

Long Beach Business Journal

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Catalyst CEO Elliot Lewis isn't in the Long Beach cannabis business to make friends



Elliot Lewis, CEO of Catalyst Cannabis Co., inside the waiting room of one of his Long Beach locations. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

With the exception of a small, gold-trimmed bar cart, the Long Beach office of Catalyst Chief Executive Elliot Lewis contains little that holds the eye. A couch, a sideboard, a desk made of imitation wood and a cash-counting machine atop a black metal safe—any attempts at decor fall short of inspiring.

The true centerpiece of the office is mounted on a wall with a direct view from Lewis' desk chair. There, on a large whiteboard, is a rundown of future dispensary locations, complete with anticipated opening dates. Pomona, El Monte, Oxnard—the list is long and, judging from earlier erasures, subject to constant corrections, revisions and additions.

"We're always planning and plotting," said Lewis, whose ag-

gressive strategy in obtaining cannabis licenses has garnered him fans and foes alike among fellow cannabis entrepreneurs and government staffers across the state.

Lewis isn't afraid of conflict. He seems to seek it. His public persona and loud voice on issues like social equity and cannabis taxes—he was the only dispensary owner to lobby the city council to raise taxes on the industry—have made him a controversial figure in the local industry and beyond.

Some praise his activism for social equity applicants, a group long disappointed by a malfunctioning city program meant to support those most affected by the war on drugs in entering the local cannabis industry. But others counter that his brash style and political advocacy smack of self interest.

In September, Lewis became only the second member to be

kicked out of the Long Beach Collective Association, a trade advocacy group founded in 2010 to represent the interests of the local cannabis industry.

"I think some of the positions they took were stupid," Lewis said. "Not just greedy, but stupid."

He said he disagreed with the association on how best to advance social and racial equity in Long Beach's cannabis industry and on a proposal to raise the local cannabis tax by 0.5% to help the city meet budget shortfalls during the pandemic.

On Sept. 18, The Grunion published an op-ed by Lewis in which he argued that the cannabis industry's designation as an essential business made it one of "the luckiest business types in the entire city" and that business owners thus had "an obligation to step up" in the city's time of need.

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Creating new park space in Long Beach 'not impossible, but challenging'

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Residents in East Long Beach have access to nearly 16 times the park space than those living in West Long Beach. But as the City Council tries to address this inequity, it will likely run into two big obstacles: time and money.

A report released by the city this month outlined the park inventory in the city and potential ways the city can expand it, but also the challenges that would accompany those additions. The largest park in East Long Beach, El Dorado Regional Park, consists of 400 acres of open public space, while Virginia Country Club and Rancho Los Cerritos make up the largest open area in the western half of the city.

The report was requested by the City Council in February amid years-long efforts to close the park-access gap. Council members have tried to more equitably distribute park programs and performances in the past, and now some are trying to identify parcels in the city that can be purchased and converted to open space. But creating new park space in a city that is largely built out could be a tall order.

"It is challenging," said Deputy City Manager Kevin Jackson. "Not impossible, but challenging."

Jackson said he's hopeful that the report brings transparency to how much of a challenge it is to create new open space as the city begins preliminary work to expand park space on the westside.

The history of Long Beach parks is a patchwork one. Drake Park in Downtown didn't become a public facility until 1904 when it was donated by Col.

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March is typically a slow month for
cargo traffic; this year marked a
record for the Port of Long Beach



March was the Port of Long Beach's busiest month in its 110-year history. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

By BRANDON RICHARDSON
Reporter

Terminal operators at the Port of
Long Beach moved 840,387 twenty-
foot equivalent units during March,
making it the busiest month on record
in its 110-year history, staff announced
Thursday.

Typically one of the slowest months
of the year, March's record figure
marks a 62.3% increase over the same
month in 2020, the largest year-over-
year jump ever for a single month. The
previous record of 815,885 TEUs han-
dled in one month was set in Decem-
ber.

This is only the third time in the
port's history it handled more than
800,000 TEUs in one month.

"Although the pandemic is reced-
ing, consumers are spending less on
travel this year and turning toward
online retail in unprecedented num-
bers to purchase exercise equipment,
office furniture and home improve-
ment items," Executive Director Mario

Cordero said in the announcement.
Imports increased 74% to 408,172
TEUs, while exports declined just un-
der 4% to 139,710 TEUs compared to
March 2020 when the emergence of
COVID-19 halted some shipping op-
erations. Empty containers moving
through the port skyrocketed 112.5%
to 292,505 TEUs.

March is the ninth consecutive
month the port has broken its own cargo
movement records.

The port moved 2,376,128 TEUs
during the first three months of the
year—a 41.2% increase from the same
period last year—making it the port's
best first quarter on record and the sec-
ond best quarter ever after the fourth
quarter of last year. The previous re-
cord was 481,251 TEUs set in 2018.

"The demand for e-commerce is
happening more quickly than we an-
ticipated," Cordero said, "but we will
continue to collaborate with our indus-
try stakeholders to catch up with the
unprecedented cargo volume at our
gateway."



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Emotionally and economically exhausted: Hospitals one year into COVID-19

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

The last 13 months have been a rollercoaster of shifting guidelines, lockdowns and tragedy. From individuals to businesses to the economy at large, nothing was immune to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Doctors and nurses have spent the last year triaging patients in parking lots, providing care in temporary tents and working long hours to treat massive amounts of patients in overcrowded hospitals.

The pandemic took a mental and physical toll on health workers, and those on front lines say the full scope is yet to be seen, as is the full financial impact on the facilities in which they work.

“The surges were stressful times. We were meeting a lot of patients and the hospital was very full,” said Dr. Graham Tse, Long Beach Memorial’s physician in charge of COVID-19 response. “There was stress, there was anxiety—every day was different and the numbers kept on going up.”

The winter surge was particularly hard on hospitals. With rapidly increasing cases, hospitalizations and deaths, Tse said the continued devastation was detrimental to the mental health of staff who were working long hours to care for the influx of patients.

In a written statement, St. Mary Medical Center officials said the effects

of the winter surge remain, with staff being emotionally, mentally and physically exhausted. Both Memorial and St. Mary officials said their organizations are committed to supporting staff by providing resources to help them process and cope with what they have gone through.

The number of hospitalizations has subsided significantly over the last few weeks. At the high in mid-January, there were 581 people hospitalized in the five facilities that serve Long Beach, according to city data. On April 8, there were 34 people hospitalized.

Tse said staff finally has the chance to breathe and recuperate—somewhat. It is a cautious optimism, Tse said, noting the pandemic has not completely disappeared, a fact that all staff is highly cognizant of, especially as more activities resume or expand locally and across the state.

“We still have to practice the good behaviors that we all know make a difference and ensure that we get as many vaccinations into arms as possible,” Tse said. “We need to be very cautious.”

Financial toll

The financial impact of the pandemic on medical facilities is staggering. In a July report, the U.S. National Library of Medicine estimated elective procedure cancellations would result in losses of \$16.3 to \$17.7 billion per month in revenue, which comes out to \$4 billion to \$5.4 billion less per month in net income



Patients wait to be triaged and seen outside St. Mary Medical Center, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

to U.S. hospitals.

Throughout the pandemic, elective procedures—care that is planned in advance, which does not involve a medical emergency and can be put off for a time without life-threatening implications for the patient—were not always available for much of the last year, having been canceled to slow the spread of the virus and ease overcrowding of facilities.

From the onset of the pandemic through February of this year, Long Beach Memorial is \$30 million in the red

despite receiving some federal support, according to COO Ike Mmeje.

“We’re very fortunate that we pride ourselves on running a very efficient organization and we have a very strong credit rating, which allows us to withstand some of these impacts in the short term,” Mmeje said. “But it’s a concern for hospitals across the state to see the impact over the long term.”

St. Mary officials noted that hospitals also faced increased costs associated with securing additional personal protective equipment and ensuring the hospital was adequately staffed during patient surges.

Early in the pandemic, Mmeje said hospitals had to begin thinking of ways to “tighten their belts” without impacting frontline staff and patients negatively—not an easy task. The outcome was the Long Beach facility working within the larger MemorialCare network to re-vamp and streamline programs and services to improve efficiency, Mmeje said. Some of these improvements, including an increase in telemedicine, are likely to remain in place indefinitely, he added.

