COVID-19 HAS CHANGED HIGHER ED FOR GOOD WITH INCREASED LEVEL OF ONLINE LEARNING

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

When the coronavirus spread to the U.S., millions were forced to stay home from work and school. With little notice, colleges and universities nationwide were forced to shift their learning models to a fully digital space.

The transition, at first, seemed temporary. But as colleges and universities have worked through the challenges to build a system that allows for learning exclusively online, officials now say remote instruction will likely become a permanent fixture of higher education.

The early difficulties that professors and administrators faced in implementing such a major shift, though, were real.

"Pre-pandemic [online] offerings were minimal at best," Lee Douglas, vice president of academic affairs at Long Beach City College said. "It wasn't really that widespread."

The transition to 100% online instruction was challenging for students, Douglas said, as well as educators. "It was, I'll be very honest, a traumatic experience for many."

Prior to the pandemic, William Jeynes, a professor of education at Cal State Long Beach, said he assumed his lack of experience with teaching online put him in the minority. However, when the school set up Zoom tutorials for teachers, he quickly realized the vast majority of his colleagues were as new to the format as he was.

Another assumption Jeynes had, "and it turned out to be wrong, is that in terms of technological ability, my students were ahead of me," he said. "Many of them were, but what surprised me is how many students I had to assist technologically."

Despite the early challenges, both educators agree there are many benefits to online learning. The primary benefit amid the pandemic, of course, was the ability to continue teaching students during a time of turmoil that kept people physically apart.

Another major benefit of online education is the flexibility provided to both students and teachers, Douglas said. Prior to the pandemic, asynchronous

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LBUSD students saw drop in test scores last year, reflecting pandemic challenges

BY KELLY PUENTE / Reporter

Long Beach Unified students saw significantly lower test scores in math and English for the 2020-21 school year, highlighting the difficulties in a year of mostly remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The California Department of Education recently released student performance data from 2020-21, giving a snapshot of how students fared in the pandemic for the first time in two years.

Overall, students statewide saw setbacks in standardized tests for math and English, while chronic absenteeism increased and four-year graduation rates decreased. The scores also show widening achievement gaps between

Continued on page 8

LBUSD school workers raise possibility of strike as contract talks remain stalled

BY MIKE GUARDABASCIO / Reporter

The Long Beach Unified School District is still stuck in a protracted impasse with its second-largest employee union, with no end in sight as state mediators prepare to step in later this month.

The 3,000 or so classified employees in the Long Beach chapter of the California School Employees Association range from nutrition workers to bus drivers to custodians and maintenance staff. They’ve been negotiating a new contract with the district for nearly two years, with pay being the main sticking point.

The CSEA Long Beach chapter has never before gone on strike, but the leadership’s frustration was evident at a LBUSD Board of Education meeting late last month, where many of their

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The 10% of students who have not fulfilled this requirement are barred from visiting the campus for any reason, including for any on-campus services or events. While many students who had not followed the mandate were immediately dropped from in-person and hybrid classes on Jan. 24, 1,700 students have been able to re-enroll in classes with case management from LBCC.

The case management program began on Jan. 10 for students who were expected to not be in compliance with the mandate, though officials did not expand on how those students were identified. Those students, though, were supported by a ‘collaboration between counseling, student affairs, enrollment services, student equity, and leadership from (counselor) Dr. Erainia Freeman,’ said, that helped provide students the knowledge and resources to submit their records and re-enroll or explore options that do not require a COVID-19 vaccination.

LBCC continues to work with students still in violation of the mandate to get them back in classes. The school began its case management program with 2,187 students, and the 1,700 that have re-enrolled after submitting vaccination records, represent a significant portion of students in violation of the mandate.

“We’re not just dropping them and leaving them alone. We are following up with those students to assure they have educational options at Long Beach City College,” the college’s interim Vice President of Student Services Nohel Corea said.

These numbers come as LBCC continues extensive efforts to encourage vaccinations, including $1,000 incentive payments to 2,285 students who met the timeline for the mandate, with an additional 428 students set to receive this incentive.

The school has also conducted significant outreach, contacting over 2,800 students via text, email or phone to ensure awareness of the mandate. The mandate, though, comes as enrollment numbers continue to drop as the pandemic lingers. General enrollment for the winter 2022 session was almost 9% lower than it was the year prior, which has resulted in a low fill rate for classes, particularly those requiring in-person attendance.

Just over 60% of classes requiring in-person attendance were filled for the winter 2022 session, compared to 85% for those conducted in an online-only format. The fill rate for classes overall is about 73%, but that number dipped dramatically from the 87% overall fill rate in winter 2021.

O. "Dough" Douglas, the vice president of academic affairs, said that a glaring reason for these lower numbers was an abnormally high number of dropped classes in the first few weeks of the session.

"I would imagine that some of the drops are in part likely due to the rate of omicron," Douglas said, "which happened to coincide with the first few weeks of our winter session."

While the spring semester of this year has seen only a slight decline in overall enrollment, the fill rates for classes overall show an even greater reluctance to attend classes in person.

Less than 55% of in-person only classes have been filled, and hybrid enrollment has shrunk 64% of classes filled for spring 2022. However, online-only class enrollment remains steady, sitting at 82%.

Douglas noted that enrollment numbers for the spring were improving slightly before the past week, when numbers dipped to lower than the overall average levels. Douglas explained that this drop is directly connected to the cutting of low enrollment classes during that time frame, as well as drops initiated due to lack of compliance with the vaccine mandate.

Another update will be presented to the Board of Trustees at its Feb. 23 meeting.
CSULB to return to Angel Stadium for this year’s in-person commencement

BY FERNANDO HARO / Reporter

Cal State Long Beach officials announced last month that the university’s graduation ceremony this year will be held at Angel Stadium of Anaheim for the class of 2021 and 2022. Each college will hold its own two-hour ceremony, starting with the College of Engineering on May 16, at 10 a.m. The schedule for the three-day event is as follows:

• College of Business — May 16, 10 a.m.
• College of Education — May 16, 1 p.m.
• College of Health & Human Services — May 17, 11 a.m.
• College of Natural Science & Mathematics — May 17, 1 p.m.
• College of Fine Arts — May 17, 3 p.m.
• College of Health — May 18, 10 a.m.
• College of Health — May 18, 9 a.m.

Last May, CSULB officials opted to hold graduation for the class of 2020 and 2021 at Angel Stadium to sodly accommodate a larger number of students at a time in keeping with state health guidelines. Last year was a “grad pass,” decision was made after a school-wide survey revealed that by a six-to-one margin, students preferred to have their graduation ceremony in person. This year, students that were faced with the task of choosing were allowed to invite guests to the graduation as CSULB officials gave them a total of five tickets each student in attendance and one for a guest, the Daily 49er reported. Students were also given two parking passes. CSULB officials later gave students an extra ticket, for a total of three, prompting some students to look for creative ways to acquire more graduation tickets for family and friends.

