

# Long Beach Business Journal

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## 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,

*Continued on page 8*



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

## 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 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

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Real Estate

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Editor's note: An article on page 8 of the Dec. 28, 2021,
edition of the Business Journal titled, "Convention
bookings to lead Long Beach's tourism rebound in 2022,"
misspelled the name of the general manager of the Long
Beach Convention and Entertainment Center. His name is
Charlie Beirne.

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Two people walk along Lakewood Boulevard, past the Long Beach Exchange retail center Thursday, Jan. 6, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Long Beach Exchange retail center sells
for \$158.2M to San Jose real estate firm

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The 26-acre Long Beach Exchange
retail center in East Long Beach has
sold to San Jose-based private real
estate equity and development firm
DJM in partnership with PGIM Real
Estate, the companies announced
earlier this month.

With 246,500 square feet of retail
space, the property sold for a staggering
\$158.2 million, according to Kinnery
Brokerage House Vice President Brian

Russell, citing real estate information
and analytics service CoStar. The sales
price breaks down to nearly \$639 per
square foot.

"That's a very high price index for
retail properties over 200,000 square
feet," Russell said. "Usually, there is
an economy of scale where the larger
properties sell for a smaller dollar per
square foot."

By comparison, Carson's
300,000-square-foot SouthBay Pavilion
just up the 405 Freeway sold for under

\$60 million—or just over \$288 per
square foot—on Dec. 16, Russell said.

The Carson property, however, was
built in the early 1970s and renovated
in 1992, while the expansive outdoor
retail center at the southwest corner
of Lakewood Boulevard and Carson
Street, opened in the first half of 2018
following its development by Burnham-
Ward Properties.

"Long Beach Exchange is a fantastic
addition to the DJM portfolio and we
look forward to shaping the property

into the best version of itself," DJM
Chief Creative Officer Chad Cress said
in an announcement.

In its announcement, DJM did not
specify what changes, if any, would be
made to the retail center, saying only
that the firm would increase the value of
LBX through "best-in-class management,
leasing, marketing and placemaking."

The firm did not 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,"
Cress said. "This rebound, which
reinforces the ever-changing nature
of retail, is due 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, long-
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, TJ Maxx, PetSmart,
Ultra Beauty and In N Out Burger.

The center is also home to several
fitness concepts and eateries, including
those inside the 17,000-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 Bryon 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." ■

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Conversion of former Verizon building is nearly complete

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

The revival of the former Verizon
building in Downtown Long Beach, a
1968 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 Blvd.—rather than creating an

entirely new structure—produced a
unique project.

"What's really great is that we had
to work with the bones of the existing
building," he said, "so it 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 these 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. "It has
definitely more of 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 were

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## ADUs

Continued from cover

window from weeks to days.

Councilmembers Al Austin and Suely Saro, who proposed the idea, said it could be another tool for the city as it tries to meet its regional housing goal of producing over 26,500 by 2029.

“I think it’s important that, in 2022, we come out with a really aggressive approach to solving our housing crisis,” Austin said during the Jan. 4 meeting.

Other cities in the state have adopted similar programs, with some providing plans for ADUs to residents for free, and others, like Los Angeles, requiring residents looking to build units to buy pre-approved plans directly from contractors.

It’s unclear how the Long Beach program would work, but council members weighed in on what it should look like.

Councilwoman Stacy Mungo Flanigan asked to look at including a small fee to recoup costs if the city were to invest money in developing a program. She also said that any pre-approved floor plans should have a fee schedule attached that would let homeowners know what associated charges there would be for things like sewer access, debris recycling and support for local school districts.

That would help people know what they’re getting into before they’ve already started the process, Mungo Flanigan said.

“We have a couple of projects that are just stuck because people ran out of money, and that’s also not good for the community,” Mungo Flanigan said.

While the program could speed up the permitting process and potentially eliminate the architect fees, which are generally around a few thousand dollars, building ADUs is still likely to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on the size of the units.

City planners have said that permits for these types of backyard additions have jumped to hundreds per year and that production could reach 450-500 per year for a period of 10 years.

A city estimate said that there are about 59,800 lots in the city that could add an ADU, but just 47,244 are the ideal size to add one. A city ordinance caps the size of an ADU at 800 square feet but state law allows for the addition of a third “Jr. ADU” that can share bathroom facilities with the main house if kitchen efficiencies are met in the unit.

A fuller picture of what the city’s program could look like could come back to the City Council as soon as March. Austin and Saro’s item asked for the report to be completed within 60 days. ■



The former California National Guard Armory building near the corner of Seventh Street and Alamitos Avenue has been sold for adaptive reuse. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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

BY JASON RUIZ / 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 art-focused facility adjacent to a new affordable housing project.

Gundry Partners, LP, which includes St. Anthony High School, Pacific6 and Howard CDM, is expected to build a 64-unit all affordable housing unit in the parking lot next to the armory building as well as various improvements to Gumbiner Park adjacent to the project.

The adaptive reuse of the armory building will be used by St. Anthony but also could be available to the public as a performance space. The construction window for the project is expected to be 18 months, which means the earliest the project could be completed and ready for tenants to move in is spring 2024, according to a city memo.

The \$5.1 million sale to Gundry Partners, LP is unique in that the city won’t receive any payment at closing. Instead, it will begin to receive payments after the affordable housing loan used to develop the site is paid in full and rents are sufficient to pay the operating expenses and debt service on the affordable housing loan.

Payments to the city could come at any time over the 55-year term of the agreement but are not guaranteed. The loan’s repayment back to the city comes with a 3% interest rate, and the balance of the contract could be paid off at the end of the 55th year in the form of a balloon payment by the group.

While the city likely won’t receive a payment at the close of the sale, Economic Development Director John Keisler estimated in a memo to the council that Long Beach would see approximately \$25,000 per month in savings because of the sale.

Negotiations for the site began in early 2021 but were drawn out because the developer insisted on purchasing the site. Long Beach was looking for an entity to enter into a long-term lease for the armory building.

The initial plans called for a mixed development of market-rate units mixed in with affordable 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 only setting aside 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 Coast Artillery unit, an anti-aircraft regiment in the lead up to World War II. The unit was called into service in September 1940, over a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor thrust the United States into the war.

*Editor’s note: Pacific6 is the parent company of Pacific Community Media, which owns the Long Beach Business Journal.* ■

## Mercy Housing to break ground on senior affordable housing project

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

More affordable housing is on its way to Central Long Beach.

Mercy Housing will likely break ground next month on Long Beach Senior, a four-story, 68-unit project at 901-945 E. Pacific Coast Highway, according to the nonprofit’s vice president of real estate development, Ed Holder.

“We develop affordable housing for families and special needs communities and seniors, and we had seen in Long Beach that there was a really significant increase in senior homelessness,” Hodler said of the decision to develop the site, “and particularly in the central part of the city, rents had really started to skyrocket.”

Data that Cal State Long Beach professor Seiji Steimetz presented at an economic forum last month showed that rents in the 90806 ZIP code where the project is located have grown 46% over the last five years—more than any other ZIP code in the city.

As for the decision for this development to serve seniors exclusively, Holder said many low-income seniors were already struggling before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public health crisis further exacerbated the issue.

“Seniors were already among the most vulnerable,” he said. “And it’s only grown worse. So it’s just—it’s a community we have served, really, since our founding. We really understand their needs and felt this site just really, really aligned with that community. Its proximity to transit and community



An affordable housing development at 901 E. Pacific Coast Hwy. Rendering courtesy of Mercy Housing.

resources is great.”