The financial future of hospitals is looking up, Mmeje said, with the backlog of elective procedures beginning to fill up hospital calendars and emergency department volumes increasing as people begin to feel more comfortable visiting hospitals. But a full financial recovery will take years, he said.

While other departments are coming back relatively strong, pediatric visits have been slower to return, mostly due to many children not being in school, where it is more common to contract illnesses such as colds or flu. Planning long term is difficult because the full impacts of the pandemic have not been realized, Mmeje said, and it is still not over.

“The pandemic has been a really horrendous event worldwide,” Tse said. “Stressful not just from the medical aspect but all the changes in everyone’s lives, whether it was schooling or job loss, it’s been an incredibly emotional event.” ■

Residents over 16 can now get a COVID-19 vaccine in Long Beach

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Reporter

Any Long Beach resident over 16 can now get the COVID-19 vaccine at the city’s Convention Center mass distribution site, Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia announced at a news conference Thursday, April 8.

Residents in that age group are now able to make an appointment on the state’s website: <https://myturn.ca.gov>

The news comes as the state has said it would open the vaccine to anyone over 16 by April 15. Long Beach has been allowed to move ahead of the state’s schedule due to its faster vaccine rollout.

As of April 8, more than 43% of the city’s eligible adults—more than 163,000 residents—had received at least one dose of the vaccine, the mayor said.

More than 86% of residents over 65 have been vaccinated.

“It’s really impressive numbers,” Garcia said. “We’re really outpacing where the country and the state has been on these numbers.”

Long Beach Health Department Director Kelly Colopy gave the latest data on what has been a “dramatic decrease” in COVID cases following a winter surge.



Steven Garcia, a Long Beach City College nursing student, administers a vaccine shot to a man in the Long Beach Convention Center parking structure, Thursday, April 1, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

In January, at the height of the surge, Long Beach was averaging 739 new cases a day. That number has now dropped 96% to an average of 31 cases a day.

The city’s rate of positive cases compared to those getting tested also has plummeted from a high of about 17% percent to down to about 1.7%, the lowest rate since the start of the pandemic, Colopy said.

Colopy said the city is seeing lower hospitalization rates with 34 people hospitalized in five area hospitals,

down from nearly 600 at the height of the surge.

Colopy said the city will continue working to address the racial and geographic disparities in the vaccine rates with bus shuttles to vaccine sites for areas hardest hit by COVID, popup clinics, door-to-door information campaigns and partnerships with community organizations.

“We’re doubling down on our effort to make sure all communities have access to the vaccine,” she said. ■

Bankrupt Queen Mary operator left more than \$20 million in urgently needed repairs, court filing says

■ By KELLY PUENTE
Reporter

A former Queen Mary operator neglected the ship and failed to perform more than \$20 million in critical repair work, resulting in “significant issues and damage” to the historic vessel before the operator filed for bankruptcy, the city of Long Beach alleges in a recent court filing.

The city filed legal action last week as part of ongoing bankruptcy hearings for current Queen Mary operator Eagle Hospitality Trust, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in January. The ship’s lease is set to go to auction in May.

Former operator Urban Commons, which signed a 66-year lease to run the city-owned ship in 2016, created Eagle Hospitality Trust to list on the Singapore Stock Exchange in 2019. Eagle Hospitality took over as the ship’s operator last year after Urban Commons suffered a string of financial problems. However, Urban Commons’ limited liability corporation, Urban Commons Queensway, remains liable to the city under the lease agreement.

The city has now filed a legal complaint against Urban Commons for violating its lease agreement by failing to maintain the ship and not providing financial records that show how repair funds were spent.

“The Queen Mary is not an asset that can have no maintenance and repairs for a period of time or minimal maintenance and repairs,” the city stated in its complaint. “However, that is exactly what has happened under (Urban Commons’) watch. The absence of necessary maintenance and repairs has caused significant issues and damage to one of the City’s most iconic assets and has placed visitors and employees at risk.”

A representative for Urban Commons could not be reached for comment.

The city in bankruptcy court documents said it’s owed more than \$20 million in repairs for the ship, in addition to \$926,783 for unpaid rent and other fees.

The debtors have proposed \$748,157, which the city said is insufficient to cover its losses. A judge will decide what the city is owed in the coming weeks.

Long Beach Deputy City Attorney Richard Anthony said any funds recovered in the bankruptcy will go to the new leaseholder to help repair the ship. A private investment firm called Monarch Alternative Capital has offered a tentative \$15 million bid for the Queen Mary lease, but a higher bidder could come in the May 20 auc-



The city of Long Beach has accused a former Queen Mary operator of neglecting the ship and failing to perform more than \$20 million worth of critical repairs. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

tion, he said.

“What we hope to see is a properly maintained ship and we would like the existing debtor to either make the repairs or at least the bankruptcy estate to provide reasonable value for the repairs that the former operator didn’t make,” Anthony said.

As part of the lease agreement, the city in 2017 issued \$23 million in bonds and Tidelands funds for Urban Commons to fix the most critical repairs for the ship listed in a survey conducted at the time, but the funds ran out before many of the repairs were completed. Urban Commons later failed to complete other important repairs, including some that pose urgent safety and structural issues, according to court documents.

One of the most critical repairs is the severely corroded lifeboats that hang over public walkways.

“This is a critical life safety issue because the failure of the lifeboat support structure may cause injury or fatalities to guests, visitors or employees walking under the lifeboats and may cause further structural damage to ship sidewalls,” according to the complaint.

Of the repairs that were done by Urban Commons, some appeared to have been “performed incorrectly or not pursuant to applicable standards, and will likely need to be fixed or re-done in the near term.”

The city said Urban Commons has also failed to account for \$23 million in city bonds and Tidelands funds, which come mostly from oil revenue.

Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud, who is investigating Urban Commons, said the company has yet to provide an “electronic check register, cash account detail, bank statements and canceled checks, cashier’s checks, wire transfers or other payments made to vendors and subcontractors relating to the \$23 million funded by the city.”

The city in court documents said Urban Commons to date has not provided sufficient records to show how vendors were paid for their work on the projects.

Long Beach Economic Development Director John Keisler, whose department is in charge of overseeing the Queen Mary lease and projects, said this week he supports the city auditor’s investigation and is confident that Long Beach received \$23 million in project work on the Queen Mary.

Keisler in an interview said his department—under the terms of the lease agreement—verified invoices for the work and inspected the different projects, including \$5 million spent to repair the ship’s dangerously outdated sprinkler system.

Keisler said Urban Commons was responsible for keeping records on how it paid its various vendors and subcontractors but it has not been able to provide those records to the city, which is the source of the audit investigation.

“We know what we spent our money on and we know what work was done that has made the ship safer,” he said. “We as a city feel confident

that \$23 million was spent on eligible projects that made the ship safer and stronger.”

The city in the meantime is considering transferring control of the ship and the surrounding land known as Pier H from the City Council to the Harbor Commission, which is charged with overseeing the Port of Long Beach.

Councilwoman Cindy Allen, whose 2nd District includes the Queen Mary, said in a text message that she proposed the initiative because the “Harbor Department is experienced in handling leases and development on piers.”

Third District Councilwoman Suzie Price, who also supported the initiative, was the lone councilperson in 2017 to vote against the city’s plan to provide \$23 million to Urban Commons for ship repairs. Price, who works as a prosecutor for the Orange County District Attorney’s Office, had urged the city to proceed more slowly at the time.

In an interview last week, Price said nobody could have anticipated the operator’s scale of financial problems. Claims and lawsuits have been pulling up against Urban Commons for issues ranging from non-refunded wedding deposits to unpaid city taxes.

“I believe the city was misled in a very significant way by the people we had entrusted to be partners with us,” she said. “There are things that could have been done differently, but I don’t fault our city for it.” ■

City leaders approve storage facility where advocates wanted a park

■ By JASON RUIZ
Reporter

A contentious proposed storage facility near the banks of the Los Angeles River won final approval on Tuesday, April 13, after the Long Beach City Council voted 7-1 to allow construction to move forward despite fierce resistance from advocates demanding the privately owned site be used for park space.

The council's vote certifies a decision made by the Planning Commission in December that approved lot mergers, zoning changes and permits for the construction of the three-story, 152,000-square-foot self-storage and recreational vehicle-storage facility that will be built at 3701 Pacific Place.