This year, students that apply for graduation will not require a ticket to attend the event and will instead use a “grad pass” to gain access. Graduates will also receive a minimum of 15 tickets for guests and parking will be free, according to the CSULB website. More information on tickets and distribution will be available in May, school officials said.

Students who wish to have their names added to the Graduation Recognition Program must apply for graduation by March 1. The “popular” Graduation Recognition Stages, where students can create a personalized slide and quote that appears as they hear their name announced and walk the “mini,” will be staged in the student’s parking lot.

The ceremony will also be available through a livestream on the commencement website. For more information, visit csulb.edu/commencement.

Q&A: How a new center at CSULB hopes to address equity in higher education

BY RAMSHIA MUNGUIA / Editor

The two-year-long COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated so many different types of inequities—and perhaps none more than our students’ financial barriers to education. But in the midst of the public health crisis, Cal State Long Beach kicked off its own effort to address just that issue.

The university’s Center for Equitable Higher Education launched over the summer, so I reached out to the center’s director, Rashida Crutchfield, to learn more about the program’s work and how it fits into the current educational landscape.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

HAYLEY MUNGUIA: First, can you tell me a little bit about the background of the Center for Equitable Higher Education? How did it get started?
RAMSHIA CRUTCHFIELD: Well, my research and work agenda is focused on promoting food, housing and financial security for students and their families. So in many ways, our coordinated efforts strive for, but clearly in a time where a lot of people are losing their jobs and many are without health insurance, so we make sure our work is that much more urgent. And the work we’re doing at the Cal State level is really in response to a growing crisis that we’ve seen. So it’s not really that cuts into the work that’s already in progress.

RC: When talking about this in the abstract, in some ways, because we just started. So the rapid research we’re doing is a $2 million project that is an longitudinal study, so it’s consumes quite a lot of our efforts. But the things we’re doing is evaluating programs that already exist. Sometimes when people are doing programs that actually exist, it’s just more about determining the impact of those programs.

HM: OK. So are you thinking that a lot of the work the center is doing is going to focus on evaluating programs that already exist? Or creating new programs based on students’ feedback on their effectiveness?
RC: We’re thinking about this in the abstract, in some ways, because we just started. So the rapid research we’re doing is a $2 million project that is an longitudinal study, so it’s consumes quite a lot of our efforts. But the things we’re doing is evaluating programs that already exist. Sometimes when people are doing programs that actually exist, it’s just more about determining the impact of those programs.

HM: And is this a center that hopes the Center for Equitable Higher Education will accomplish?
RC: I definitely see the center as working in tandem with our campus staff, and within the campus community, and our policy makers to ensure that our campus has the resources to support our students. Last year we heard, that’s really important to their needs and that we produce the kinds of supports necessary to make sure that they graduate. I’ve spoken a lot about that. I’ve reached out to the Foundation that’s supporting our work.

RC: I’m really excited about a study that I’m working on with a group of CSU faculty around student success. This is a research study with my colleague Jessica Wu, which looks at this year’s students and how we’re also working with faculty in our faculty in our faculty support at the institutional level that support from foundations, from private donors and seek support from the state. The idea would be that the Center for Equitable Higher Education will accomplish.

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Rashida Crutchfield

Long Beach College City plans to use $30M gift to advance educational equity

BY CHRISTIAN MAY-SUZUKI / Reporter

A $30 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott will help Long Beach City College offer a more equitable educational experience for its students.

College officials spoke at the board of trustees meeting last week to announce the plans to use the unrestricted gift, which was one of dozens that Scott doled out to schools across the country last summer.

Since the gift was announced, officials said the college has created an advisory group that will solicit input from the community on how it should be used. The college said that educational equity should be front and center.

“We did it that way because when we received this gift, this was not going to be a one-time windfall and came out of charities. We had, ‘Hey, this is how this $30 million is going to be spent,’” Superintendent-President Mike Moure told the board. Through that process, three funding priorities came to light: improving student academic outcomes through closing racial equity gaps, engaging in race-conscious and culturally responsive practive that promotes an inclusive and affirming campus environment, and increasing holistic campus support services for our most vulnerable students.

But allowing the money—which “I simply the largest donation the college has ever received—to be seen as one type of ongoing growth strategy is also important to officials. To that end, Moure said, up to $5 million will be invested for the long term. An investment firm will be chosen by the Board of Trustees following a request for proposals. Several guidelines have been set for the right investment firm, including socially responsible investing and making sure the input of the advisory group.

A graduate walks down the first step to join his fellow graduates at the commencement of Cal State Long Beach’s College of Engineering classes of 2022 and 2021 at Angel Stadium in Anaheim on May 20, 2022, at the University Park. / By Nyu Lee. Connor's

It’s focused on promoting food, housing and financial justice for students in the higher education. It’s really our job to make sure that the support services and the policies that have been found are addressing the needs of those students, and particularly the needs of those students of color. The center started in June of 2021, so we’ve seen the payment of the initial seed money from the CSU’s chancellor’s office, and then just two weeks later and finally we all felt like we hit this low.

HM: Can you tell me a little more about this center? What is it doing? And how can we evaluate that stuff?
RC: We’re thinking about this in the abstract, in some ways, because we just started. So the rapid research we’re doing is a $2 million project that is an longitudinal study, so it’s consumes quite a lot of our efforts. But the things we’re doing is evaluating programs that already exist. Sometimes when people are doing programs that actually exist, it’s just more about determining the impact of those programs.

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members rallied outside, carrying signs demanding more living wages or threatening to walk off the job. Chapter President Gilbert Bonilla Jr. spoke over the sound of honks and cheers from the parking lot: “LBUSD, you’re our union.” “We appreciate your videos of gratitude but you have to pay us bills.”

CSEA Chapter Vice President Enrique Chavez spoke as well and used profanity to address the five board members. “Do you want a walkout or a strike on your record?” he asked.

According to the district’s most recent bargaining update, issued in October, the two sides have been negotiating their new collective bargaining agreement since March of 2020, with more than 100 hours of meeting time. In October, the two sides participated in impasse mediation with a California State Conciliation Service Mediator but could not come to an agreement. Bonilla said in an interview last month that the two sides are preparing for a Public Employee Relations Board fact-finding session that will take place Feb. 22-23, where both sides will present evidence in support of their proposals. The district offered the CSEA the same 3% it gave the teachers Association of Long Beach in negotiations last year, while the CSEA wanted something closer to 7%. Bonilla said neither side has made any contingency plans if the CSEA threatens to walk off the job. “If a teacher goes 2% and they’re making $40,000, they’re getting $800, $900,” Bonilla said. “If one of our members is making minimum wage, which is getting $240 a year, the increase of living has gone up 5%, and inflation has made it even higher.” When people ask, “Why don’t they just take the teachers home?” That’s the problem. The state gets a 14% raise, the executive staff get a raise. “We’re asking for seven cents on the dollar, and they’re saying no.”