Units will be set aside for both formerly homeless seniors and formerly homeless senior veterans. Those residents will receive case management support from either the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or from Mercy Housing; services will include offering access to income, mental health support and connections to organizations that

can help with issues like addiction.

“It’s a really comprehensive program,” Holder said.

The ground floor of the property, meanwhile, will serve as a “community benefit space,” Holder said, though Mercy Housing has not yet identified a tenant. If the developer can’t find a suitable occupant, the area could be used as a space for events like community

meetings or health screenings.

“We really want to make sure it’s a community asset,” Holder said. “We don’t need it to be an income-generating space. We really want it to be community-serving.”

But Mercy Housing still has some time 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. ■

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Construction continues at 200 Ocean Boulevard Thursday, Jan. 6, 2021. The former office building is being converted into housing. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## Verizon

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able to build townhomes on the roof because we removed the weight of existing mechanical equipment, without negatively impacting the structural capacity of the building.”

Overall, the project includes 10 ground-floor studio lofts that range from 750-to-1,000 square feet; 88 traditional apartment units that range from 675-square-foot studios to 1,200-square-foot two-bedrooms; and eight two-story townhouse units, which are all two or three bedrooms and range from 1,300-to-2,220 square feet.

While Bohn was excited to discuss the rooftop townhomes—“I don’t know of any units like that in Downtown Long Beach,” he said—he was even more enthusiastic about his firm’s ability to take a piece of history and turn it into something new.

“The greenest building is always the oldest building that you can save,” Bohn said. “We’re taking an office building and bringing new life to it. We’re not throwing away all the materials. We’re just rejuvenating a building.”

“It’s wonderful to see it get new life,” he added, “and become relevant now in the 21st century.” ■



# 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: 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 if 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 Amazon.

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 in that 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, Beard 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. Annexing

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, 3 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 its 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 a townhouse feel.

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 1,811 square feet, it’s the largest of the four floor plans in Island Village.

Downstairs has one bedroom with a bathroom, a large living room with a



A car leaves the Island Village community in Southeast Long Beach Thursday, Jan. 6, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



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

pair of skylights and a wood-burning fireplace, a combination kitchen/family room and a dining area. The other three bedrooms are upstairs.

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.



This Island Village home is on the market, listed at \$849,900. Listing photo.



A building at affordable housing complex Century Villages at Cabrillo has been demolished to make way for a larger one with more units. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## 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.

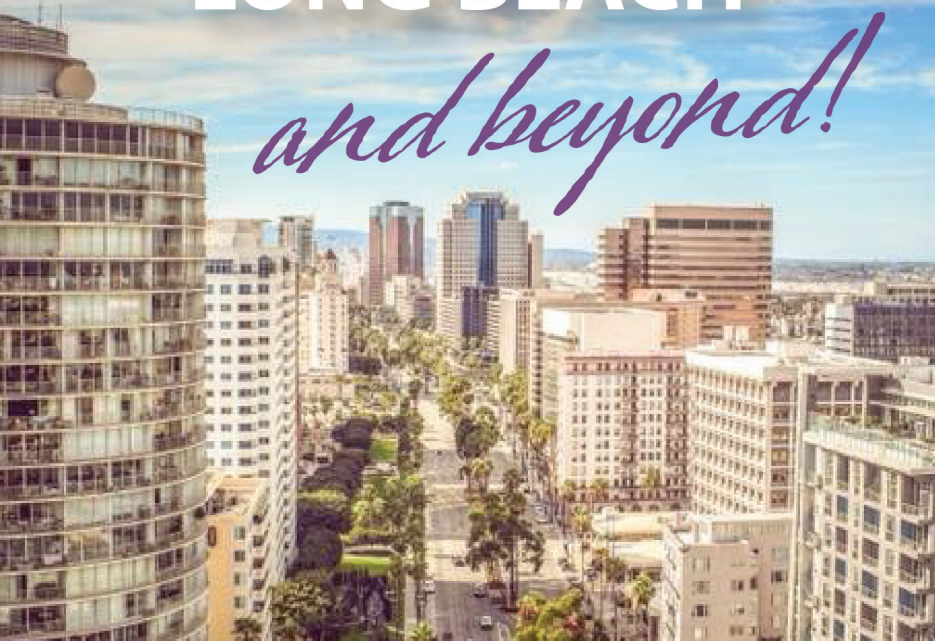
“This will address 50 of those, incrementally, but the reality of this is that those units are all going to be leased up,” D’Andrea said of the 90 new units proposed in the project. “This should move the needle significantly in addressing the incidents of veteran homelessness.”

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. ■

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Commercial Real Estate

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very competitive space.”

Even before the pandemic, there have been closures of some large big-box stores locally and across the country, including K-Mart and Best Buy. And COVID-19 did not help many retailers.

“Throughout the pandemic, there has been some big-box vacancy—things like movie theaters and other large box tenants have gone out of business,” Weibel said. “But leasing teams have really shown the ability to backfill those mid- to large-box spaces with new and emerging tenants.

“So even where there have been sort of mass closures announced, we believe there is opportunity to fill those voids with new and exciting retail.”

New fitness concepts and small-format grocers have proven ideal for backfilling mid-size vacancies, Weibel said. Major fitness groups also are taking over former big-box locations, as is the case with LA Fitness, which is moving into the former Best Buy at Marina Pacifica in Southeast Long Beach.

Medical uses such as dialysis and plasma centers also are taking more retail space, Weibel said, as are churches in some tertiary markets.

In general, Weibel said the U.S. as a whole is “over-retailed,” which has created other opportunities, namely the development of additional housing on parcels occupied by outdated retail. The Marina Shores retail center in Long Beach, for example, recently sold to developer Onni Group for nearly \$68 million. The firm has plans to redevelop the property with multifamily housing that could introduce hundreds of units to the area.

Looking forward, Weibel said he expects robust demand and transaction volume through at least the first half of 2022. Nontraditional uses will continue to grow strong, but the resilience of the market will continue to prop up traditional brick-and-mortar spaces—for good operators.

“Target is a great example of a really strong operator. We’ve seen them change store format, product offerings and how they run their business,” Weibel said. “[Good] operators are being very creative in how they service their clients and continue to get customers in the door.”

**Office**

Office real estate has been a rollercoaster throughout the pandemic, with mini cycles following along with the spike and decline in cases, according to Jason Fine. Many office-based operations can have some or all staff work remotely and remain productive, which has cast a continued uncertainty.

“It was touch and go in 2021. I guess you could say peaks and valleys,” Fine said, noting that each variant saw tenants pull back, sometimes canceling



The former Orchard Supply Hardware store at Long Beach Exchange has sat vacant since Lowe's closed all OSH locations in August 2018, months after the Long Beach location opened. Thursday, Jan. 6, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



Three industrial buildings under construction at the corner of Spring Street and Orange Avenue Thursday, Jan. 6, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

deals. “Downtown took a bit of a hit.”

Vacancy in Downtown offices increased from about 23% in the third quarter to 26% at the end of the year, Fine said. Buildings that have undergone renovations into more creative and modern spaces such as 211 E. Ocean Blvd. continue to perform well, remaining nearly fully occupied.

For the most part, Downtown Class A buildings such as the World Trade Center and Shoreline Square have maintained decent occupancy rates, at around 80%. Landmark Square, meanwhile, has taken a bit of a hit, Fine said, noting that the building’s occupancy is around 65% after several tenants downsized or moved out.

“The overall sentiment was that tenants were kind of steering away from [high-rise offices],” Fine said. “But Downtown Long Beach is really well positioned for this year, and I’m optimistic with the growth and development happening.”