Councilman Roberto Uranga was the lone opposition vote, stating that he supported a full environmental impact report. Councilwoman Suely Saro recused herself because of her work with an environmental agency that had taken part in negotiations for the project site.

City officials had maintained that the site's history of oil-related uses has left the soil contaminated with lead and arsenic, and its zoning for industrial structures had never qualified it to be a park.

"This site has been industrial use for the past 100 years," said Councilman Al Austin, who represents the area where the project is proposed. "And for the past 14 years, ever since the driving range closed, it's been a blighted site."

But several community groups, who formed the Riverpark Coalition, argued that the project was being rushed without the necessary environmental review. They say the city took away a plot of land that should



Despite community pushback, the Long Beach City Council approved a proposed storage facility along the LA River. Rendering courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

be transformed into green space as part of the city's promises made when the Los Angeles Riverlink plan was updated in 2015.

"Not only do we bear the burden of our disproportionate pollution but we are here before you humbling ourselves, practically begging, for you to follow through on your earlier votes to provide a larger park to our half of Long Beach," said Juan Ovalle, a member of the coalition that opposed the project. "The very least you could do is to require an EIR and deny this zoning change."

Ovalle said that if the project were allowed to go forward it would further the open-space inequity that's been present in the city for decades, with East Long Beach residents having the most acreage per person and West Long Beach residents having to suffer from pollution produced by refineries and activities at the Port of Long Beach.

A lawyer representing the coalition said that the mitigated negative declaration, an approval that the developer sought to avoid doing a full environmental impact report, was not appropriate and deprived the public of an opportunity to participate in the environmental review process.

The site's developer, InSite Property Group, said it plans to take several measures to mitigate any ill effects on nearby residents, including using water to eliminate dust during grading, air quality monitoring and having the city and state's Department of Toxic Substances Control on site to ensure that the conversion is done safely.

"We have to get it right; it's simply not up to us," said Fernando Villa, an environmental attorney representing InSite.

InSite also plans to include over 6,000 square feet of office space that will also

serve as its new headquarters.

"We'll have a good incentive to make sure that things are good," said Zach Rocktashel, an analyst with InSite.

InSite is also proposing a small nature preserve at the northern end of the project that it says can link to future developments on the 11-acre strip of land owned by the county that separates it from the riverbed. The developer added that a public access point to a county parcel and public parking will also be integrated into the project.

Last week, the county parcel was identified by the city in an open-space-acquisition report as the most viable site along the river that could be transformed into green space. While it will likely take years to secure funding and complete planning and construction, city officials said that the site represents a "very good possibility" for the city to create more open space in West Long Beach.

"This 11-acre site will be a win for our community and city as a whole," Austin said.

While the project had near unanimous support from public commenters, opponents of the project allege that a lobbyist for the developer stacked the deck for public comment by gaming the city's public comment system that only allows 20 speakers per item.

Ovalle and others allege the spots were claimed within minutes last Wednesday in a coordinated effort to block out dissent. Dozens of comments objecting to the project were included in documents submitted to the city with many echoing concerns of a lack of environmental review.

Only a handful of speakers gave live comments despite all 20 slots being reserved. ■

The City Council's 20-person speaking limit is silencing some members of the public

■ By JASON RUIZ
Reporter

Kimberly Walters wanted to be heard. For weeks, she'd been campaigning against a plan to build a controversial storage facility along the Los Angeles River, and now was her chance to talk directly to the City Council.

But when she signed up to speak at the Tuesday, April 13 council meeting, she was denied. There was not space, officials said, for her to voice her opinion.

"It's understandable that there would need to be some changes because of COVID but doing things telephonically should allow more people to participate," said Walters, a professor at Cal State Long Beach.

The 20-person limit on public speakers put in place in June has mostly flown under the radar, but for the second week in a row it resulted in the most controversial item on the council agenda receiving no verbal pushback from the public.

On April 6, an emergency meeting called to approve a lease with the federal government to hold up to 1,000 migrant children at the Convention Center received unanimous support from the council after a list of speakers almost unanimously praised the idea.

While allegations have been levied that

the city put this rule in place to limit dissent, City Clerk Monique De La Garza said that the decision to place a cap on speakers was made for a variety of reasons, including COVID-19 safety precautions, staffing levels and providing good customer service.

De La Garza's staff administers the meetings every week, and because City Hall is still closed, it requires multiple staff members and IT support staff to monitor calls from a small room.

They run through a checklist with every caller to ensure that speakers know how the system works and what they need to do when their item comes up, including unmuting themselves. De La Garza said that 20 people per item was what they could successfully manage.

But the recent abuse of the rule has not gone unnoticed.

"I don't think we realized it was happening until this meeting," she said of this week's council meeting.

De La Garza acknowledged that Tuesday's speaker slots for the controversial project filled up in three minutes, with opponents of the project alleging that the list of speakers was stacked by a lobbyist representing the project developers.

While only a handful of speakers ultimately used their time, their slots were occupied. De La Garza said her office doesn't

allow for people to be on standby, but does allow speakers to give up their space in line to another person of their choosing.

"But we're not hunting them down," De La Garza said.

She said her office had tried to take proactive measures to prevent something like that from happening but was told that the city's system didn't have the ability to require unique IP addresses for each individual signing up.

Other options like going to a lottery system could anger people who signed up early but were left off the final list and could lead to other transparency issues.

Mike Murchison, the consultant who was accused of coordinating the takeover of the public comment period, denied orchestrating signups and said he only helped register his wife, who has lived in the community where the project is going to be built for over 22 years.

Murchison said that the other side had ample time to speak because the hearing allowed opponents 30 minutes to articulate their position and that it should have been part of their strategy to get people to sign up, adding they were "not quick enough on the draw."

He was critical of one change to the city's public speaking rules: the time allowed to each speaker.

"I do think the old system, where they allowed people to speak for three minutes, that they should go back to that," Murchison said. "It's very difficult to get anything across in 90 seconds."

Changes to the public comment policy are unlikely in the coming weeks as the city works its way back to allowing in-person attendance, at which point the 20-person limit will be abandoned. De La Garza also said that the city is hoping to deploy new tablet sign-up stations to make it easier for people to do that once people are let back into the council chambers.

For Walters, the experience on Tuesday was demoralizing. Between being blocked from public comment and an email sent out less than an hour after the meeting ended celebrating the project's approval, she's uncertain if she'll continue with her activism.

The option for Walters and others to have their voices heard through an email or e-comment was not an appetizing one. Walters said there's no point in submitting those if the decision makers aren't going to read them all before voting to approve or deny a project.

"That didn't seem like a hearing to me, it seemed like a foregone conclusion," Walters said. "For a newcomer like me it felt every undemocratic and kind of demoralizing to ever do this again." ■

Long Beach has room for projected housing needs, but current zoning shields wealthier areas from density

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

The Long Beach City Council and the public got their first extended look at a housing policy that could determine where future density and affordable housing is located, sparking some early opposition to the fact that much of East Long Beach is left untouched.

Long Beach needs to make room for 26,502 units over the next eight years, according to the latest Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) approved by the Southern California Association of Governments in March. And nearly 60% of those units need to be affordable.

The city met just 17% of its affordable housing needs during the last RHNA allocation cycle.

Part of the Housing Element, a document that guides development in the city for the rest of the decade, is an inventory of parcels that shows where the city has space. The city must then zone that space appropriately to allow new units to be built.

If the city can't identify enough parcels, it would have to identify parts of the city to be rezoned within three years of the state certifying the Housing Element, which could happen by the end of the year.

A preliminary inventory shows a concentration of available parcels in the city's Downtown area as well as North and Central Long Beach. Nearly all neighborhoods east of Lakewood Boulevard or Ximeno Avenue were left out of the inventory.

The parcels overlap much of the city's identified regions where its recently adopted inclusionary housing policy could require affordable units to be built into new developments.

"It's like red-lining 2.0," said Elsa Tung, a policy analysis with Long Beach Forward, a group that advocates for communities of color. "The map clearly shows that predominantly White East Long Beach is excluded from new housing and the burden of greater density is all on the western half of the city, especially Down-

Income Level	Total Annual RHNA Target (2014-2021)	Total units permitted through 2020	Total units remaining to meet RHNA Target	Average Annual RHNA Target	% of RHNA met by # of permitted units (2014-2020)
Very Low	1,773	410	1,363	222	23%
Low	1,066	216	850	134	20%
Moderate	1,170	39	1,131	147	3%
Sub-total Affordable	4,009	665	3,383	502	16%
Above-Moderate	3,039	3,504	-465	380	115%
TOTAL	7,048	4,169	3,830	881	59%

A breakdown of Long Beach's housing production progress compared to what is required by the state's Regional Housing Needs Assessment. Chart courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

town and Central Long Beach."