LBUSD instructional aides represented by the CSEA also spoke at the Jan. 19 board meeting and shared the difficulty of continuing to live in the city given the rising cost of living. After public comment had concluded that evening, LBUSD Board President Francesca Moreno said that the district’s large financial reserves should help offset any staff and service cuts, instead of accumulating as a cushion against future financial issues, the district’s reserves are currently over $300 million. “That money is supposed to be spent on education each year. Those are tax dollars from parents that aren’t being seen in education or support, which includes our members,” said Bonilla. “Instead, a lot of that money went into the piggy bank, and we have members that’s going to back down from its demands.”

In budget presentations over the last few years, the district has said those reserves will help offset last minute revenue due to the steady enrollment decline of the last several years, a trend that’s expected to continue. The October bargaining update from the LBUSD reads, “While the District recognizes the significant contributions of CSEA during these difficult times, the District is not able to respond positively agree to this offer if it is to remain fiscally solvent in the future.”

With both the CSEA and the LBUSD holding firm on their positions for the last several months, there’s little hope of resolution ahead of the state-led fact-finding session. Bonilla said his membership isn’t going to back down from its demands. “Our surveys show that the majority of our membership want the raise, and they’re willing to strike,” he said. “We’re getting to that time where it’s critical.”

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Long Beach struck off its spring semester last month by joining a California State University-system-wide initiative that aims to bridge the digital divide among students by providing thousands of iPads bundled free of charge.

The “CSUCCESS program will help our first-year students have the technology they need to succeed,” Bryan Jackson, assistant vice president of University Technology Support and services of CSU Long Beach, said in a statement. “We have taken many steps to bridge the digital divide during the pandemic and the CSUCCESS program only strengthens the Student Technology Loan program for our students in need.”

CSULB worked to bridge digital divide with free iPads for students

BY CHRISTIAN MAY-SUZUKI / Reporter

Attendance at the Long Beach Unified School District has taken a sharp fall in the 23-22 school year, thanks in large part to the ongoing variant of COVID-19. Attendance coming out of winter break in January fell to an approximately 30% weekly average districtwide, but that number rebounded to 87% by the end of the month. In December, the district saw a 91.6% attendance rate—and that number represented a drop off from last year’s numbers, which was at 92% attendance rate.

That’s compared to the 20-21 school year, when there have been on staff and student testing clinics on average 70% to 80% of four days, and 90%-95% of district officials hope to see numbers rebound to that level by the 24-25 year. To that end, programs are being reinstated to help manage attendance and reassure parents and students during this tumultuous time.

“We know that chronic absenteeism impacts learning,” Elzykuo said. “We’re implementing an ‘All-in’ attendance initiative that includes direct outreach to students and families to encourage their attendance and support them in any way we can to remove any barriers to school attendance.”

While Elzykuo said the district can’t speculate reasons for all of the absences, the general consensus is that the main causes are students having family members who were ill, were ill themselves, or were waiting for a COVID-19 test results, which takes several days from getting tested.

The district, though, has been proactive in providing mental health and counseling support for families through district health and counseling programs. Testing clinics Monday through Fridays at Cabrillo High School for both students and employees. Students also can request free Wi-Fi hotspots.

The program does not have an income-based eligibility requirement, but students must submit a request to the university. “The CSUCCESS program will help our first-year students have the technology they need to succeed,” Bryan Jackson, assistant vice president of University Technology Support and services of CSU Long Beach, said in a statement. “We have taken many steps to bridge the digital divide during the pandemic and the CSUCCESS program only strengthens the Student Technology Loan program for our students in need.”

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BY BRADON RICHARDSON / Reporter

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socioeconomically disadvantaged students, progress. In the 2017-18 school year, 57% of students failed to meet math standards, up from 68% in the 2016-17 school year. By the time the graduating class of 2022 receives their diplomas this spring, they’ll have spent more than half of their high school years navigating the restrictions and uncertainty that have come with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pursuit of “normalcy” has mostly been a fool’s errand in the past two years, and students and administrators are often left deciding among a number of imperfect options.

As cases spiked following the recent holiday season, and schools once again faced increased restrictions for on-campus events, choices had to be made. The timing of the ommertan surge coincided with long-scheduled winter formal dances at area high schools, and there was no uniform solution for each campus.

At Lakewood High, the school had already committed thousands of dollars to the winter formal dance, scheduled for Jan. 8 at Mile Square Golf Course in Fountain Valley. The school decided to forego the event as scheduled, with additional safety measures in place. “With all the restrictions coming down, it was like deja vu to the 2020-21 year,” said Lakewood Activities Director Warren Booth. “They wanted to get (the dance) in before school shut down. They were scared that this was their last opportunity. They told us, ‘We don’t want to move anything or we’ll lose our money and we’ll lose the opportunity of having a dance this year.’ So they were excited about getting it in.”

Lakewood senior Katelyn Khan didn’t go to any school dances prior to the pandemic, so this was her last opportunity to attend a winter formal. She admitted to having some nerves about attending the dance given the circumstances but didn’t want to miss out on the opportunity. “I was honestly really excited because it was my first dance, but I was also a little wary about COVID and anything,” Khan explained. “But the administrators on site were very adamant about the masks and made sure that everyone was wearing one at all times.”

Members of the student council were worried that attendance might suffer at the dance, but the turnout was strong. “We were a little nervous if people were going to show up or if they would decide not to go,” admitted senior Sydney Goodin. “But honestly, it was a great time because of all the activities. Other than just the dancing, we had a carriage ride and video games and karaoke that everyone tried.”

Booth shared the same sentiment from his conversations with students immediately after the dance.

“They had a great time,” Booth said. “It was positive vibes all the way. The following week with the kids sharing pictures. They enjoyed getting out and being with each other dressed up. There was a lot of school spirit that night.”

While Lakewood was asked with their formal as scheduled, Wilson High decided to take a different approach. The Bruins were scheduled to host their winter formal on Jan. 20 at the exact same venue but opted to delay the event until March 19. According to Wilson Activities Director Erin Fekjär, it was the students who pushed for the postponement.