The vacancy rate in the suburban market is 34%, virtually unchanged from 34.3% in the third quarter, he said. Suburban vacancy is led by two properties: 384 Kilroy, a 138,000-square-foot building previously occupied entirely by Epson America but that now sits 100% vacant; and 4801 Airport Plaza Dr., a 130,000-square-foot building that previously served as the interim headquarters for the Port of Long Beach, which is now 75% vacant.

Market rents increased in both

markets by three cents per square foot, to \$2.91 in Downtown and \$3.03 in the suburbs, Fine said.

Once companies have a better grasp on when—or if—employees will return to the office in full, the market can begin to work itself out. Amid the current surge of the omicron variant, however, the uncertainty continues, Fine said.

Many office-based businesses have determined hybrid models with a mix of in-person and remote work will stay long-term, meaning the company needs less space as fewer employees are in the office at a time. Fine said the hybrid model will likely remain for many. However, businesses have also rethought the use of space, opting for more open and collaborative areas as well as amenities, which will in part offset the need for less space, Fine said.

How these trends will play out in the long run remains to be seen, but Fine remains optimistic for Long Beach’s office market’s future.

“It can only go up from here,” Fine said. “I think 2022 will be a year of getting back to the office.”

**Industrial**

The industrial real estate market remains the hottest sector in the South Bay and across the U.S. In the third quarter of last year, Cushman & Wakefield reported a record 521.4 million square feet of industrial space was under construction nationwide, the first time the pipeline has exceeded 500

million square feet.

In Long Beach, millions of square feet of industrial space have been delivered over the last six years, including the recent completion of a 415,320-square-foot warehouse in North Long Beach and the sprawling Douglas Park. Three more industrial buildings are on the way at the southwest corner of Spring Street and Orange Avenue on the Long Beach-Signal Hill border, ranging from 36,000 to 68,000 square feet.

But space for new industrial construction is scarce in the South Bay, and demand continues to be strong, especially for operations related to goods movement and Long Beach’s budding space sector. The industrial vacancy rate in the South Bay is just below 3%, according to John Eddy, executive vice president with Coldwell Banker Commercial BLAIR WESTMAC.

“I’ve never seen a market so fluid in the 35 years I’ve been in this business,” Eddy said. “By the time I price out a property, within a very short time period, the value may have fluctuated—and not downward.”

High demand and low vacancy continues to put upward pressure on asking rents and sales prices, Eddy said. In Long Beach and Signal Hill, the average lease rate for a space under 5,000 square feet is between \$1.15 and \$1.55 per square foot, he said, while larger spaces rent for \$1 to \$1.50 per square foot.

Eddy said he is working with a client on the lease of 60,000 square feet in Carson for between \$1.20 and \$1.30 per square foot. He leased the same building in 2018 for 75-80 cents per square foot, he said.

Sales prices for industrial properties also have a wide range, from \$215 to \$375 per square foot, according to Eddy. The reason for the extremes is that cannabis operations are willing to pay exorbitant amounts for space due to the fact that they are limited by cities’ regulations on where they can be located.

“When I’m working with a client, I give them two tables—regular uses and cannabis,” Eddy said. “We can put a property on the market and a buyer will put an offer into the seller that far exceeds [our price] just to secure the building. It’s a frenzied pace.”

Looking ahead, Eddy said he expects logistics and goods movement related operations to continue to have strong demand, especially given the continued congestion at the Port of Long Beach, which has seen record cargo volumes for months. The burgeoning space sector also is likely to continue playing a major role in Long Beach’s industrial real estate, particularly Relativity Space’s ongoing conversion of the former Boeing C-17 site.

“I think we’re in for another year of growth,” Eddy said. “I don’t foresee 2022 having any downturn. All indicators are that [this year] should be as robust as 2021.” ■

Local economists concerned about rising housing costs

BY MELISSA EVANS / Managing Editor

Despite good signs that the economy is recovering after significant pandemic-induced job losses, one growth indicator has local economists worried: Rising housing costs.

In a quarterly forum hosted by the Long Beach Economic Partnership last month, economist and Cal State Long Beach professor Seiji Steimetz presented some startling data on the effect rising home costs are having on rent.

In just one year, rents have shot up 5% or more in most city ZIP codes, amounting to more than \$100 in extra costs per month for mostly lower-wage workers. And in Long Beach, that can have a big impact on economic spending, as roughly 60% of the city’s residents are renters.

Economists also noted that the rising living costs could hamper the region’s ability to retain workers in key industries as people seek a more affordable lifestyle elsewhere.

The Central Long Beach ZIP codes of 90804 and 90806 saw some of the biggest rent increases; in the last two years, rents have shot up 10%, or roughly \$150. Rent increases have also risen 10% in the 90808 ZIP code in East Long Beach.

The spike in rents from five years ago is even more startling: in the 90806 ZIP code, which includes the Wrigley neighborhood, rents have shot up 46%.

This rise is being driven largely by

the housing market, Steimetz said, which has been spurred by low interest rates along with high demand and limited supply.

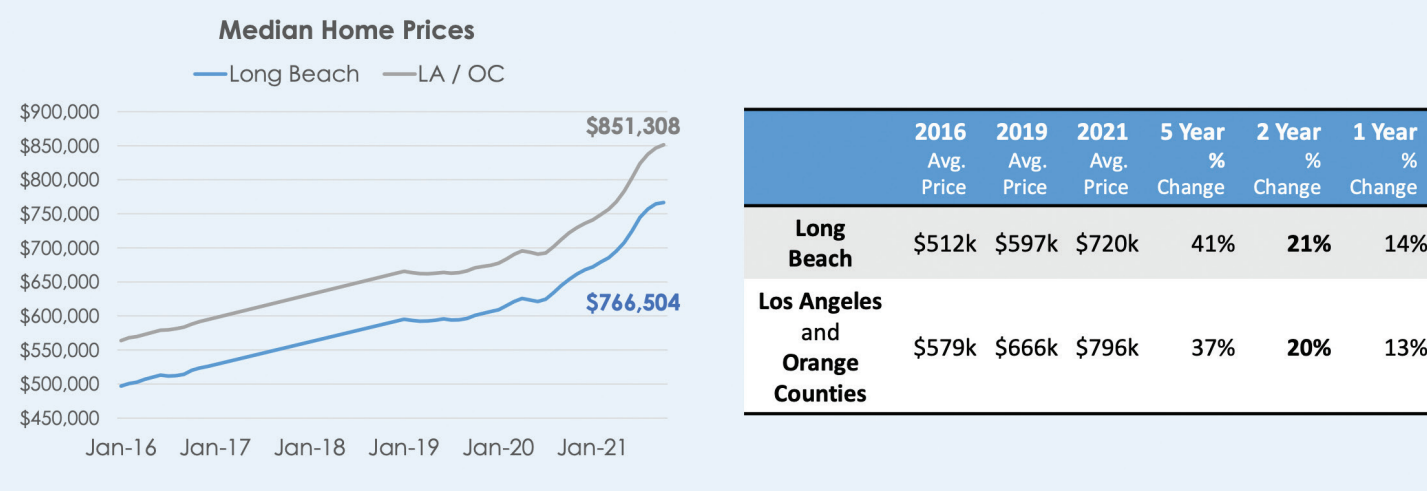
The median house price in Long Beach is now \$766,504, slightly below the median of \$851,308 in the Greater Los Angeles/Orange County region. The cost of buying a home in Long Beach is on average 21% higher than it was just before the pandemic began.

The region is simply not producing enough houses for the population needs that Southern California has, said Robert Kleinhenz of CSULB, who also spoke at the forum.