A large part of what contributed to the locations of the parcels was the Land Use Element approved by the City Council in 2018. The contentious, years-long approval process pitted homeowners against renters and proponents for more density in the city against communities wanting to maintain the character of their single-family neighborhoods.

The version adopted by the council left nearly half of the city zoned for single-family housing and whittled down capacity for increased density in other parts of the city. Large swaths of East Long Beach are zoned for single-family housing. The council removed nearly 800 acres of land that was set to be zoned for denser developments before approving the Land Use Element in an 8-1 vote.

City staff said that in creating the preliminary inventory list, it eliminated certain types of parcels from inclusion because they're not zoned properly (industrial, commercial only) or are used for open space, waterways or have historic resources.

It also excluded single-family zoned neighborhoods because they currently wouldn't allow for multi-family housing developments.

State law prohibits parcels that were

included in the last Housing Element from being identified in the current one, unless the city can prove that it will be developed in this housing cycle.

Christopher Koontz, the city's deputy director of Development Services, said that the rule has been an obstacle for Long Beach, but one it's been able to overcome.

"The rule is really trying to crack down on cities who cheat," Koontz said. "It's not Long Beach, but there are some cities across the state that list properties that they have no intention to actually develop."

Koontz also noted that there are parcels in the inventory that are in the East Long Beach council districts, but they're located in parts where the zoning would allow for future development. Koontz said the City Council has the ability to rezone any part of the city at any time, but a move like that at this time is unlikely.

This distribution of the parcels was recognized in discussion by council members, as were concerns that the way sites were identified as potential spaces for future development could lead to gentrification.

Councilman Al Austin said that there is concern over the equitable distribution of new affordable units in the city. The part of North Long Beach that he represents has several clusters of parcels identified as potential spaces for development.

"We've had this conversation for many, many years," Austin said. "There is a clear disparity and it makes a lot of sense to expand where we can."

Austin also suggested that the city look at accessory dwelling units and unused office spaces as opportunities to build up the city's housing stock.

Officials are hopeful that with recent changes to zoning and enhanced density bonuses, which allow developers to build taller in exchange for reduced parking requirements and inclusion of affordable units, will create enough room to accommodate around 31,000 units.

The Housing Element draft report is expected to be ready for public review by June and the City Council could adopt it and submit it to the state by October. Two public hearings at the Planning Commission and City Council are expected to happen in the months after the draft is released in June.

More information about the city's Housing Element and links to a virtual open house can be found on the city's Development Services website: <http://long-beach.gov/lbds/planning/advance/housing-element-update/> ■

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A map of parcels suitable for housing development throughout Long Beach. Map courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

Restaurant owner who defied COVID-19 rules closes permanently, but says she has no regrets

■ By JEREMIAH DOBRUCK
Reporter

Restauration, the Long Beach restaurant that set off a firestorm of controversy by staying open during the worst stages of the pandemic, closed its doors for good on Monday, owner Dana Tanner said.

“I don’t want to be looking over the shoulder for the rest of my life fighting for my business in Long Beach, so I just made the hard decision to close,” Tanner said.

Tanner has been facing thousands of dollars in fines and fees, 20 misdemeanor charges, and the threat of eviction for refusing to comply with some coronavirus rules and then continuing to operate after the city pulled her health permit.

It’s not clear yet what will happen in those criminal and civil cases, but Tanner said she decided it wasn’t worth it to try to stay open.

“Why am I fighting so hard to provide something to an area that doesn’t want me there?” Tanner said.

The saga began last year when Tanner had refused to close her restaurant or even turn away on-site customers during the height of the pandemic when dine-in service was banned.

The city began citing Tanner after plans

for a New Year’s Eve party at her restaurant went public. This was during some of the worst parts of the winter COVID-19 surge when thousands of Long Beach residents were testing positive for the virus each week and officials were worried about coronavirus patients overwhelming hospitals.

Tanner, who at one point invited other businesses to join her in defying the rules, said she has no regret about staying open, but the fight with the city, constant threat of more penalties and personal attacks against her on social media eventually became too much.

“I just don’t want to cringe or have a panic attack every time a Public Works vehicle drives by my restaurant,” she said.

Tanner said she still had supporters—including her employees—but many neighbors were outraged at her after the city shut off her gas and someone then ran an illegal line to her restaurant, causing a gas leak. Tanner’s been charged with a misdemeanor for allegedly running the line. She denies any involvement other than mentioning to a supportive neighbor that she wished there were a way to get her gas back after the city cut it.

Recently, she and Long Beach officials were trying to reach an agreement to settle the fines and fees and give her a path to pos-



Dana Tanner, left, owner of now-defunct Restauration, speaks with customers as she waits for gas department employees to investigate a reported leak, Sunday, Jan. 24, 2020. The restaurant will not reopen. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

sibly getting her health permit back.

She said the city offered to drop its administrative case against her if she agreed to close her doors for six months, admit wrongdoing and pay the cost of all her fees and other penalties. Instead, she made the decision to close for good. Tanner said there’s no way her business would survive that.

It’s unclear if the city will still try to collect the fines and fees now that Tanner has closed.

Even if that issue is resolved, Tanner would still be facing the criminal charges, which are handled separately by Long Beach City Prosecutor Doug Haubert’s office.

Haubert had made no indication he was willing to drop the case or reach a settlement while Tanner was still open.

“We don’t make offers while someone is still violating the law,” he said. ■

CITY OF LONG BEACH BID OPPORTUNITIES

TITLE	BID NUMBER	DUE DATE
Irrigation, Water, and Sewage Pump Replacement (Re-Bid)	ITB PR20-066	04/21/2021
Remove & Dispose Mixed Excavation Material	WD-17-21	04/22/2021
Power Take Off Related Parts & Repair Svcs.	RFQ	04/22/2021
El Dorado Duck Pond Rehabilitation	R-7030	04/28/2021
On-Call Traffic Engineering Services	RFP	04/28/2021
LB Must Facility Phase 1	R-7179	04/29/2021
Engineering Consulting Services for 32 nd Street Booster Pump Station	RFP (EO-3501)	04/30/2021
Medical Bill Review Services	RFP LW21-032	05/03/2021
Maintenance and Management of Environmentally Sensitive Areas	RFP PR20-034	05/05/2021
As Needed Traffic Engineering and Transportation Planning Services	RFP PW21-036	05/10/2021
Unmanned Aircraft System Consultant	RFP PD21-029	05/12/2021
Queen Mary Inspection & Reporting Svcs.	RFP ED21-046	05/18/2021
Development Opportunity at the LB Airport	RFP AP21-042	06/07/2021

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DLBA to provide up to \$10K in outdoor dining expense reimbursement for businesses while funds last

■ By BRANDON RICHARDSON
Reporter

Businesses with outdoor dining will be able to apply for up to \$10,000 in relief through the Downtown Long Beach Alliance’s Outdoor Dining Reimbursement program beginning Monday, April 12.

Restaurants, bars, breweries, distilleries and wineries that have invested, or will invest, in parklets or other outdoor dining areas will be eligible for funding on a first-come, first-served basis until the \$250,000 fund is exhausted. The funding is part of the city’s CARES Act grant from the state and county.

“It’s overstating the obvious that the hospitality industry has been decimated and we want to provide relief and help rebuild that sector of our economy,” DLBA President and CEO Kraig Kojian said in a statement.

The program will provide 100% in matching funds up to \$10,000 to reimburse eligible expenses incurred between Dec. 29, 2020 and June 30,

2021. Eligible expenses include cladding, barriers, deck installations or improvements, furniture, lighting, heaters, personal protective equipment, sanitation equipment, signage, shade sails and canopies.

To apply, businesses must be located within the DLBA’s boundaries, have a valid business license, must be approved by the city to operate outdoors and must be operating in adherence to the city’s health orders. Before final approval, businesses must also provide receipts or other documentation of expenses.

Once approved, businesses will be required to submit a W9 form.