“They were the ones who said we need to change it.” Fekjär explained. “They said, ‘We want a safer environment. A lot of us are in winter sports or we’re gearing up for spring sports, so we don’t want to get sick, we don’t want to be on the dance floor and everybody getting all COVID-y all over one another, so can we move it?’ And they think that’s proved to be a really good decision.”

Wilson’s dance was set to be at the same venue—which offers both indoor and outdoor space—the circumstances for each event were very different. In addition to having an extra three weeks of lead time before the event, Lakewood’s lower enrollment allowed for a smaller event. Lakewood’s formal had around 425 students attend, while Wilson was planning upwards of 700 attendees.

Wilson’s administration will still require proof of vaccination or a negative test come March and require masks to be worn at the event, but the students are hopeful things will be safer and more relaxed as we move closer to spring.

“I think the current feeling of what’s happening with omicron, the students decided to take the precautions now,” Fekjär explained. “But we want to have the most fun night that we possibly can with the least amount of restrictions.”

Lakewood High School students Ira Mang and Phinmena Basco attended the school’s winter formal dance earlier this month. Courtesy of Lakewood High School.

**By Tyler Hendrickson / Reporter**

**To postpone or not? High schools grapple with hosting dances during a pandemic**

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**Test Scores**

Socioeconomically disadvantaged students, with more than 50% of Black students failing to meet math standards, while nearly 60% of students in Los Angeles County didn’t meet standards, up from 68% in the 2016-17 school year. Statewide, just over half of all students met English standards, while 66% of Long Beach Unified students met standards in 2018-19 years, 66% of Long Beach Unified students met standards in 2018-19 school year. Black students saw the highest increase, with 26% chronic growth, up from 22%.

In comparison, 17% of Latino students were chronically absent, up from 16%, while 6% of white students were absent, down from 10.2%. Asian students saw an 8% absent rate, up from 8%. The statewide absenteeism rate was 14% up, from 13%. Education officials said the district is implementing an “All-In” attendance initiative that includes direct outreach to students and families to encourage their attendance and support them to overcome any barriers to school attendance.

Long Beach’s four-year graduation rate saw a slight decrease at 84.5% last year, down from 87.5%, which the district attributed to the pandemic’s overall impact on student learning and mental health.

While the pandemic has brought challenges, the state Education Department in a statement California, added an offer of new funding, is committed to helping students.

Last year, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a $123.9 billion education package that provides the highest level of K–12 funding in state history.

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**By Tunis Brule**

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**By Tunis Brule**

**In one of the larger setbacks in recent years, 66% of Long Beach Unified students failed to meet state standards for math last year, up from 54% in the 2018-19 school year. The drop in achievement as comes of the district had been showing consistent progress. In the 2017-18 school year, 37% of students failed to meet math standards, down from 46% the previous year. Scores were lower for Black, Latino and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, with more than 50% of Black students failing to meet math standards, while nearly 60% of students in Los Angeles County didn’t meet standards, up from 68% in the 2016-17 school year. Black students saw the highest increase, with 26% chronically absent, up from 22%.

In comparison, 17% of Latino students were chronically absent, up from 16%, while 6% of white students were absent, down from 10.2%. Asian students saw an 8% absent rate, up from 8%. The statewide absenteeism rate was 14% up, from 13%. Education officials said the district is implementing an “All-In” attendance initiative that includes direct outreach to students and families to encourage their attendance and support them to overcome any barriers to school attendance.

Long Beach’s four-year graduation rate saw a slight decrease at 84.5% last year, down from 87.5%, which the district attributed to the pandemic’s overall impact on student learning and mental health.

While the pandemic has brought challenges, the state Education Department in a statement California, added an offer of new funding, is committed to helping students.

Last year, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a $123.9 billion education package that provides the highest level of K–12 funding in state history.
Online Learning

Continued from cover page

online classes (those without meeting times) were the most common form of online classes. Before and during the pandemic, the asynchronous format allowed students to learn at their own pace, on their own schedule.

"Clearly, there are some homes that are higher in socioeconomic status than others," Jones said, adding that the issue is close to his heart having been raised in New York's inner city by his single mother.

"It's frustratingly extensive searches for a parking spot, Jeynes said.

"But even when you account for the digital divide, the online format has been a pleasant surprise," Douglas said. "It allows us a great deal of flexibility in terms of how we're looking into a couple different technologies into the classroom that were typically the most the museum could host before, according to museum officials. But the museum's transformation also includes a host of amenities designed to foster a message of inclusivity to students and the greater community.

"We offer instruction," Douglas said. "It allows us to offer instruction—to develop their own software, in a lot of cases, led to really interesting tools being developed that weren't supported by any earlier platform. The Kleefeld Museum will operate on limited hours until further notice, with open hours Tuesday-Thursday from noon to 2 p.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. via appointment only. Every second Saturday of the month will be a free day for all, and we'll be looking for appointments only.

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The exhibition will be available for viewing from Feb. 12 through June 25. Also on view will be the museum's opening in May.
Community Hospital likely to be sold as city seeks to pay operator for millions in losses

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The Port of Long Beach is giving its master plan a facelift, a public announcement meeting slated for this Thursday, Feb. 3.

The existing master plan identifies permitted uses for the nearly 2,700 acres of land and 4,000 acres at the nation’s second busiest port complex.

Port master plans are required by the California Coastal Act of 1976. Since the last comprehensive update over three decades ago, the port and the shipping industry have undergone significant changes in operations and goals.

“The container cargo has grown an astounding 400% since the last comprehensive overhaul, and it was before we became an industry leader in reintegrating emissions with goods movement with the green port policy,” Executive Director Mario Cordero said in an email.

Last year, the port moved a record 83,381,365 20-foot equivalent units of cargo, or 38% above the 60,280,800 TEUs port handled in 1995 when the port handled 2,845,501 TEUs. Cargo volumes would have been even lower in 1990, with throughput steadily rising each year with the exceptions, according to port data.

In 2006, the Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach jointly approved the Clean Air Action Plan, a first-in-its-kind plan to dramatically reduce emissions from port operations. The ultimate goals would be to bring the port’s emissions down to 80% of 1990 levels by 2050 through electrification. Most of the proposed updates to the master plan are revised goals and languages to bring the document in line with the CAAP and the transition to zero-emissions. The 2038 draft also includes updates to capital improvement projects, policy language, and planning and design goals, in large part related to sea-level rise and climate change adaptation.

One of the most notable changes to the master plan is the addition of a new section: Environmental Justice and Tribal Resources Element. The section focuses on “advancing principles of environmental justice, equality and protection of tribal resources.”