“We continue to have a housing affordability problem,” he said. “This poses a question, which is: How are we going to maintain our competitive position in housing and labor?” ■

Zip Code	2019 Avg. Rent	2021 Avg. Rent	5 Year % Change	2 Year % Change	1 Year % Change
90802	\$1,856	\$2,001	30%	8%	6%
90803	\$1,977	\$2,143	21%	8%	5%
90804	\$1,670	\$1,834	35%	10%	6%
90805	\$1,564	\$1,676	32%	7%	2%
90806	\$1,510	\$1,657	46%	10%	4%
90807	\$1,659	\$1,788	24%	8%	5%
90808	\$2,806	\$3,092	26%	10%	6%
90813	\$1,407	\$1,531	40%	9%	5%
90814	\$1,783	\$1,956	34%	10%	6%
90815	\$2,085	\$2,291	22%	10%	7%

Rent increases for most Long Beach ZIP codes. Data from Zillow Research and PolicyMap.



Long Beach median home price. Courtesy of the Long Beach Economic Partnership.

LBUSD board moves forward in process to sell 2 vacant properties

BY MIKE GUARDABASCIO / Reporter

Long Beach Unified’s Board of Education has voted to move forward with selling two vacant properties owned by the school district.

The LBUSD, which is the largest property owner in the city, has been in enrollment decline for a decade, and last year the board voted to classify seven properties as “surplus,” beginning the process of looking to sell those properties.

At the board’s Dec. 15 board meeting, the two vacant properties at 999 Atlantic Ave. and 4310 Long Beach Blvd. were at issue. The board’s vote that day was to seek a waiver from the State Board of Education to avoid the traditional open bidding process, which would require them to sell the properties to the highest bidder. The reason the district is seeking that waiver is the possibility of selling to a bidder with a “greater community good” in mind.

Although no specific plan has been developed yet, board member Megan Kerr said in October that she’d like to see the properties become affordable housing to help families move into Long



A vacant LBUSD property at 999 Atlantic Ave. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Beach, where the cost of rent has been swiftly rising.

David Miranda, the LBUSD executive director of facilities, development and planning, said in his remarks at the Dec. 15 meeting that the district took the board’s wishes into

consideration in requesting that waiver for the two sites, which have been vacant for four-to-seven years. The district is currently spending money on security and maintenance for the vacant sites.

“My only comment is I appreciate

staff really listening to the board,” said Kerr. “I’m grateful for the opportunity to do good in the process with all of this.”

The vote was 4-0 with board member Doug Otto not present due to illness.

Miranda said the district would submit an application for the waiver this month, with approval likely at the next state board meeting in March. The hope would be to receive responses from potential buyers in the spring and then present the LBUSD board with a recommendation for the two properties in the summer.

The other five locations the district has deemed as “surplus” are currently occupied, including its headquarters at 1515 Hughes Way. The district is still developing plans for what to do with those sites, which are:

- 1515/1511 Hughes Way, Long Beach, CA 90810
- 723 Long Beach Blvd, Long Beach, CA 90813
- 2201 E. Market St., Long Beach, CA 90805
- 2425 Webster Ave., Long Beach, CA 90810
- 2700 Pine Ave., Long Beach, CA 90810

■



# 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 city ordinance to be prepared for it to vote on later this year.

The council first initiated a temporary ban in July after the state issued similar rules to protect renters 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 ensued over the rest of the year, with property owner groups advocating for no stricter policies to be put in place while

tenant groups pushed for the city to create a city-run division that oversees unit remodels to limit displacement.

During the council’s last meeting in December, members opted to ask that the new ordinance raise the amount or relocation assistance required of landlords for each displaced unit to \$4,500, or two months rent, and required a 90-day notice to vacate the unit. State law required just one month’s rent to be paid to tenants.

The pending ordinance could also establish a civil penalty of up to \$15,000 for 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. ■



A rendering of one parcel that will make up The Beat, an expansive development by LAB Holdings in North Long Beach. Rendering courtesy of LAB Holdings.

## 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.”

Sadeghi 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 show up 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 bonfire and have a conversation.”

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

“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 on much of the leasing activity, but now it’s starting to come back, and we’re excited.”

LAB Holding isn’t the only development firm, 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 more are on 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 Harding Plaza retail center at Atlantic Avenue and Harding Street.

“We’ve got our plans mostly through the city,” Greenspan said. “At this point, the problem is that our primary anchor tenant was a gym, 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 the pandemic.”

Greenspan said the firm is exploring other potential tenants for the anchor site, which will take up between 15,000 and 20,000 square feet. The best alternative to a gym, he said, would likely be a grocery store.

But until Westland finds an occupant for that space, plans for The Uptown will remain on hold.

“We did have some smaller tenants, but at this point, everybody’s been sort of put on a holding pattern, waiting for the large tenant,” Greenspan said. “We’re not going to break ground without the anchor.”

“Our plan was to rebuild the entire block and have a cohesive development project,” he added. “Our current shopping center, which is Harding Plaza, is still open for business and will continue to stay open for business. We’re not going anywhere. We’re just—all the pieces just have to line up for this to make sense.”

City Councilman Rex Richardson, who represents North Long Beach’s 9th District and recently announced his mayoral campaign, said he would be glad to see a grocery store at the development.

“I’m very interested in adding a high quality grocer in the area, like a Sprouts,” he said. “I think that would be a significant advancement for the corridor and add an amenity that’s much needed, and add more pedestrian activity and value for the homeowners and residents in the area.”

As for the broader trend of developers being drawn to North Long Beach, Richardson said it’s the product of years of planning.

“What we’ve seen since making the initial public investments of the Michelle Obama library and Houghton Park and now Uptown Commons—we’re beginning to see real momentum in the corridor with private investment,” he said. “We’re seeing property owners make hundreds of thousands of dollars in investment, and that’s the kind of momentum that we want to see on Atlantic Avenue and can be replicated on corridors across the city.” ■



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

# FROM THE EDITOR: Laserfiche’s new Bixby Knolls headquarters is ready for a hybrid workforce

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

The Bixby Knolls-based software development company Laserfiche is slated to move into its new headquarters in late 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.

Laserfiche, which is currently based in a leased building at 3545 Long Beach Blvd., bought the adjacent property, 3459 Long Beach Blvd., years ago with plans to fill both spaces with the company’s ever-growing workforce.

Now that COVID-19 has upended the labor market and office culture overall, though, I was curious about how the company’s plans for the site have changed—and it seems there have been some pandemic-induced adjustments.

Laserfiche CEO Chris Wacker told me that the first building, at 65,000 square feet, was designed to accommodate 500-to-600 workers, which is about the number of people who were working at the site before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. At the time, it appeared more space would soon be necessary.

“When the pandemic hit, we were

forced to work from home or work remote,” Wacker said, “and that really impacted us, and certainly our plans moving forward.”

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.

Ditching the new 102,000-square-foot building, which the firm owns and designed itself, was not an option. So Laserfiche instead notified the landlord at 3545 Long Beach Blvd. that the company would vacate its old space. That building is now for sale.

Wacker told me that while plans for the new headquarters were made before the pandemic, it still offers features that will be crucial for a hybrid workplace. Meeting rooms, for example, were designed with video conferencing in mind, with cameras at one end of the room and tables with a slight “V” shape to allow for full video visibility. The building is also LEED- and WELL-certified with high-quality air filtration systems.

Beyond the aspects of the project that

have become newly important amid the pandemic, Wacker also said he was excited about the way the layout will foster more collaboration.

“It’s an open seating environment,” he said. “There are a few executive offices, but for the most part, it is open seating to encourage collaboration, with expansive 270-degree views and balconies on several floors that will allow for open-air discussions.”