“This is the just the start of what DLBA and other like-minded organizations can do to help provide the necessary resources to resuscitate our local businesses,” Kojian said.

Applications are available on the DLBA website or by calling 562-436-4259 and will be accepted through June 30 at midnight or until funding lasts. ■

How the mayor quickly rallied support for a migrant shelter at the Convention Center



The Long Beach Arena at the Long Beach Convention Center. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Among well-connected people in Long Beach, it had been the worst kept secret for more than a week: The federal government had asked the city to use the Convention Center to temporarily house unaccompanied migrant children.

The request started with a call from the White House to Mayor Robert Garcia's office on March 25. It wasn't until 10 days later that the city officially revealed the idea was under consideration.

City leaders had declined to confirm the news when it was first reported on April 1 that the Convention Center was under consideration—instead, officials announced the plan four days later on the afternoon of April 5.

In the interim, city staffers had mobilized to coordinate logistics and learn about how a similar plan was working in San Diego. But there was also political maneuvering.

Hours before the plan appeared on a City Council agenda Monday, April 5, Garcia, who is close with senior members of the Biden Administration, began rallying supporters. In a private meeting with 25 to 30 community groups, Garcia asked them to speak out in support of the proposal and urge the City Council to approve the idea.

"Absolutely we wanted to encourage them to give their support," the mayor said.

On Tuesday, April 6, when the City Council took up the issue at an emergency meeting held on short notice, the council was met by a fusillade of near-unanimous support during the public comment section—despite the fact that immigration is a lightning rod on the national stage, and that leaked news of the proposed shelter had generated fierce debate on social media with conservative naysayers arguing that people

crossing the border illegally should be immediately sent back to their home countries while those on the left said sites like the one proposed for Long Beach are merely dressing up Trump-era detention centers where kids were kept in cages.

The lone speaker at City Council who was somewhat critical of the idea was James Suazo, executive director of the community group Long Beach Forward, who said the city should not be in the business of expanding what he described as detention centers and criminalizing people crossing the border.

Suazo, and another local immigrant rights organizer, Gaby Hernandez, said several of their members tried to sign up to speak against the proposal but either weren't able to sign up in time, were confused by the several different City Council agendas for that day or were simply pushed out of the queue by supporters who filled up the 20 available slots for speakers at the meeting.

The speakers who got a chance to weigh in included Garcia's close friends, political allies—and even his brother.

"It's clear from Tuesday's public comment that speakers were overwhelmingly mobilized in alignment with the city's talking points," Suazo said.

"This highlights what community activists have been saying since the start of the pandemic: The 20-person limit and 'first-come, first-served' approach severely limits democracy, creates barriers for non-English speakers, and greatly benefits people with power like the mayor's office, especially in the instance of an emergency meeting with 24 hours notice.

"This is not what democracy looks like," Suazo said.

Garcia said during a media briefing Thursday, April 8, that he was pushing for the item to be added to the agenda as soon as possible but the city did not have confir-

mation from the federal government until Monday. He also said the Congressional delegation, including Reps. Alan Lowenthal and Nanette Barragan, needed to be informed first.

"This is a federal facility, so it's pretty standard that we weren't going to make it public until they went through their notification process," James Ahumada, the mayor's communications director, said in a text message regarding the decision not to go public with the discussions until the afternoon of April 5.

Garcia said he'd pushed for the legally required public notice to go out about Tuesday's council meeting as soon as possible. But it ended up going out with the absolute minimum amount of time—24 hours—and required the council to hold an emergency special meeting in the middle of its regularly scheduled one.

Garcia said the delay came from the city attorney's office.

City Attorney Charlie Parkin said that the city had been in preliminary negotiations with the Federal Emergency Management Agency last week, but had not been in contact with the federal Department of Health and Human Services, the department that is expected to run the site, until April 3.

While a councilmember or the mayor could have added the item to the agenda at any time, the decision was made to wait until an actual discussion could be had, Parkin said.

"We wanted to wait until we got something from HHS that at least outlined the parameters of what they wanted to do," Parkin said. "That came the Saturday of Easter weekend."

Parkin said the logistics of scrambling city employees on a holiday weekend, some of whom were out of town, played into the item being placed on the agenda Monday

afternoon, after Garcia had met privately with nonprofits trying to gather support for the item.

At a media briefing Thursday, April 8, Garcia said he did rally people to try to give the project a boost before the City Council agenda was publicly posted, but he pointed to other ways people have to express their opinions even if his allies took most of the available slots to speak directly to council members.

"But I think that one of the great things about public comment is you can comment, you can e-comment," Garcia said. "We've been receiving emails. So there's a lot of ways obviously of giving your input."

David Snyder, the executive director of the First Amendment Coalition, said that while the state's laws governing open meetings don't include a hard rule on the amount of time speakers can have, it's very clear about rules that discriminate against points of view.

Snyder said the 20-person limit at City Council should be used situationally. If a meeting is going to last 12 hours it might be reasonable to impose restrictions, but if there's a meeting like the one Tuesday, with one controversial item, limiting speakers could be interpreted by a court as an unreasonable suppression of speech, Snyder said.

"If the result under this rule is that people with a certain viewpoint, whether it's supporting the mayor or being politically liberal, then I think there's a Brown Act issue there," Snyder said.

He said the rule also runs the risk of only allowing access to those who are tuned in or have advance notice of items being added to the agenda, something that happened in the case of the Convention Center vote.

"That's another reason that a hard cut off like this is inviting trouble," Snyder said.

Kelly Puente and Crystal Niebla contributed to this report. ■

Old Fire Station 9 site could be up for sale in the coming months

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

The old location of Fire Station 9 in Long Beach could be up for sale in the coming months as city staff is recommending that the site that's been closed since 2019 due to recurring mold be designated as surplus property and sold.

A memo from Economic Development Director John Keisler to the mayor and City Council earlier this month outlined how a request for proposal process could be initiated and the types of projects the city might consider in the space if it's sold.

The station, at 3917 Long Beach Blvd., was closed in July 2019 after recurring toxic mold continued to endanger the firefighters that were housed there. This prompted the city to relocate the station's assets to two other locations in the city which negatively impacted response times to Station 9's typical service area, which includes Bixby Knolls.

Station 9's assets were moved closer to home at the end of last year after the city took control of a site that it's leasing for up to three years while it works to build a permanent home for the station.

Depending on if the building is designated as a historic structure, it could be retrofitted for adaptive reuse for office space or other commercial uses, or it could be leveled to make



The city of Long Beach may soon list the old Fire Station 9 property in Bixby Knolls for sale. The facility was closed in 2019 due to recurring mold issues. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

room for passive recreation space or a new structure, according to the memo. But everything is preliminary right now, Keisler said.

"We actually don't know what the market will bear," Keisler said.

Keisler said that the city is unsure what the private market would want to put in that space, if anything, but that the city's RFP process could open the space up to creativity.

Any entity that buys the property would have to navigate the issues raised in the initial environmental impact report circulated by the city last year.

Tearing down the building to make way for a new development or a park would require remediation for lead-based paint, mold and potential asbestos in the walls.

Keeping the building intact for reuse would eliminate the total loss of a potentially historic building but would require steps to ensure that the persistent mold that closed down the fire station was eliminated. But the building being reused is unlikely to happen.

Christopher Koontz, deputy director for Development Services, said that it's likely that the building will

be demolished because of the persistent mold issues. The city has also indicated that it will not declare the building historic which could make any future development of the site easier, he said.

"The mold keeps coming back in the building and to remediate that you'd have to remove the entire exterior which would then see the building lose all of its historic value," Koontz said.

While a final EIR still needs to be made public by the city and an RFP process has yet to be formalized, the memo from Keisler asked city management to declare the location of the old fire station surplus property, one of the first steps to eventually sell it.

Before an RFP process can begin the city must first have negotiations with any parks or housing authorities or any affordable housing providers who show interest in the site after it's declared a surplus property.

Those groups would have up to 60 days to respond to the notice and would have a minimum of 90 days to negotiate with the city to purchase the property.

The parcel falls just outside of the city's recently adopted inclusionary housing policy, however, the memo said that the city would require a minimum of 15% of units to be set aside for low-income households if a developer chooses to build housing at the old site of Fire Station 9. ■

Little Coyote opening a second location on—where else?—Los Coyotes Diagonal

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

Little Coyote, the popular pizza restaurant on Retro Row at 2118 E. Fourth St., was opened last summer by business partners Jack Leahy and Jonathan Strader and was an instant hit on the trendy dining and shopping corridor.