Continued on page 16

Downtown Long Beach sees rebound in residential market

BY CHRISTIAN MAYS-ZUZIK / Reporter

The market for residential properties in Downtown properties in Downtown saw a rebound in 2021, with occupancy and rents slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, according to a 2021 Q4 Economic Snapshot released last month by the DLBA. The recovery comes as a citation across Southern California continues to find their own solutions to homelessness and a lack of affordable housing that has come to the fore front in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Downtown Long Beach added 260 units to its stock in 2021, which includes both the 271-unit Volta on Pine that was completed in April and the Shoreline Gateway project, which opened in November with another 215 units. In 2020, by comparison, only 50 new units were delivered.

The return to a pre-pandemic occupancy rate of 94% in Downtown and 96.5% citywide is encouraging, and several other areas in the region (like Downtown Santa Monica (94.7%) and San Pedro (94.3%) have also gotten close to the 90-95% mark, dropping from the higher rates seen in currently in other major cities in the region, including Fullerton (97.6%), Costa Mesa (98.2%), and El Segundo (97.4%).

Class A properties — which are the most expensive of the three and have an average age of just seven years — have an occupancy rate of 95.2%. On the other hand, Class B properties are significantly more occupied at 98.3%, despite the buildings being 60 years old on average. That’s likely because rent is $750 less than Class A per month, while still offering a higher quality of life than can be found in Class A.

While not directly connected to housing development or market fluctuations, the report’s recommendations to Downtown businesses has been beneficial in the area of economic recovery. The 5.5 million visitors that explored the area last year in 2021 was approximately 50% greater than the pandemic-hampered numbers of 2020 and 7% higher than the pandemic-hampered number of 2019. Many of these visitors will be located at the $251 million Broadway Block development, which is expected to open in 2023.

While an estimated 75% of the work force calls Downtown home, many of its units will be located at the $251 million Broadway Block development, which is expected to open in 2023.

The resulting increase in demand has translated into an increase in their cost of living. At 206-256 Long Beach Boulevard, Downtown Long Beach Business Journal • February 8, 2022 • 13

NewsWatch
Unemployment in Long Beach drops to 6.7%

The unemployment rate in Long Beach continued its downturn trend in December but remains higher than 7%, according to the U.S. Census County data, as of February 8, 2022.

The unemployment rate in Long Beach decreased from 7.1% in November of last year to 6.7% in December, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Though it continues to improve, the rate remains higher than 88 of the 123 other cities and municipalities within the country.

Unemployment in Long Beach residents decreased from 18,500 in November of last year to 15,700 in December, according to the EDD.

The number of unemployed Long Beach residents also decreased by 700 during the same time as the labor force decreased by nearly 4,000 to 234,900.

Business owners cite hiring, supply chain, inflation as major issues amid pandemic

Three Long Beach-based space firms are among 12 companies selected to provide launch services for a five-year NASA program with a maximum total budget of $500 million in launch contracts.

The firms include ABL Space, Rocket Lab and Relativity Space, according to a statement from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Launch Initiative.

“With this new tool in our toolbox, trying to figure out substitutions, trying to get plants wherever I could, whether I had to go down to the wholesale market or go up north, that was an issue,” Bermudez-Perez said.

“The biggest obstacle to business success, according to surveyed owners, is the inflation spike caused by the pandemic. About 84% of the business owners said they have felt inflation pressure in their everyday spending, and over three-fourths of respondents said they have been negatively impacted by inflation.

A large majority of business owners believe that the response to COVID-19 has still not been adequate when it comes to supporting “main and pop” shops. Less than 10% of owners surveyed believe that the federal government has provided enough support for any of the previously mentioned issues, and over 80% of owners support continued emergency financial assistance from the government.

Bermudez-Perez believes that there is a deeper reason than just supply chain issues.

“The growth problem is echoed by a majority of business owners, with 87% of respondents stating that difficulty hiring and retaining qualified candidates is the biggest problem presented by the pandemic,” Bermudez-Perez said.

Overall, 97% of surveyed owners said that they believe the country is heading in the right direction, compared to 64% from June 21. In fact, 36% of businesses said that 2021 was more difficult than 2020.

In spite of this gloomy outlook, 79% of respondents believe that they are causeda sudden downturn in support of the government’s direction. Less than a fourth of the respondents said that they believe the country is heading in the right direction, compared to 64% from June 21. In fact, 36% of businesses said that 2021 was more difficult than 2020.

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Long Beach Airport officials expect increased air traffic around Super Bowl

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

With the 2022 Super Bowl at SoFi Stadium just a jump out on the freeway, Long Beach Airport officials are gearing up for an increased number of travelers and a surge in air traffic in the days leading up to and after the event. The Los Angeles Rams will take on the Cincinnati Bengals at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood on Feb. 13. Last year, 3.5 million passengers traveled through the airport, an expense that was heavily scrutinized to select the host SoFi Stadium in 2017, while the Rams advancement to the championship game was decided last month.

At 22.4 miles away, Long Beach is the second closest to the five commercial airports in the Los Angeles region. Los Angeles International Airport is the closest to SoFi at 3.6 miles, while John Wayne and Ontario range from 30 to 53 miles away from the stadium. To accommodate an increased demand, airport staff are working with the National Football League and the Federal Aviation Administration as well as its tenants to plan accordingly and maintain compliance with the small municipal facility’s noise ordinance. Additional outfield parking spaces for visitors with carpool passes have been identified, according to staff.

“We are ready as we welcome football fans visiting the region for Super Bowl LVII,” airport general manager for Paradies Lagardere Cynthia Guidry said in an email. “As we cooperate with our partners, Tish Stockton, retail area manager at Long Beach Airport, confirmed.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a complex countywide eviction protections late last month that will phase in and phase out protections over time, but could protect the poorest households through June 32023. Supervisors voted to approve an extension of an extra day before the current moratorium was set to expire. The new safeguards will come in three phases, with county residents making 80% or less of the area median income or less—which is $80,000 for a family of four in Los Angeles County—being protected the longest.

While Long Beach had for a time been setting its own rules or aligning with the state on what evictions were allowed or banned during the pandemic, it is more recently aligned with the county. The changes will apply to Long Beach residents according to the city attorney’s office.

The first phase of the extension will allow all rental protections, including those barring no-fault evictions for reasons like renovating units, removing hazardous conditions and evictions filed for non-payment due to COVID-19 hardships. Those protections will also include bars on retaliatory evictions for tenants who self-identified as being in a lower income bracket, but all other项 protections for almost all other tenants will be lifted. In June, the second phase will begin with the protections provided in Phase One, like barring evictions tied to owners moving into properties only if the tenant was not financially affected by the pandemic, will go away.