Wacker acknowledged remote work has its benefits—it can allow better concentration, for one—and said Laserfiche will continue to allow employees to work however they’re most comfortable.

But, he added, “there’s no substitute for physical interaction, really. It’s just being in the same place at the same time—you just have conversations in the hall, and you bump into people, and you’re always renewing those bonds and relationships. It’s exchanging ideas and thoughts—even nonverbally. There’s just no substitute for that.”

While the new office represents the next chapter for Laserfiche, it’s also a significant addition for the neighborhood.

“Long Beach Boulevard, in the ‘50s and ‘60s, was this creative corridor where Edward Killingsworth and Donald Gibbs practiced,” said Michael Bohn, senior principal for Studio One Eleven, one of the firms behind the new project. “There were a lot of creative firms at the time, and it got sleepy near the end of the 20th century, and in the 21st century, a lot of new creative firms have really come back and appreciated the older, quirkier buildings.”

But the thoroughfare hasn’t seen a significant new development for decades—that is, until now.

“I think having this new building, 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. “So I think this is kind of the cherry on top that says, ‘Hey, this is still a relevant creative corridor,’ and this investment of a brand new building—which was inspired by a Killingsworth-designed building next door—I think says a lot about the continuity of history and moving forward.” ■

## Long Beach

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# Virgin Orbit now on Nasdaq; first mission of 2022 to blast off this month

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Long Beach-based rocket 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 the Nasdaq Aug. 25.

The transaction is expected to raise \$228 million to fund the continued growth 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 May 2020.



Richard Branson and Virgin Orbit leadership ring the bell to open the Nasdaq stock exchange Friday, Jan. 7, 2021. Photo courtesy of Virgin Orbit.

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 new 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,” NextGen co-founders George Mattson 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.

Pre-launch rehearsal for Virgin Orbit’s first mission of 2022, dubbed “Above 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 university payload sponsored by NASA. The LauncherOne also will carry two nanosatellites for Poland-based SatRevolution. ■

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

BY CRYSTAL NIEBLA / Reporter

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

The Pier B On-Dock Support Facility, launched a decade ago, is an \$870 million rail project that will reconfigure 171 acres of land southwest of Anaheim Street and the 710 Freeway to improve cargo movement via a rail system.

The on-dock 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 hear at the end of what will be our busiest year ever,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero 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 \$10.9 million in 2013 from the Federal Regional Surface Transportation Program, and about \$5.3 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-Dock 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 project completion in 2032, according to the port. ■



After serving the Belmont Shore community for 17 years, Fern’s Garden shuttered for good Dec. 31, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

# 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 gift-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 think we made the best decision for our future,” said the shop’s owner, Fern Solomon.

Solomon 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 crazy 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 the problems

*Continued on page 22*

# Former Gilmore Music employees to open new music shop

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

When it was announced in May that Gilmore Music would close after serving Long Beach musicians for 75 years, the music community mourned. The store’s staff, however, was determined to continue its legacy, one way or another, and that drive has evolved into More Music LB, a new music shop expected to open soon.

Four former Gilmore employees—Andy Arroyo, Andre and Ettienne Bouyer, and Pedro Rodriguez—banded together after the iconic store’s closure, each having worked at the store for 12 or more years.

“We are a family,” said Rodriguez, who worked at Gilmore for 14 years and was manager when it closed.

Initially, the small group of musicians sought to purchase the Gilmore store from Linda Gilmore, wife of Clint Gilmore, who died in 2020. However, the asking price was simply too much, Rodriguez said.

“We really wanted to honor his legacy because [Clint] employed us and we were thankful for that,” Rodriguez said. “But we couldn’t even keep the name.”

There is no animosity between the



From left: More Music LB co-owners Pedro Rodriguez, Andy Arroyo and Ettiene and Andre Bouyer inside their new store Friday, Dec. 24, 2021. The four business partners were employed at Gilmore Music when the iconic shop closed. They decided to open their own store that is expected to open soon. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

*Continued on page 17*

# 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 1,300 locations across South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, will be taking over the former WaBa Grill at the Harding Plaza on the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Harding Street, according to a recent report by Eater L.A. Unlike its Gardena counterpart, the North Long Beach location will include a drive-thru.

“We are very excited to introduce the signature Mom’s Touch experience and delicious fried chicken creations to the port. ■

*Continued on page 15*



A box of fried chicken from Korean fried chicken chain, Mom’s Touch. Photo courtesy Mom’s Touch.





Artists work on a mural prior to the pandemic. Photo courtesy of Able ARTS Work.



Carlos Arredondo poses with his artwork. Photo courtesy of Able ARTS Work.

## Able ARTS Work makes art accessible

BY TESS KAZENOFF / Reporter

When Helen Dolas founded Able ARTS Work nearly 40 years ago, she saw there was a need in the Long Beach community.

For many people with disabilities, there was very little care available that wasn't attached to a state hospital, let alone any artistic services that were accessible.

That all changed with the founding of Able ARTS Work, which brings creative services and art therapies to all people, with an emphasis on serving people with disabilities.

"The arts are human. We're wired for rhythm, we're wired for sound, we're wired for music . . . our speech is rhythmic, our walk is rhythmic," said Dolas. "Everything about us has rhythm and movement, and music and art and dance are all part of that humanistic life experience, so we need the arts to drive our brains."

Music is the only thing that can activate the entire brain, said Dolas, and it is not necessary to be an artist or a musician in order to be creative.

Not only does art and music benefit academic progress as well as critical thinking, but it can also allow for the unconscious self to express itself, she explained.

"There may be something problematic or a challenge that a child or adult might have, where they may not feel safe or comfortable to talk about or express those thoughts or feelings, but it can come out in the creative arts. It can come out in art therapy," she said. "A trained art therapist is able to recognize those symbols and those signs within the artwork to be able to follow and address those in a therapeutic process."

Compared to an arts education that is more product-oriented, art therapy is instead more process-oriented, said Dolas.

The nonprofit, which initially started with single-day programs for adults with developmental disabilities, has extended to include three-day programs and services for children and teens in the

greater Los Angeles area.

This year, Able ARTS will even introduce its programming to San Diego.

The organization tries to reach as many people as possible, working with schools, community centers, and other day programs, even working in incarceration settings and with at-risk youth, said chief operations officer Honor Dunn.

Adults with developmental disabilities can receive one-on-one services within their homes, and children with autism can utilize the organization's health and wellness clinic. Accessible arts workshops aim to reach those in marginalized and underserved communities, she said.

Particularly since the pandemic, the organization was able to pivot quickly and connect to the community with an inclusive, accessible learning site, Learn for Life, which focuses on creativity and wellness, professional development and continuing education.

"This has been such a difficult time and it has really affected the communities that we serve—the isolation, the loneliness, the lack of services that are out there. It's real," said Dunn. "The culture of the organization is this constant, 'How can we be better, and how can we make ourselves more accessible? How can we make ourselves more inclusive? And how can we have a higher level of representation?'"

Able ARTS Work participants can take classes varying from visual arts, music, drama, or dance, with many of the classes emphasizing community connection and engagement as well as employment, said Dunn.

Opportunities in podcast producing or displaying art in a gallery are offered to students, particularly through the organization's 2nd & PCH Gallery over the past year and a half. This month, the location is moving to the Expo Arts Center in Bixby Knolls.

The nonprofit sees the arts as a viable option for employment for many students, and areas of opportunity

*Continued on page 20*



One of the THUMS oil islands off the coast of Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## Ballot initiative to increase tax on oil producers could be at odds with state law

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

A potential November 2022 ballot measure that would raise the taxes on oil producers for every barrel produced in Long Beach could also test the power that California lawmakers have over local measures.