Now after one successful year, the owners are opening a second location

on, appropriately enough, Los Coyotes Diagonal in East Long Beach, at the former home of the short-lived Lou & Mike's restaurant, at 3500 Los Coyotes Diagonal.

Strader and Leahy have a lot of experience in the food business and they opened Hatchet Hall, an American wood-fire restaurant in Venice in 2015.

The pair chose the Los Coyotes location chiefly for the size of its com-

missary kitchen and its patio, which can hold 80 customers at 100% capacity, which isn't really a thing yet, though the partners hope things will continue to ease in terms of pandemic restrictions. The building itself is about 1,900 square feet, "and most of that's kitchen," said Strader. "Getting a large kitchen was the final piece of the puzzle in terms of what we were looking for."

"Hopefully, this new location will


be a bit more community and family oriented, a bit more like an old-fashioned pizza parlor," said Strader, noting that the Fourth Street location, with little room for diners, is more of a "grab-a-pizza-and-go" place.

"It will also give us a chance to expand our menu some," said Leahy. "Maybe add some pasta items."

The owners hope to open Little Coyote No. 2 on June 1. ■



A second Little Coyote pizza joint is slated to open in East Long Beach in June. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



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Long Beach could look again at combining its utility services through a 2022 ballot measure

By JASON RUIZ
Reporter

The city may revisit the idea of merging Long Beach's utility services in the coming months as officials work toward amending the city charter through a ballot measure, according to a city memo.
Chris Garner, the general manager of the Long Beach Water Department and Bob Dowell, the city's director of Energy Resources, which oversees consumer natural gas delivery, sent a memo to city officials last month expressing interest in taking another look at consolidation.
The purpose would be to create a single business entity under one governing body that would have utility-focused governance to help set policy and rates, the memo said. Currently, Garner is hired by and reports to the Board of Water Commissioners, while Dowell reports to the city manager.
A ballot measure that would have created a Utilities Commission to oversee both water and energy was

presented in 2018 before the City Council and the Charter Amendment Committee, which voted to abandon it in August of that year by opting to leave it off that year's November election ballot.
Garner said that the decision to pull it from consideration for the 2018 ballot was because of poor polling figures showing less than 40% of residents signaling support for the consolidation of city utilities.
"It shocked the heck out of me because to me it was one of the least controversial items being placed on the ballot," Garner said of the 2018 election, which included multiple charter reforms including a controversial increase to term limits for the City Council and mayor.
However, with increased outreach, the city is optimistic that the measure could pass this time. Any change to the city charter would require over 50% of voters to approve the merger. The issue likely wouldn't appear on a ballot until 2022, the memo said.
If a ballot measure is pursued, it's unclear what would happen to

the city's oil and waste energy operations, which are also part of the Energy Resources department.
Garner said that while the memo was very preliminary and that formal discussions had not taken place with city management or elected officials, he believes combining the utilities would be more efficient and potentially less costly.
"Water is a cost-based utility," Garner said. "The lower the cost we can do our business the lower costs can be for our customers."
The move would put Long Beach in a group of other large Southern California cities including Los Angeles, Riverside, Anaheim and Pasadena that have consolidated municipal utilities.
Garner, who previously served as the head of the city's gas and oil department, said the two departments will sometimes dig up city streets years apart while servicing pipelines, a redundancy that could be eliminated with consolidation. It could also increase the city's capacity to respond to emergencies like leaks and repairs

because employees would have opportunities to cross-train, Garner said.
While gas rates are market-based, Garner said there could be more transparency with how those rates are set for customers. Typically they mirror the rates charged by the Southern California Gas Company but Garner said that in some instances they could be lower at the city level.
However, unlike the water department which has its own city commission that sets rates and presents its budget over the course of months of public meetings, the city's Energy Resources department is usually presented in one night during the council's budget cycle.
"If we consolidate it would be a much more transparent process at gas than it is today," Garner said.
Placing a utilities consolidation onto the ballot will likely take months, but if the city chooses to move forward with the process it will have some time. The deadline to place a measure on the November 2022 ballot is in August 2022.

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Maggie, Aquarium of the Pacific's 'motherly sea otter,' dies at 20

■ Staff Report

The oldest sea otter at the Aquarium of the Pacific died April 9, an aquarium spokesperson said.

Maggie, the 20-year-old sea otter, had been in declining health recently, and she died shortly after a routine blood draw intended to help assess her condition, spokesperson Marilyn Padilla said in a statement.

"At 20 years of age, Maggie was reaching the maximum age of sea otters," the statement said. "Further tests will be performed to help determine as much information as possible to contribute further to our knowledge of the health issues experienced by geriatric sea otters."

Maggie was 9 when she arrived at the aquarium in 2010 after being stranded and rescued.

Padilla wrote that the staff "considered Maggie to be a motherly sea otter with a kind and gentle nature."

"Over the years when young rescued sea otters would be introduced to their new home at the Aquarium, Maggie would share food and swim gently with them," Padilla said in the statement. "She will be greatly missed by staff and her many public fans." ■



Maggie, the Aquarium of the Pacific's oldest sea otter, died at 20 years old. Photo courtesy of the aquarium.



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The crowd was virtual in December 2020, but in other years, the Convention Center's Terrace Plaza hosts thousands of local residents for Long Beach's annual tree lighting ceremony and fireworks show, such as this from 2019.

Long Beach Convention Center represents a ‘shovel-ready’ infrastructure opportunity

Study: Facility needs \$85 million investment to clear backlog of repairs

President Joe Biden has ambitious plans to help kick start the post-pandemic economic recovery. The first part of that plan? A roughly \$2 trillion investment for improving the nation's infrastructure.

Dubbed the American Jobs Plan, the proposal would fund improvements to facilities, roads, bridges, railways and other infrastructure in communities across the nation. In unveiling his

the cornerstone of that return on investment coming from the Convention Center — is a priority, said Public Works Director Eric Lopez.

“It's been transformed into a place where people want to go,” Lopez said, crediting the award-winning CVB staff and the Convention Center operator ASM Global with helping the city invest in the right areas to keep Long Beach at the forefront of

\$32M annual contribution to city finances from hotel stay bed taxes pre-COVID

proposal, Biden has said that it will create “really good-paying jobs” and help the nation compete better.

Here in Long Beach, local leaders say an investment in tens of millions of dollars in deferred maintenance at the Convention Center would directly benefit a local tourism and hospitality industry responsible for thousands of jobs and nearly \$2 billion in positive economic impact.

Maintaining Long Beach's reputation as a destination — with

the industry. “It's really a space that is memorable that people talk about long after their convention or special event brought them here.”

The Convention Center has benefited from approximately \$65 million in public-facing renovations and ongoing improvements over the past decade to create industry-pioneering new event spaces and flexible solutions for convention guests and visitors.

Behind the scenes, a longer-term problem — the need for reinvestment in facility maintenance — does lurk outside public view for the massive facility, which includes an arena, grand ballroom, multiple theaters, meeting rooms, exhibit halls, indoor and outdoor spaces, with some of those spaces currently being used for vaccination distribution.

“It’s a really large, vast facility that requires ongoing reinvestment,” Lopez said, with city officials identifying roughly \$85 million needed to address some deferred maintenance for out of public view systems and machinery long-past their lifespans.

Hospitality and tourism, including the Convention Center itself, is the second-largest job sector in Long Beach and an industry that — pre-pandemic — was estimated to generate \$1.8 billion in economic impact annually, according to an independent study conducted by Los Angeles-based Beacon Economics.

“Convention business is 100% important to Long Beach — it brings people to the city and highlights what we have here,” said Imran Ahmed, general manager of the Long Beach Marriott.

When gatherings do resume, Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Steve Goodling and his staff have banded together with the California Convention Center Coalition in a commitment to maintain necessary safety protocols. He said they want to be ready to offer hybrid digital options, too, and rebuild one of the most critical cogs keeping Long Beach’s economic engine turning.

And he noted that beyond the financial implications, the industry-leading campus serves as a center of our city and is vitally important for many jobs and the economic prosperity of the community.

