of 2022 on Jan. 4 started with a strange announcement from Mayor Robert Garcia, the in-person meeting would go as planned, but the public would not be allowed to watch from inside the council chambers.

Residents who did attend the meeting were locked to watch the meeting online. Garcia said in an in-person meeting with no members of the public allowed to be present. Garcia’s announcement came as the city experienced an unprecedented number of COVID-19 cases with city health officials saying last week that Long Beach was reporting over 1,700 new cases per day.
Kindergarten students participate in a classroom activity on the first day of in-person learning at Maurice Sendak Elementary School in Los Angeles on April 13, 2021. AP Photo by Jae C. Hong.

NEWSWATCH

LBUSD teachers, students absent amid COVID surge; district struggles to fill vacancies

BY MIKE GUARDABASCIO / Reporter

As the Long Beach Unified School District’s approximately 60,000 students and 3,400 teachers returned to campus last week amid a surge in COVID-19 cases, thousands of students and teachers weren’t present—and it’s been difficult for the district to fill vacancies.

On Jan. 3, the LBUSD had 369 classroom vacancies on Jan. 5. Personnel to cover double-digit unfilled vacancies at some schools had to shuffle in administrative personnel to cover double-digit unfilled classroom vacancies on Jan. 3.

“The vast majority of parents still sent their kids to school last week, but there was a dip in student attendance, especially in the elementary schools,” said LBUSD spokesperson Elyffo Chris. “We adjusted our staffing, and we’re doing that each time a classroom vacancy occurs.”

The past 24 hours has strained the district’s substitute pool and has resulted in many teachers not being present—and it’s been a struggle for the district to fill vacancies.

“LBUSD teachers, students absent amid COVID surge; district struggles to fill vacancies” was first published on Jan 21, 2022 by Long Beach Business Journal.

City Council

public comment is provided. As the chair of the City Council meetings, the decision has been Garcia’s to stick with in-person meetings or to pivot to a virtual setting.

On Jan. 5, the Long Beach Health Department announced that City Council meetings will be virtual starting Jan. 18. Garcia said the day of the announcement that the decision was made in consultation with the Health Department and city management and that in-person meetings won’t resume again until there is a recommendation from health officials that it is safe to do.

“Just like other bodies, Congress, state legislature, we should be asking the public and should be able to meet the public where they are,” Garcia said. “We’re not going to a point where we feel like it was right to go to virtual.”

Garcia said that some people want virtual, but some people also want in-person, and the in-person could benefit those who can’t access virtual meetings because of technological barriers. But for now, the soft thing to do is to go virtual, he said.

“It’s a balance, but right now it’s important to keep people safe,” Garcia said. A Dec. 22 memo from the City Clerk’s office said that switching to a virtual format could be accomplished with existing staffing, with Zoom and Kudos—which could cost up to $25,000 annually—being options that could be implemented relatively quickly.

Multiple members of the council said before the announcement by health officials that they would prefer a return to in-person meetings to protect the health and safety of others, and also to allow all those who wish to participate in public meetings to be able to do so.

“I appreciate taking precautions to keep everyone safe and healthy,” said Councilman Al Austin, adding that he and others were double-masked. “With the rapid infection rate that we’re dealing with, I’ve seen the chart lately. It’s through the roof and more dramatic than it was ever.”

Anderson didn’t know about the protocols for the Jan. 4 meeting until he showed up to a fairly empty 15 minutes before the start of the meeting.

Councilman Daryl Supernaw said he thought of the optics of the meeting as much as it did about his personal health as the meeting unfolded. Supernaw is vaccinated, but also one of the older members of the City Council.

“I was concerned that we’re sending an unhygienic message,” Supernaw said. “If we’re telling people not to gather, not to meet, then we’re sending a mixed message in being behind the door.”

The LBUSD also announced tighter regulations for on-campus events last week.

Attendance for indoor sporting events and other performances will be capped at 25%, and some large indoor events are being postponed until Jan. 28.

These postponements include an upcoming basketball tournament that has been rescheduled for February, and the long-running Long Beach Poly senior ticket giveaway. Mr. Jackrabbit Pass will not be available until Jan. 28. Food distribution will resume the following week, Jan. 30.

Another delay was announced for the upcoming Wilson dance show, which has been postponed to a later date.

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Long Beach BLAST helps students meet academic, career goals

BY TESS KAZENOFF / Reporter

Long Beach Detter Learning for All Students. Today, otherwise known as Long Beach BLAST, tackles the difficulties many young students undergo when meeting academic standards. According to Executive Director Brandon Adachi, students involved in the organization’s programs can be facing myriad challenges. Many are experiencing the consequences of poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, depression, or gangs, among other life discomforts as well. But Long Beach BLAST doesn’t view their students as “at-risk,” instead, they are “at-promise,” encouraged to pursue a brighter future and succeed academically and personally.

Long Beach BLAST students participate in one of two programs: the academic mentoring program, a cornerstone of the organization since its founding 20 years ago, or its Bridge to Success program, introduced in 2011 as a response to community needs. The academic mentoring program engages elementary, middle, and high school students from throughout the district. Students are paired with a college student, receiving guidance and mentorship as they navigate through and around their academic goals, personal growth as well. “Especially over the past year and a half, students have had to be resilient, and had to go through so much, so much mentoring allows just that additional positive role model—(and) that support as they navigate through their academic and life journey,” said Adachi.

While the nonprofit supports students with the college process through applications and financial aid, college isn’t the end goal for every student, said Long Beach BLAST addresses that.

Grand Prix

Custodian from page 18

two events have conflicts. The city has always had the right to develop portions of the track, including the elephant lot, but the new agreement now requires the city to give notice to the association regarding negotiations or development agreements it pursues with periodic notices if a project advances. Developers could be required to speak with race organizers about incorporating their projects into the race circuit or allowing them to use land around the track or around their project. Whatever ends up at the site for the long term will require the approval of the California Coastal Commission since the lot is in the coastal zone. But the Grand Prix Association will also have a seat at the table, which municipal said is “significant progress.”

With the new contract, race organizers will also have four fewer days to set up and take down race infrastructure like large walls and grandstands. It will also require the association to pay an annual contribution of $30,000 to help restore streets damaged during the race. The 2021 race was pushed to late September as race organizers hoped to host the race during a time of the year where large crowds were allowed to gather with limited restrictions. In October, the City Council agreed to keep parts of the Grand Prix track up to cut back on setup time and costs. Five months removed from the 2020 Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach, roughly 1,400 concrete blocks still remain on place on Shoreline Drive, Seaside Way, and in the elephant lot. Organizers said in October that they would leave up about half of the 2,400 concrete blocks put in place for the race in September. This was expected to save race organizers about three days of setup time and around $100,000, some of which will be used to resurrect city streets damaged by race activity. Tickets are already on sale for the 2022 Grand Prix that is scheduled for April 4-10. The event was canceled by the NTT IndyCar Series, as well as the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. The weekend event will also include the Super Drift Challenge under the lights on Friday and Saturday nights, plus double bike and car action by the Gordon’s Speed Energy Stadium SuperTrucks, and a 100th year commemoration of the 1922, the Porsche Carrera Cup North America. Tickets range from $15 to $90 and general admission to $168 for a three-day ticket that includes weekend reserved seating in grandstand upper bays.

Reporter Jason Ratz contributed to this story.
Looking Ahead

What makes Long Beach the Port of Choice? Long-term vision – leading the industry in finding supply chain solutions and helping our partners move cargo efficiently, predictably and economically today, tomorrow and in the future.