The measure, which proponents have not begun collecting signatures for, would add \$3 to the city's general oil barrel production tax, a move that could generate \$20 million or more annually for the city's general fund.

The measure, titled the Long Beach Environmental Protection General Purpose Oil Production Tax Increase Measure, was submitted to the City

Clerk's office late last month by Elliot Lewis, an owner of multiple cannabis dispensaries in and around Long Beach.

Lewis said that the oil industry should pay more, given the harm that its product causes to the environment and the people living in the city.

"They need to pay more taxes," Lewis said.

The petition submitted to the clerk cited the October 2021 oil spill that dumped 25,000 gallons of oil in the Pacific Ocean from a pipeline situated off the Long Beach coast, saying that the current taxes paid by oil producers don't go far enough to ensure that the city has sufficient revenue to offset future spills.

Because it's a general tax, the

measure would only need a simple majority of voter approval to win if it qualifies for the ballot. As a general tax, the revenue it generates cannot legally be set aside for specific programs, but it could boost the city's overall budget, which is currently facing a \$30 million shortfall in 2022.

But first, proponents will have to collect about 28,000 signatures to get it on the ballot, according to the City Clerk's office.

Ballot measures need 10% of registered voters' signatures to qualify for a vote. A definite number of how many signatures this measure would need is not yet available because the city is still waiting to hear from Los Angeles County election officials about how many

registered voters are in Long Beach.

In March 2021, Long Beach had 281,731 registered voters. The City Clerk's office said proponents would have until July to get the required number of signatures verified.

But placing the item on the ballot could be a lesser obstacle than what could happen if voters approve it.

Voters approved Measure US, a similar oil production tax that was placed on the ballot by the City Council in 2020, which was aimed at providing funding for youth programs and issues caused by climate change. The 15 cent increase was projected to create \$1.6 million in annual revenue, then gradually decline as oil production comes to an end in the city.

The most recent city budget projected about \$1.33 million would be generated by Measure US. The initiative being pursued in 2022 is 20 times larger than Measure US but could run into a legal obstacle created by the California legislature earlier this year.

Assembly Bill 155 specifically banned new taxes levied against oil production in Long Beach that would affect the state's share of oil revenue. Deputy City Attorney Rich Anthony said this raises questions that his office hasn't yet answered.

"The California constitution lays out how ballot initiatives work in charter cities, as does our charter," Anthony said. "It's unclear if state legislation takes precedent over those two."

Anthony said it's possible that if the measure makes it to the ballot and wins, the state could sue the city to block just its share of oil revenue from being taxed at a higher rate.

Not all of Long Beach oil is produced on state land, like the Tidelands Area, but the oil production on other properties is not the lion's share of oil production in the city, Anthony said.

Anthony added that it is common for state laws to single out cities for specific things like AB 155 did with Long Beach oil production. But the office doesn't yet know if state law has the legal authority to stop a local ballot measure. ■

## CDC advises people to avoid cruise travel 'regardless of vaccination status'

BY ANTHONY PIGNATARO / Reporter

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control said late last month that because of the spread of COVID-19 variants, everyone, regardless of vaccination status, should avoid cruise travel.

In a Dec. 30 advisory, the CDC also updated its Travel Health Notice level to Four, the highest level, meaning transmission of COVID-19 is happening at "very high" rates.

"Even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk for getting and spreading COVID-19 variants," the CDC noted in its advisory. "The virus

that causes COVID-19 spreads easily between people in close quarters on board ships, and the chance of getting COVID-19 on cruise ships is very high, even if you are fully vaccinated and have received a COVID-19 vaccine booster dose."

As of Dec. 30, each of the three Carnival Cruise ships that operate out of Long Beach—Miracle, Panorama, and Radiance—were designated as "Yellow" on the CDC's Cruise Ship Color Status, which means each ship currently has COVID-19 cases on board.

On the Miracle, the CDC has started

an investigation, while on the Panorama and Radiance the CDC has investigated and the ships remain under observation, according to the agency.

A spokesperson for Carnival Cruises referred the Business Journal to a statement posted by the Cruise Lines International Association on Dec. 30. According to that statement, cruise lines found the CDC's new advisory "perplexing" but agreed to work with the agency.

"The decision by the CDC to raise the travel level for cruise is particularly perplexing considering that cases identified on cruise ships consistently

make up a very slim minority of the total population onboard—far fewer than on land—and the majority of those cases are asymptomatic or mild in nature, posing little to no burden on medical resources onboard or onshore," the cruise lines association's statement said.

"While we are disappointed and disagree with the decision to single out the cruise industry—an industry that continues to go above and beyond compared to other sectors—CLIA and our ocean-going cruise line members remain committed to working collaboratively with the CDC in the interest of public health and safety." ■



The "Fuego" fried chicken sandwich. Photo courtesy Mom's Touch.

### Korean Fried Chicken

*Continued from page 13*

our Long Beach guests who may have heard about us in Gardena, but haven't had the chance to visit just yet," Mike Lee, director of marketing and finance at Mom's Touch, said in a statement.

The chain's international menu is quite expansive compared to its SoCal menu, which offers a modest, although well regarded, selection of fried chicken wings, chicken sandwiches and chicken fingers.

It is perhaps the restaurant's preparation that has piqued diners' attention since it landed in SoCal last year. The chicken, which is served fresh and touted as never frozen, is marinated in a Cajun spice blend that includes red pepper, cayenne pepper and paprika for 24 hours before being hand-battered and deep-fried.

The wings come in six flavor profiles,

from its mildly spicy "Mom's Original" recipe to its spiciest, "Fuego." Some sweeter offerings include a "Sweet Chili" and "Apple Zing" flavor.

There are three fried chicken sandwiches to choose from, including the original, fuego and a creamy garlic option that can be made with either dark thigh meat or chicken breast. Each sandwich includes lettuce, onions, pickles and a "special sauce" that's sandwiched between a soft brioche bun.

Mom's Touch representatives say the restaurant will open in "early 2022." To keep tabs on the restaurant, visit its Instagram or website.

Mom's Touch is also slated to open a third location in the City of Industry in 2022, though the date has not been disclosed.

Mom's Touch will open at 6191 Atlantic Ave. ■





People wait in line for COVID-19 tests at Long Beach City College's Pacific Coast Campus Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Photo Brandon Richardson.

# Long Beach changes its COVID-19 quarantine rules

BY CHEANTAY JENSEN / Reporter

The city’s health department announced late last month that it would change its COVID-19 requirements for how long a person who is infected or exposed to the virus should quarantine and wear a mask.

These changes align with Los Angeles County’s new COVID-19 requirements that are based on recent

new recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and the California Department of Public Health. In Long 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 if 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 when 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 nose wire, instead of a less effective cloth mask.

**If you’ve been exposed but are vaccinated and boosted:**

You don’t need to quarantine, though you should get tested immediately. If that test is negative, you should test again on the fifth day after the last contact with the person who had the virus. If you develop symptoms, you should get tested as soon as possible.

The new guidelines also require

people who have been exposed to wear a mask when indoors and outside while around other people for 10 days.

**If you’ve been exposed and 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 on the rise in the city.

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

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

BY FERNANDO HARO / Reporter

The corporation that operates the Crunch Fitness gym in Bixby Knolls has agreed to pay about \$10,000 in penalties to settle criminal charges that it illegally stayed open during industrywide 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 state and citywide health orders, City Prosecutor Douglas Haubert said.