“The investment into the convention center is more than worth the return, Goodling said, “When we came out of the recession, when you look at the TOT revenue, it almost goes straight up — it looks like Bitcoin stock.”

Before the pandemic, the hospitality and tourism industry supported 18,652 jobs, 15,000 of which were supported by direct visitor spending; 1,599 supported by indirect spending; and 2,053 supported by induced spending, which is spending by individ-



Vaccine signs are placed at the entrance of the Convention Center’s Terrace Plaza on March 26, 2021. The Convention Center campus has hosted two walk-up and drive-up mass vaccination sites for months, where tens of thousands of Long Beach residents have already been vaccinated.

Long Beach City Councilwoman Cindy Allen, representing District 2, maintains that the city and its small businesses have come to rely on hospitality and tourism.

“These business owners wagered their futures on our active

18,652 Long Beach jobs supported by the hospitality and tourism industry, the city’s 2nd largest employer.

uals or households caused by increased earnings linked to the direct and indirect spending, according to Beacon.

About one-quarter of total visitor spending at that time was spent on food services. Accommodation spending accounted for the second largest percentage of total visitor spending at 22.4%, followed by entertainment at 14.2%, transportation at 14% and retail at 12.7%.

And, visitors in Long Beach keep the city’s coffers full. City officials said transient occupancy tax generated by overnight visitors at hotels is the fourth-largest tax revenue generator in Long Beach.

convention center and tourist traffic, and had until COVID-19 been growing due to the increased vitality downtown, largely driven by our successful convention attraction,” Allen said.

“Until conventions are set to return, their ability to plan and budget for the future is uncertain,” she said. “We must find a way to restore a sense of predictability and certainty to enable these businesses to thrive, and that rests on reopening our convention center, restoring lost contracts there, and getting back to the incredible partnerships between conventions, hotels, eateries, and shopping retailers that drove Long Beach’s wonderful, increasing vitality one year ago.”

Drinkable high: Are THC-infused beverages the next trend for the legal cannabis industry?

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Cookies, gummies, brownies—edible THC products have been a staple among cannabis consumers since long before the drug was fully legalized in California in 2016. But as of late, a less well-known form of consuming cannabis has taken hold: THC-infused drinks.

While beverages still make up a small portion of the \$4.4 billion legal cannabis market in California, an increasing number of brands are developing products in this segment, including a Canadian company with a new facility in North Long Beach.

Tinley Beverage Company, which is publicly listed on the Canadian stock exchange, recently purchased a 20,266-square-foot building on 59th Street, where it hopes to soon produce THC-infused drinks at large scale.

“When you say the words cannabis or marijuana, nobody thinks of drinking it,” said Rick Gillis, Tinley’s president for the Western U.S. region. Tinley and other companies are poised to change that. “We want people to come over to this industry that’s now legal in California and enjoy it in a way that’s socially acceptable.”

Socially acceptable is a key term here. While other common forms of consuming cannabis, specifically vaping and smoking, might not be welcome in all environments, beverages are.

“You can’t smoke in hotels, restaurants, airplanes—you can’t,” Gillis said. “Drinking is a little bit different. So what better idea than to build an industry in a category that everyone’s quite comfortable with?”

Market data shows that the product category of THC-infused drinks is slowly picking up steam.

According to data from Seattle-based cannabis analytics firm Headset, sales of cannabis-infused beverages increased 40.3% last year compared to 2019 across all states where recreational cannabis is legal, meaning the submarket slightly outperformed in terms of growth the overall cannabis market, which increased 39.4% in the same time period.

While those numbers aren’t exactly a sign of consumers’ wholesale endorsement of the product category yet, investment from players in the national beverage industry indicates a growing interest in the market for cannabis beverages, experts say.

“There’s a lot of hype and expectation, especially when it comes to the long-term opportunities,” said Bethany Gomez, managing director of the cannabis-focused market research firm Brightfield Group.



Elijah Avery, 29, lead cannabis consultant at West Long Beach’s Chronic Pain Releaf Center dispensary, holds up a cannabis-infused sparkling water produced by California beer brewer Lagunitas. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Gomez said she expects the cannabis beverage sector to clear the \$1 billion mark by 2025.

The first sprouts of this can already be found at local dispensaries, where THC-infused seltzers, ice teas and alcohol-free beers are sold next to the actual seedlings of cannabis plants.

Elijah Avery, a lead cannabis consultant at Chronic Pain Releaf Center on the Westside said a lot of customers are curious about the dispensary’s selection of psychoactive drinks. How-

ever, those conversations have also revealed some of the challenges toward establishing this new product category as a go-to among consumers.

“It definitely is growing in popularity,” Avery said. But, “It’s a product I have to explain a lot.”

Like all edibles in the legal market, beverages are capped at 100mg of THC content, turning off some long-term consumers who are used to higher doses available in the illicit and pre-regulated market.

And even for consumers who are content with the lower dosage, the difference in onset time between beverages and edibles—drinks kick in more quickly than THC-infused foods—might take some getting used to.

The taste—some cannabis-infused beverages have a strong weed-like flavor—is another factor that’s still being ironed out.

“There’s a lot of work that needs to be done in terms of driving consumer adoption,” said Gomez. “But there’s growth opportunities.”

Still, some bigger players, like Pabst Blue Ribbon and Lagunitas Brewing Company, have already taken the plunge and developed their own THC-infused drinks. Others might follow if the Biden Administration takes on the federal legalization of cannabis, something Vice President Kamala Harris supported during her time in the U.S. Senate.

“These large alcohol companies, who have been sitting on the sidelines, would then be able to jump in,” Gomez said.

Until then, California will likely be a testing ground for companies eager to develop their own THC-infused beverages and nail their marketing approach.

“If you’re going to test in a market, test in a very large one,” Gomez said. “California is absolutely the market to do this in.” ■



Cannabis-infused beverages on display at Chronic Pain Releaf Center, a West Long Beach dispensary. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Expunging cannabis-related convictions is a step toward racial equity, economic opportunity—and a bureaucratic nightmare

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Considered essential during the coronavirus pandemic, the cannabis industry has established itself as a vital part of the state and local economy—even creating a rare bright spot in an otherwise bleak city budget.

But years after the industry was fully legalized in California, many residents are still hindered by cannabis-related criminal records. People with criminal convictions are not a protected class, meaning that there are no laws prohibiting employers, landlords and even government agencies from denying them a job, apartment or housing assistance.

Proposition 64, which legalized recreational cannabis in 2016, made many of those records eligible for expungement. But an arduous bureaucratic process has complicated this key provision of the voter-approved law, as well as subsequent legislation aimed at making expungements easier.

Long Beach, however, has still been able to make significant progress.

“All of the Long Beach cases that were eligible for automatic expungement have been expunged,” said Long Beach City Prosecutor Douglas Haubert, whose office participated in a large-scale effort concluded last year to wipe clean certain cannabis convictions.

In February 2020, then-District Attorney Jackie Lacey announced that her office had asked the Los Angeles Superior Court to dismiss 66,000 felony and misdemeanor convictions dating back as far as 1961, including cases handled by the Long Beach city attorney’s office.

In doing so, Los Angeles County and Long Beach beat a deadline set by Assembly Bill 1793 to submit cases eligible for dismissal or redesignation to the California Department of Justice by July 1, 2020.

For individuals with cannabis-related convictions to see relief in housing or employment, however, the conviction must first be sealed by the Department of Justice, thus making it inaccessible to potential employers or landlords conducting background checks.

The status of that undertaking remains unclear. A spokesperson for the Los Angeles County Superior Court said in an email that the court had “compiled an electronic file of roughly 60,000 cases” and “is waiting for the Department of Justice (DOJ) to accept it.” Once “accepted successfully,” the department would be required to update its summary



Expungement for all eligible cannabis cases in Long Beach has been completed, according to the city attorney’s office. Photo by Brandon Ricardson.

database accordingly, the spokesperson said.

Organizing, sharing and maintaining criminal justice data for a jurisdiction the size of Los Angeles County, which comprises numerous local agencies, is a challenge to say the least, according to Haubert.

“It’s embarrassing how poorly DOJ data is kept,” Haubert said.

Between the hundreds of court clerks entering conviction records across California’s 58 superior courts, which then send the information to the state’s department of justice, case information isn’t always reported uniformly.

“Imagine 600 people trying to put notes in a computer the same way,” he said. “They don’t.”