Landlords will also be able to evict tenants who deny them entry into a rental property, as long as that entry is not prohibited by the landlord’s permit. Under the extension, rentals making 80% of the area median income or less are able to self-certify that they have a financial hardship and could have

For more information on this important effort, Scan QR code or visit: www.protectcatalinaisland.com

HELP US PROTECT CATALINA ISLAND’S ECONOMY AND TOURISM

Join the Catalina community and businesses by visiting www.change.org/catalinexpress to sign an important petition NOW to help us protect Catalina Island’s economy and vital tourism industry!

Catalina Express, the essential ferry service that transports passengers to and from the island is facing new regulations from the California Air Resources Board (CARB). Under CARB’s current proposed rules, which would take effect in 2023, Catalina Express ferry owners will again be required to modify the engines on all their vessels. The cost to repower an existing vessel is $7 million but will displace environmentally sustainable port land use policies that said “obviously a lot has changed, and this process will allow us to incorporate previous amendments, reflect changes in the shipping industry, strategically manage resources and help us to achieve the state’s goals to significantly change global economy.

A similar moratorium was introduced in 2019 for public review. Feedback received by the port has been considered, according to staff. Public comment on the port’s updated 2020 land use and environmental policies is accepted through March 14. Comments can be submitted by emailing info@corduroy.com or writing to Theresa Dau-Ngo, 415 W. Ocean Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90802.

The public virtual meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 10.

Elaine Hitchkinson, president of the Apartment Association of Southern California, submitted a letter to the board calling for it to oppose the extension to its entirety. Because of the way commercial tenants were seeing their protections largely go away and asked if that was because the economy was “in full swing” and extending it was “excessive.”

“This eviction moratorium is not supposed to be used to further housing policy,” Hitchkinson said. “Instead, it was in response to a health crisis… from 2020.”

Hitchkinson noted that while California and New York have lifted their policies or let them expire and asked why Los Angeles County did not. Commercial protections for large companies ended Jan. 31, but companies with nine or fewer employees will have their protections extended to Nov. 30. Larger companies will have until July 31 to pay back rent, while smaller companies will have until the end of January 2023.

County eviction ban extended, with low-income renters shielded through June 2023

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a complex countywide eviction protections late last month that will phase in and phase out protections over time, but could protect the poorest households through June 32023. Supervisors voted to approve an extension of an extra day before the current moratorium was set to expire. The new safeguards will come in three phases, with county residents making 80% or less of the area median income or less—which is $80,000 for a family of four in Los Angeles County—being protected the longest.

While Long Beach had for a time been setting its own rules or aligning with the state on what evictions were allowed or banned during the pandemic, it is more recently aligned with the county. The changes will apply to Long Beach residents according to the city attorney’s office.

The first phase of the extension will allow all rental protections, including those barring no-fault evictions for reasons like renovating units, removing hazardous conditions and evictions filed for non-payment due to COVID-19 hardships. Those protections will also include bars on retaliatory evictions for tenants who self-identified as being in a lower income bracket, but all other项 protections for almost all other tenants will be lifted. In June, the second phase will begin with the protections provided in Phase One, like barring evictions tied to owners moving into properties only if the tenant was not financially affected by the pandemic, will go away.

Landlords will also be able to evict tenants who deny them entry into a rental property, as long as that entry is not prohibited by the landlord’s permit. Under the extension, rentals making 80% of the area median income or less are able to self-certify that they have a financial hardship and could have until December 2023 to pay any rent payments missed through the end of this phase. Other protections like those barring evictions tied to owners moving into properties only if the tenant was not financially affected by COVID-19 hardships will expire.

Phase Two, which begins in January 2023 and ends in March 2023, will continue to protect those tenants who self-identified as being in a lower income bracket, but all other项 protections for almost all other tenants will be lifted. In June, the second phase will begin with the protections provided in Phase One, like barring evictions tied to owners moving into properties only if the tenant was not financially affected by the pandemic, will go away.

Landlords will also be able to evict tenants who deny them entry into a rental property, as long as that entry is not prohibited by the landlord’s permit. Under the extension, rentals making 80% of the area median income or less are able to self-certify that they have a financial hardship and could have
Amid omicron wave, Long Beach has yet to impose vaccine mandate for employees

BY ANTHONY PIGNATARIO / Reporter

Though the city of Los Angeles passed an employer vaccination mandate back in November and Long Beach officials said news about its own edit would be forthcoming after the first of the new year, the city still does not have a COVID-19 vaccine mandate in place for its workers.

The mandate is seen by public health experts as an important way to help curb the spread of COVID-19, particularly among firefighters, police and other workers who come in close contact with the public. Infections fueled by the omicron variant surged throughout January, with case rates and hospitalizations hitting points not seen since last year at this time.

A vaccine mandate is critical “because citizens deserve to know that if they call 911, the men and women responding to the call are vaccinated,” said Andrew Noyer, a public health advocate who works at UC San Diego.

“Vaccinated people are less likely to spread the virus,” Noyer said.

Negotiations between the city and various employee labor unions were ongoing as a mandate began in September, according to the city manager’s office. Negotiations are continuing over implementation dates, details over who would qualify for an exemption and other factors, according to a Dec. 28 memo from City Manager Tom Modica.

“Vaccinated people are likely to prevent the virus,” Modica said through a spokesperson. “Once finalized, we will have more information on the details.”

Labor leaders involved in the negotiations represent some of the most politically powerful organizations and constituencies, which further complicates the negotiations as the 2022 election heats up.

Mayor Robert Garcia’s office said in a statement that an update will be provided when the negotiation process ends.

“The policy remains in the process of being finalized,” Modica told the Business Journal.

“Once finalized, we will publish the details,” he said.

Rep. Alan Lowenthal, did not respond to an interview request.

One City Hall insider, who agreed to talk about the negotiations without attribution because the individual isn’t authorized to speak publicly, said the fact that many “breakthrough” infections have occurred among those who are vaccinated has played a role in the delay of the mandate.

While there was a great deal of pressure for a few months ago for a mandate, interest waned when it became clear that vaccination wasn’t enough to keep many people from getting infected, the insider said.

But vaccines are seen as a key tool to keep people working and out of the hospital, according to Dr. Nicola Solano, the epidemiologist. He said it’s too late to implement an employee mandate, adding that at COVID-19 isn’t going anywhere.

“COVID will simmer down faster the more people that get vaccinated,” he said.

Roy Purdon, president of the Long Beach Firefighters union, said he and his colleague, Tom Modica, were open to the negotiations.

“They remain the path in the process of being finalized,” Modica said through a spokesperson.

“The policy remains in the process of being finalized,” he said. “Once finalized, we will publish the details.”

BY TIM GRICOLARI / Columnist

One of the most notable homes on one of the nicest streets of residential Alamosi Heights is a flawless Paul Tay-designed Mid-Century Modern house at 651 Alamitos Ave., listed at $1.895 million.