The violations came after Gov. Gavin Newsom 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, posting 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. “And only if a business continued to operate, would they be given a criminal citation.”

Crunch Fitness in Bixby Knolls was one of only two businesses that were criminally cited. The other was Restauration, a restaurant on Fourth



Four people walk toward Crunch Fitness in Bixby Knolls Thursday, Jan. 6, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Street, whose case is still winding through criminal court. Restauration’s owner stayed open even in light of the criminal charges before eventually shutting down for good.

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

On Dec. 28, Long Beach Fitness LLC entered a plea agreement, pleading guilty

to one count of violating the statewide health order and three counts of violating the city’s health order.

According to the agreement, Long Beach Fitness LLC has 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 \$5,000 worth of memberships and \$4,000 worth of gym equipment to the Long Beach Unified School District—an idea that was sparked during a meeting between

Garrell 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, said Garrell, 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 just happened to be the individual that was on site,” Garrell said. “They’re pleased with the outcome.”

Crunch Fitness is a New-York based company with over 300 fitness center franchises in three countries. There are two located in Long Beach. ■

## Gilmore Music

Continued from page 12

group and Linda Gilmore, Rodriguez said of the failure to come to an agreeable price for the business. “It’s just business,” he said.

Without a space for their store, the group went on the hunt, which proved challenging, Rodriguez said, adding that he started driving for the food delivery service DoorDash to pay the bills. While out making deliveries, he drove by a vacant storefront across from Thomas Jefferson Middle School on Seventh Street. A number was posted on a banner, so Rodriguez called it.

Located at 3736 E. Seventh St., the former home of Luxury Glam Hair Salon was perfect for the music shop, Rodriguez said—a cleaner area with more parking and fewer traffic accidents compared to the former Gilmore location at Cherry Avenue and Seventh Street.

While More Music LB will not carry on the name Gilmore, Rodriguez said it will carry on its purpose.

“We are here for the community,” Rodriguez said, adding that he hopes

the store will become a hub for local musicians to meet, hang out, grow and promote themselves. “We want to be a store ... that’s going to be able to link musicians with each other.”

The store will have a giant chalkboard for local musicians to promote upcoming shows, seek new members and more, Rodriguez said.

Each of the four owners specializes in different areas: Arroyo in percussion, live sound, engineering and instrument repairs; Andre Bouyer in record players and turntable repair, and bass, guitar and instrument electronic repair; Etienne Bouyer in bass and guitar repairs, set up and maintenance; and Rodriguez in private lessons and instrument repair, including being an authorized repair center for Taylor and Gibson.

“It’s going to be everything except a recording studio,” Rodriguez said. “We’re going to do everything here.”

Rodriguez said the store is going to open with the basics—guitars, basses, ukuleles, banjos and other stringed instruments. However, over time, he said the plan is to expand to as many instruments as possible, including woodwinds, brass, classical and less



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.

common pieces such as shofars and other instruments.

The store also will sell and repair amplifiers, Rodriguez said.

The group had hoped to open ahead of Christmas to take advantage of holiday shoppers, but faced delays with the city. Staff made it out to the space for a building check on Jan. 4,

Rodriguez said. The final inspection with the Long Beach Fire Department is scheduled for Jan. 18, and Rodriguez said the shop should be open before the end of the month.

“We’re excited,” Rodriguez said. “We are the same people and we’re going to give the same or better customer service.” ■

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# City Council extends Grand Prix contract through 2028



IndyCars get the green flag to start the race during the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach Sunday, September 26, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

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 a say in future developments that may interfere with the current track layout.

The Long Beach City Council unanimously voted last week to have City Manager Tom Modica extend the contract with the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach to June 30, 2028. The existing agreement with the association was set to expire in June 2023.

“The Grand Prix extension that has been approved by the City Council 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 involved in any potential development process in the future.

Michaelian added that that is important because in the past, “without that requirement a developer could have come with a plan that didn’t afford us an opportunity for discussion or input or anything.”

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

The event’s Downtown racetrack spans the waterfront and loops around the Long Beach Convention Center, the Long Beach Arena and the city’s largest undeveloped parcel 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’s race schedule as one of the course’s turns, grandstands for fans and pit areas for some race teams. It’s 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 use for the space.

The elephant lot is also expected to play a role in the city’s 2028 Olympics plans. The new agreement says race organizers may have to work with Olympic organizers to adjust the 2028 race schedule if the

*Continued on page 22*

# LBPd Assistant Chief Wally Hebeish succeeds Robert Luna as police chief



Long Beach Police Department Chief Wally Hebeish.

BY FERNANDO HARO / Reporter

Assistant Chief of Police Wally Hebeish is Long Beach’s new chief of police.

Hebeish, whose promotion went into effect Jan. 1, replaced former Chief Robert Luna, who retired from the LBPd at the end of the year. Luna is running for Los Angeles County Sheriff, following in the footsteps of his predecessor Jim McDonnell, who successfully made the jump from LBPd chief to sheriff before being unseated by current Sheriff Alex Villanueva.

“I am extremely grateful and honored for the opportunity to lead the employees of the Long Beach Police Department in serving our community,” Hebeish said in a statement. “I look forward to building on the many advancements we have made under the guidance of Chief Luna and continuing our efforts in modernizing our organization in a manner that strengthens public trust, improves employee wellness, and demonstrates accountability and transparency.”

Hebeish came into his new role on the heels of a spike in gun violence and amid a surge in COVID-19 cases across Long Beach. LBPd has struggled to bring up vaccination rates among its officers, with a citywide mandate looming but no deadline yet announced.

Hebeish, a 27-year law enforcement veteran, has spent all but one of those years with the LBPd. He started his career with the Orange County Sheriff’s Department in 1994 but quickly moved to the LBPd. He’s been seen as a frontrunner for the top job since Luna announced his retirement in September. He’s worked closely with Luna for years, working as his chief of staff before ascending in rank, reaching deputy chief in 2017 and then assistant chief—the department’s second in command—in 2019.

As assistant chief, Hebeish has had an increasingly high-profile role at the department, overseeing LBPd’s new office of constitutional policing and frequently appearing at official

meetings—including defending his department’s use of facial recognition technology, which has been repeatedly questioned by some city commissioners.

Hebeish also served briefly as acting chief of the department earlier this year while Luna was recuperating from being struck by a truck while crossing the street.

“It is a privilege to appoint Assistant Chief Hebeish to serve as the new Police Chief for our great city,” City Manager Tom Modica said in a statement. “Chief Hebeish possesses a thorough understanding of critical issues and priorities currently affecting our Long Beach community. He continues to lead 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 experience and characteristics they would like to see in the new police chief, which resulted in over 1,200 responses. The survey shows Hebeish will have to respond to community demands for more transparency and accountability for officers as well as with expectations that a new chief be able to reduce and prevent crime.

In a statement, Long Beach officials said they picked Hebeish after a nationwide recruitment and multi-step screening and interview process, including input from a technical panel, community panel, department head panel and management panel.

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 our officers,” Garcia said in a statement. “I’m grateful for his commitment to Long Beach and the historic barriers he’s breaking for Muslim Americans.”

While an executive with the LBPd, Hebeish “has implemented strategies to reduce crime, address the nationwide increase in gun violence, enhance the Police Department’s Quality of Life team to provide further resources and support for people experiencing homelessness, all while also focusing key initiatives on strengthening police-community relationships and improving public trust,” according to the city’s announcement.

Hebeish holds a master’s degree in communications with focuses in new media and marketing from Southern New Hampshire University and a bachelor’s of science in criminal justice from Cal State Long Beach. ■

# 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 on as planned, but the public would not be allowed to watch from inside the council chambers.

Residents who did attend the meeting were forced to watch the meeting on the media wall inside the lobby of City Hall and were shuttled in to give public comment before being escorted back to the lobby. It was an in-person meeting with no members of the public allowed to be present.

Garcia’s announcement came as the city experiences an unprecedented surge in 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 aversion to being in public spaces.

“This is like it was a year ago, remember when no one left their home?” said Councilwoman Cindy Allen, as she peered out of her 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 telephonic or another virtual form of

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# CSULB returns to remote learning due to omicron spike

BY FERNANDO HARO / Reporter

Cal State Long Beach joined other state universities last week in turning to remote instruction out of “an abundance of caution” due to the latest surge in omicron-driven COVID-19 cases, officials said.

CSULB, which begins its spring semester on Jan. 20, will be offering primarily 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 warrants this adjustment.”

CSU spokesperson Toni Molle said that all 23 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, San Diego, Fresno, 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, bookstore, 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 reservations 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 The 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. 28, if they plan to access university facilities and programs.

“This is an appropriate modification to our approach given the current surge in infections 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.

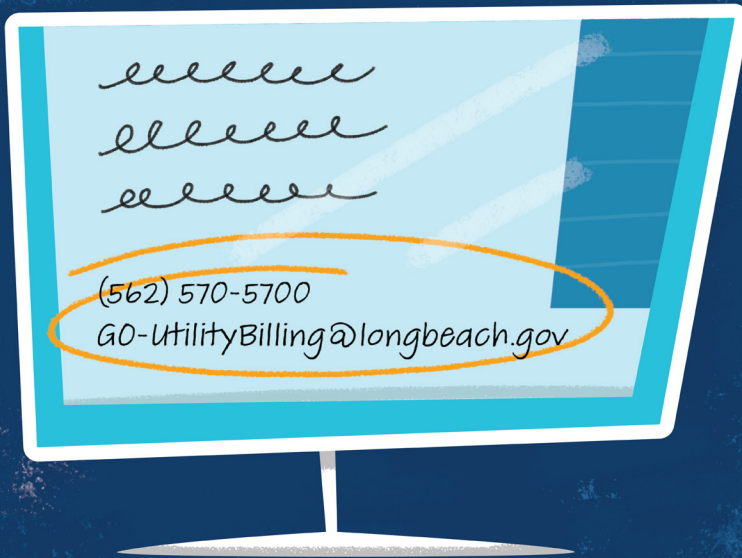
CSULB officials said they will continue to monitor prevailing conditions and public health recommendations over the coming weeks. ■



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Fern’s Garden

Continued from page 13

elsewhere on the street; increasing rent, for one, and COVID-19 and its attendant complications for another, especially with unmasked people insisting on remaining that way while shopping, which could well be caused by the Shore’s proximity to a less mask-observant county.

Through the years, particularly at Christmas, Fern’s has been crowded with customers looking for something both well made and more unique than you’d find cruising the aisles of a big-box store or even scrolling through Amazon: wind chimes, the store’s specialty, ranging in tone from tinkling to robust baritone, desktop waterfalls, hand-held Zen gardens, handcrafted jewelry and apparel, plants and planters, candles and calligraphy cards—and, these days, masks. You might not find what you’re looking for at Fern’s, but you’d almost certainly find what you weren’t looking for.

Operating in Belmont Shore became a bit problematic a couple of years before the pandemic, said Solomon. Then came the pandemic and, of course, things went downhill exponentially, with stores shuttering either permanently or temporarily and fewer people casually strolling up and down the district’s 14 blocks to see what was available for gifts or themselves.

Solomon’s business began more than 20 years ago in Los Alamitos, where she made her Jacob’s Music Chimes, still a staple of her business in Berkeley as well as online at jacobschimes.com and fernsgarden.com.

The “Jacob” is her brother—who she calls him “the king of ding-a-ling”—who’s a musician who tunes the chimes, while Solomon does the marketing and sales. She sold them from a stand at the Orange County Swap meet for seven years before opening her shop in the Shore.

Despite problems in recent years, Solomon still has happy memories of the Long Beach location. “The neighbors have been good and being next door to the fabulous George’s [Greek Cafe], they were so good to us. It’s been great,” she said. “It’s not that the store doesn’t do a lot of business anymore, but with rents going up and other costs, it’s been more difficult to make a profit.”

Solomon expressed her appreciation for all of the faithful customers over the years, with particular affection for Ashley LeDuc, who has managed the store for more than seven years, as well as her loyal employees, “The Gardeners.”

Her Berkeley shop is doing well, she said, and she just signed a lease for another five years there. “Even though I’m 69, I just want to keep going and going,” she said. “And hopefully turn it into an employee-owned store that can continue to go on.”

“I just want everyone to know how grateful I am,” she said. ■

Long Beach BLAST helps students meet academic, career goals

BY TESS KAZENOFF / Reporter

Long Beach Better 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 difficulties, he said.

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 over 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, not only with navigating their academic goals, but 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 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 assisting with applications and financial aid, college isn’t the end goal for every student, and Long Beach BLAST addresses that.

Students can also receive guidance from the organization in their pursuit of a trade, a job, or the military—“If college isn’t your reality just yet, there are ways we continue to support you,” said Adachi.

Mentors typically connect to BLAST through partnerships with Cal State Long Beach and Long Beach City College, while students generally are introduced to the program following a referral from their school.

Adachi hopes that students not only gain inspiration through their mentorships but a sense of empowerment as well.

“It’s really empowering to just become incredible agents of change and impact on their own,” said Adachi. “Whether that’s in their communities, families or with their circles, just to really provide that positive outline and outlook on life.”

Bridge to Success, on the other hand, is focused more on life skills and assistance with credit recovery for credit-deficient high school students.

Similar to the academic mentoring program, Bridge to Success aims to be comprehensive, and students not only tackle topics such as college applications and financial aid, but the program involves eight different modules, varying from financial literacy to cultural awareness and diversity.

Many lessons involve topics that Adachi and his team wished they had in high school, and Adachi sees those conversations that go beyond academics to be integral to the growth of BLAST students, and are unique to the organization.

So far, Bridge to Success is only offered at two continuation or alternative high schools, Reid and Poly PAAL, although the program recently broadened to seven middle schools, and Adachi hopes to continue expanding the program further.

However, recruitment has been stunted since the pandemic, making expansion increasingly difficult, with BLAST experiencing limited capacity in regards to being able to serve students typically served, said Adachi.

Virtual learning and the pandemic of course created new difficulties for students and the education system as a whole, with blank screens and low attendance becoming more of the norm, said Adachi.

While school being back in-person this past fall has led to an increase in engagement particularly for the Bridge to Success program, there were still adjustments that had to be made, Adachi said.

“It’s just students still adjusting to being back in-person, having to wear masks the whole time, and just in general . . . this is not the typical school year even though we’re back in-person,” he said. “So our goal is to provide a sense of normalcy to that.”

In its over 20-year history, BLAST has served around 18,000 at-promise youth, engaging around 11,000 college mentors as well.

“We hope to be able to provide that to more and more youth throughout the community,” said Adachi, although maintaining intentionality and quality of service is the organization’s top priority.

“You could say, ‘Oh, hey, we’ve served thousands of students,’ but if that’s just a basic touch point, serving them just through one activity, then that’s not that’s not what we’re focused on,” he said.

In the meantime, the organization will continue to foster its relationship with the school district and local colleges, while improving its curriculum to better meet the needs of Long Beach students, said Adachi.

For volunteer opportunities, please contact volunteer@lbbast.org, or info@lbbast.org to donate items or services. ■

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