It is worth the price if you’re willing to accept that Cliff May mid-mod homes in the city’s east end are selling for near that price, then, yes, this four-bedroom, four-and-a-half bath Tay model can be seen to be undervalued. Along with mid-mod homes designed by such stellar architects as Richard Neutra and Ed Killingworth, a Tay home is what Cliff May home owners hope to see in their day-to-day life.

A USC graduate, Tay worked for the acknowledge architecture George Montearth in his office in the Ocean Center building in the early 1950s. Montearth designed several residences and other buildings in downtown, Long Beach, and roles.

The main goal of the partnership is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for goods movement between the largest ports in the U.S. and China. “International collaboration is essential to decarbonize global supply chains,” Port of LA Executive Director Gene Suda said in a statement.

Key goals of the partnership include: • Phasing in low, ultra-low and zero carbon fueled ships throughout the 2020s, followed by the world’s first zero carbon trans-Pacific container ships to be introd...
Dine Out restaurant week returns for 7th run

BY CHEANTAY JENSEN / Reporter

Back for its seventh year, Dine Out Long Beach, Restaurant & Cocktail week will kick off Friday, Feb. 18, entering localities to indulge in (and support) Long Beach’s gastronomic landscape alongside restaurants all over the city offering special menus, prices and promotions.

The 10-day event, which ends Feb. 28, boasts 45 participating restaurants (and counting) including newcomers El harassment Canina on the Fourth Street Corridor, Rosamund’s in Downtown, Sailor Deck in Jumparo Beach and Liv’on 2nd. ZaZa District’s Colombian free grill restaurant, Selva, which opened Feb. 6, will also be participating.

Some familiar staples this year include The Ordinarie, Michael’s on Naples, Le Fil, La Terra Françaisa Italiana, Bamboo Club and more.

“It’s been another challenging year for our culinary community,” said Elizabeth McElroy, Director and Founder of Dine Out Long Beach, Restaurant & Cocktail week. “Restaurants have been hard hit and in a state of crisis, we are confident that foodies, shoppers, and professionals alike, will come out to support our restaurant owners, chefs, bartenders and sommeliers during Restaurant & Cocktail Week.”

The promotions vary from restaurant to restaurant. Some offer prix fixe menus, deals for two, chef’s tasting menus or multi-course options for breakfast, lunch or dinner—often highlighting some of their best offerings at a discount or new meals entirely. Others offer small plates, wine, beer and cocktail pairings.

There are no registration fees, all you need is to visit the participating restaurant and request the Dine Out Long Beach menu or promotions. For diners precluding to eat at home, there are participating restaurants with options for take-out as well as wine, beer and cocktail to go.

Returning again this year is Dine Out Long Beach’s “Imaginary Menu,” a campaign created last year in response to the hardships dining and drinking establishments experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Guests are invited to donate $3 or more toward their bill for imaginary food items such as “imaginary breaddicks” or “imaginary naches” that will directly benefit Restaurants Care, a non-profit organization of the California Restaurants Association that provides financial relief to restaurant owners and or workers in need.

So far, the movements has helped Long Beach restaurants The Roof, Roundbook Beer Garden, Pasta Unica, Oax Mexican Kitchen & Agave on the Water.


City to seek bond funding for new Civic Center residential development

BY ANTHONY PIGNATARO / Reporter

The Long Beach City Council last week unanimously approved a plan to use tax-exempt bonds to pay for the purchase and development of 580 residential units on the “Midblock” site at the Civic Center.

Under the plan, the City Council will enter into an agreement where the California Community Housing Agency would issue $400 million in tax-exempt bonds to buy the land and develop the Midblock site.

Though City Manager Tom Modica called the financing mechanism “really complex” and “something new for us,” the council ultimately agreed to the plan without any amendments or modifications.

Under the plan, a joint powers authority formed by state and local governments would own the new project while Plenary, the landowner, would manage it.

The property management company Graystar would then manage the two 290-unit buildings, which will include ground-floor retail space. Once those units are filled, the rent they generate would cover the bonds and any other fees and taxes that need to be paid. The city council ultimately agreed to shield the city from any liability for the bonds while providing financing for future deals. However, deals like these have proven to be risky because they depend on economic stability for decades; in this case, the 40-year duration of the bonds being repaid by rent.

The city would receive its portion of property tax revenue generated in the form of an annual $650,000 “host fee,” which city officials said a paid parking program, if ever coupled with additional measures such as toll roads or dedicated transit, could provide significant revenue to the city.

The middle and west buildings that would be built on Plenary has failed to find someone to buy the property and construct a new residential development.

City Controller Omar Sasim Price questioned staff on the risk associated with the deal, but Development Services Director Oscar Orelli told the joint authority, and not the city, would assume all risk tied to the project.

Nonetheless, an analysis by a city—Continued on page 21

Federal Trade Commission extends deadline for comment on supply chain disruptions

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

As grocery and retail shelves across the nation lay bare, the Federal Trade Commission has given an extension to some large businesses that were ordered to provide insights regarding the ongoing supply chain crisis.

In November, the commission ordered Walmart, Amazon, Kroger, C&F Wholesale Grocers, Associated Wholesale Grocers, Publix Co., Procter & Gamble Co., Tyson Foods and Kraft Heinz Co. to provide detailed information to shed light on the causes of supply chain disruptions and their impacts.

The original deadline was Jan. 28, but that has been extended to Feb. 28 at the request of the companies, the commission announced.

“Supply chain disruptions are concerning the provision and delivery of a wide array of goods, ranging from computer chips and medicines to meat and lumber,” commission Chair Lina Khan said in November. “I am hopeful the FTC’s new study will shed light on market conditions and business practices that may have worsened these disruptions or led to asymmetric effects.”

The impacts of the supply chain crisis have been ramped up by the post of Long Beach and Los Angeles—at one point, dozens of ships were anchored just off the coast, awaiting their turns at dock. The twin ports have taken various steps to alleviate backups on their end, with some success resulting in a record amount of cargo handled last year.

Despite their best efforts, the backlog persists, with over 100 ships waiting their turn as of Thursday, as the Marine Exchange of Southern California. Of those ships, 95% are anchored or slow steaming more than 25 miles of the coast.

The commission issued its order under Section 5(e) of the FTC Act, which allows the body to conduct studies that do not have a specific law enforcement purpose. The commission hopes to “alleviate ‘serious and ongoing harms’ facing consumers and maintain competition in the U.S. economy as a result of the study, the original announcement states.

Additionally, the commission will examine if the disruptions are leading to specific bottlenecks, shortages, anticompetitive practices or contributing to rising consumer costs.

The nine companies are required to provide details as well as internal documents related to:

• Their ability to obtain, transport and distribute products;
• Delayed and canceled orders, as well as those for transportation;
• Increases in costs and prices;
• Which products and suppliers are most affected;
• Steps they are taking to alleviate disruptions; and
• How they allocate products among stores amid the shortages.

In addition to the official orders, the agency is soliciting voluntary comments from consumers, retailers and wholesalers on how the supply chain crisis is affecting competition in consumer goods markets.

“The FTC has a long history of pursuing market studies, including to understand economic conditions and business conduct,” Khan said previously, “and we should continue to make nimble and timely use of these information—gathering tools and authorities.”

Report back to the city

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The Long Beach Marine Advisory Commission indicated last month that it would not recommend installing paid parking meters at Alamitos Bay Marina to the City Council.

Commissioners worked on Jan. 27 to craft a letter to send to the council that detailed why it thinks a recommendation from a city-hired consultant to add paid parking is not justifiable. A formal recommendation could come after the commission’s Feb. 10 meeting.

Commissioner Bruce Mac Rae read the letter compiled by the commission’s ad hoc committee dealing with the paid parking issue in the lots that wrap around the marina from Alamitos Bay Landing to Second Street.

Mac Rae said there are a number of concerns expressed by boat owners and businesses in the marina, including how the shift to paid parking could negatively affect those that use the marina regularly, existing leases that provide free parking, and the neighboring N2D & PCH shopping center that many have said is the source of any perceived parking problem.

“Sudden shifts increasing the costs to their customers and employees could result in a repeat of the 2ND & PCH parking problem, displaced to nearby residential areas in Seal Beach and Long Beach where parking is free,” Mac Rae said.

The letter indicated that commissioners believe the conclusion reached by the city’s consultants was done with incomplete or misleading data to support the need for paid parking.

Mac Rae noted that only two days of surveying were done during the fall, a time of the year when boat owners are less active, and before a list of the businesses that exist today were fully online.

Like other commissions, the Marine Advisory Commission serves an advisory role to the City Council, which has the final say. The 2ND & PCH development opened in October 2019 and replaced the Seaport Marina Hotel, which had occupied the corner since the early 1960s.

While the city has its own parking structure and offers validation for those staying for less than 90 minutes, it charges $2 every 20 minutes and a $30 maximum to park there.

Those opposed to paid parking paid parking meters in the Alamitos Bay Marina parking lot say the paid lots at the shopping center have led to customers and employees parking in the marina lots for free, but that is not something that has led to a shortage of parking in the vast marina parking lots.

“I don’t feel as a boat owner that we need parking meters,” said boat owner Larry Vinsky. “There’s only one person who benefits from paid parking—it’s the people who build them and maintain them.”

Boat owners also believe that they already pay for parking through their slip fees that pay back the $14 million in bonds that were issued in 2015 to fund improvements to the marina. Slip fees can be as high as $3,600 per month.

If the council ultimately decides to go forward with adding paid parking, the boat owners are hopeful that an appeal to the California Coastal Commission, the entity that governs the state’s coastline and any developments on it, would provide some relief to the public’s free public access to the coast.

The final wording of the draft letter indicated that the council ultimately agreed to the draft letter.

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Westside’s strawberry ranch is back in business under new local family ownership

BY CRYSTAL MEJIA / Reporter

After being closed for several months, the strawberry ranch in West Long Beach is back in business under a new local family who will continue the decades-long legacy of selling juicy and sweet strawberries on Santa Fe Avenue.

The family that ran the well-known Ramirez Strawberry Ranch shut it down at the end of May after patriarch, 85-year-old Rogelberto Ramirez Sr., died from a COVID-19-related illness in February. His son, Stanton Councilman Rogelberto Ramirez Jr., temporarily took over the business but later decided to close in order to priority caring for his 78-year-old mother, who developed long-term health conditions after surviving a COVID-19 infection.

Ramirez, 53, wanted to make sure that the land, which was leased from Southern California Edison, would continue to be used for agricultural purposes after the business closure. The community, he said, echoed the same desire.

After months of negotiations with Edison, Ramirez found a suitor: one of his father’s workers. Leonel Castellanos, 58, had been picking strawberries for the Ramirez family for about seven years and had observed the production process, he said. Castellanos said taking over was a quick decision because there was the opportunity to continue planting for this year.

“The community spoke for this, and we made it happen,” Ramirez said. “I know that the community is very good at supporting local, and I hope that’s the case here moving forward.”

Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, Castellanos said he had gained experience in this industry while helping his father and supporting his 10 siblings as Castellanos didn’t go to school. Now living in Carson, he continues his love for the field.

“T’ve really liked agriculture,” Castellanos said in Spanish.

While Castellanos renamed the business “Santa Fe Strawberries,” he’s following the same growing methods to keep the strawberries tasting like before. Aside from strawberries, the Ramirez family grew fava beans, and now the Castellanos family have added passion fruit to the ranch.

On a Saturday morning last month, some customers lined up for the iconic strawberries. Ten-year-old Ruth Castellanos, the Castellanos’ granddaughter, was picking strawberries for them. Her favorite part of helping her family with the new strawberry business, she said, was “eating them.”

Santa Fe Strawberries is at 1351 Santa Fe Ave.

City Mandate

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“The things are always changing,” said Pritchard, adding that the city should be following the state’s lead. “That should be the policy of the city.”

Bach Chambers, president of the Long Beach Police Officers Association, said his organization is still meeting regularly with the city manager on the proposed mandate. He said the current testing protocol for employees is working, and a mandate is unnecessary.

“The testing protocol in use right now has shown its effectiveness,” said Chambers. “Officers who test positive are isolated and removed from the public. It is working to keep the community and our employees safe.”

Data released by the city manager’s office last month show that 84% of city employees as a whole are vaccinated, though vaccination rates vary widely among the various city departments, with police and fire having the lowest rates in the city.

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Civic Center Bonds

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A one-bedroom unit will cost $2,460 per month with two-bedroom ($3,063) and three-bedroom ($3,389) units coming in under market value but more than some of the Oceanaire units, which have been criticized for not being affordable.

Because of the differing rent structures, only 120 of the 580 units will count toward the city’s Regional Housing Needs Assessment goal of creating 4,158 moderate-income units over the next eight years. The city could eventually force a sale of the building at any time after year 45, according to the analysis.

When Councilman Daryl Supernaw asked if such a sale could lead to a sharp rise in rents, Orci said that deed restrictions in the property would keep rents from rising to market rates. Though the deal lacks a formal enforcement mechanism, he said, the city would monitor the property each year.

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