It’s unclear whether these differences in reporting have contributed to delays in clearing eligible records. But some individuals with convictions that qualify for expungement have found them remaining on their records, said Holly Hancock, deputy in charge of the Los Angeles County Public Defender’s Office’s homeless mobile unit.

In her work with Los Angeles County’s homeless population, Hancock said she has seen cases that should have been wiped clean but were not—impeding the ability of individuals to obtain housing and employment.

Finding the snags in the process is difficult, Hancock explained. “We have to call the clerks, call the court, call the DOJ,” she said. “It usually is just: ‘We didn’t get around to it, we didn’t submit it.’”

The California Department of Justice did not respond to a question on the number of eligible cases submitted by LA County DA’s office last year that have been sealed by the DOJ.

As for Long Beach cases, however, Haubert said he found that all

cases submitted in the countywide record-clearing effort had been successfully removed from public view in the DOJ’s database.

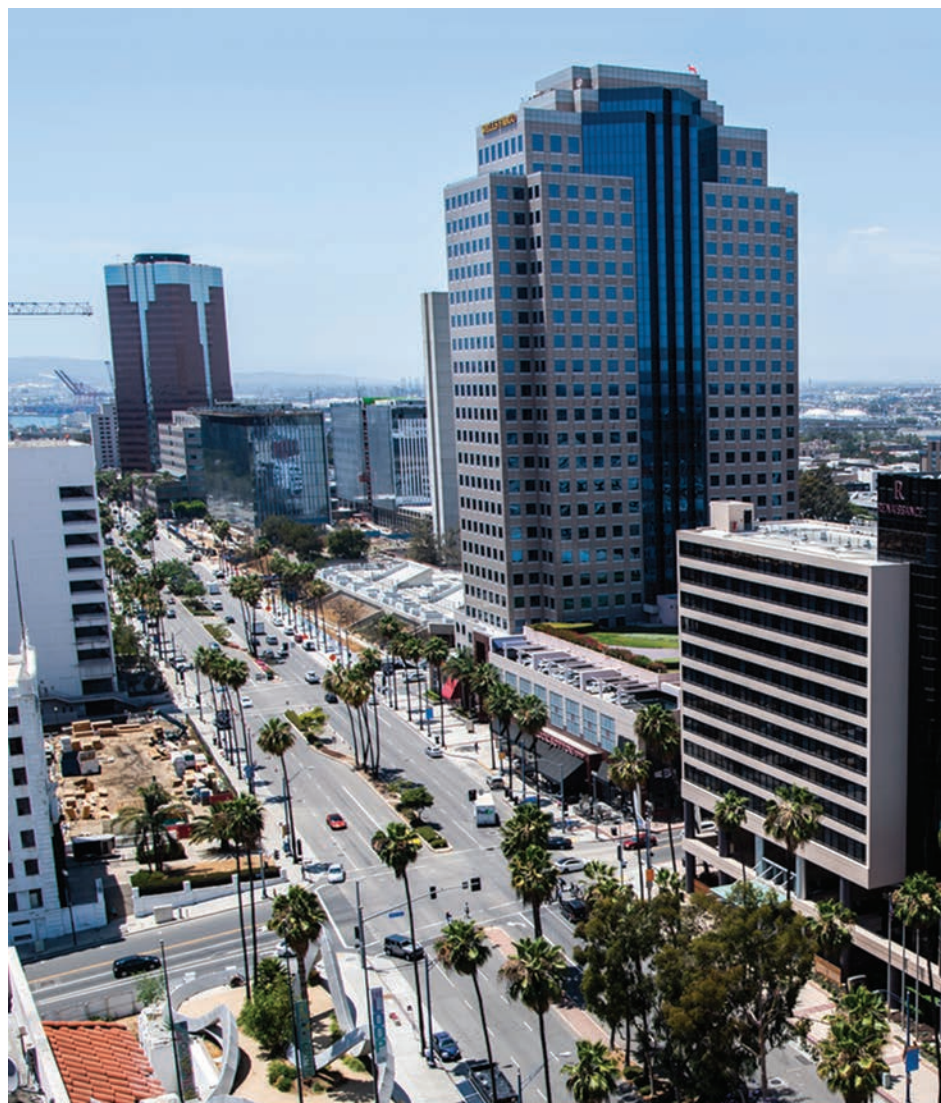
Haubert said 2,927 eligible Long Beach cases recorded since 2002, all of which had been cannabis possession cases reduced from misdemeanors to infractions under Prop.

64, had been sealed. Haubert’s office began using a new case management system in 2002, preventing him from spot-checking the status of older cases included in the district attorney’s 2020 data file.

Still, people can incur charges for illegal distribution or cultivation of cannabis, although such charges are rare and often carry lighter sentences following the passage of Prop. 64.

Just like many other criminal convictions, individuals may petition to have those cases expunged after they complete probation. This is where Haubert’s work through the city’s Restoration Initiative for Safety and Employment—or RISE—program, founded following the passage of the state’s cannabis expungement laws, continues.

“The reason we continue to hold expungement workshops is because there are still records that are not eligible for automatic expungement,” Haubert said. “California law is very generous in clearing records, the law just doesn’t make it very easy or straightforward, so people still need assistance.” ■



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Hillary Marshall, LCSW has been practicing social work for the past 20 years, and the past 12 years as a licensed psychotherapist. Just as the health of relationships are built on integrity and trust, Hillary maintains that the health of her business needs to be based on respect for and nurturing of the environment. As a Green Certified business, she values a natural approach to psychotherapy and provides services in both English and Spanish.
hillarymarshall.com

The List of the May 4 edition of the Long Beach Business Journal will highlight Real Estate Agencies. To be included, please email ads@lbpost.com

Long Beach receives another \$1.2 million in grant funding for cannabis equity program



Cannabis plants for sale at Chronic Pain Releaf Center in West Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

By JASON RUIZ
Reporter

Future Long Beach cannabis operators received a boost this month after the city received over \$1.2 million in grants to help people open businesses through the city’s social equity program. The funding is meant to help equity applicants, those who have been affected by or live in neighborhoods that have been disproportionately touched by the war on drugs and who need help financing the

startup costs of entering the cannabis industry. The most recent round of funding comes from Gov. Gavin Newsom’s office of economic and business development. While opening a dispensary won’t be possible until the City Council expands the number of storefronts allowed in the city—an idea the council discussed in March—the funding can be used in the interim to help production, delivery, lab testing and other parts of the industry get off the ground. The city has already reached its cap of 32 retail storefronts

that was set by a residents-approved measure to legalize cannabis sales in 2016. Applicants who meet the criteria for equity status under the city’s guidelines, which includes having a net worth of less than \$250,000 but also having at least 51% ownership in the business, can get direct grants from the city for meeting certain milestones. Reaching the stage of cannabis application review can get an applicant between \$20,000 and \$80,000. Submitting facility plans can result in a \$35,000 grant. The city issuing a cannabis license to the applicant can come with an \$80,000 grant. The City Council created the city’s cannabis equity program in 2018 but state funding didn’t start to roll in until 2019, when the state’s Bureau of Cannabis Control began doling out grants to municipalities across California. Long Beach is one of eight cities in the state that has adopted a cannabis equity ordinance. In October 2019 Long Beach received about \$914,000 from the BCC and was awarded another \$2.7 million in April 2020. This year’s grant brings the city’s total to nearly \$5 million in grant funding the city has received to assist cannabis social equity applicants since the program’s creation.

Council votes to support bill that would provide tax credits for social equity cannabis businesses

By ALENA MASCHKE
Reporter

The City Council on Tuesday, April 13, approved an official letter of support for a state bill that would create tax credits for cannabis businesses owned by people who have been adversely impacted by past criminalization of the drug. Many so-called “social equity programs,” which exist in cities across the state—including Long Beach—have so far fallen short of goals to help people who need it most. The bill, SB 603, which was introduced in February by Sen. Steven Bradford, D-Gardena, would create a tax credit equal to the amount of state and local cannabis licensing fees paid by an equity applicant or licensee. If approved, those credits would kick in retroactively to Jan. 1. Bradford said his efforts on the issue are motivated by the lack of diversity in the growing industry. “If we were talking about the criminalization of marijuana, it would be nothing but Black and Brown people in the room. But now that we’re talking

about the entrepreneurial opportunities, they’re being excluded,” he said. “Right now, it’s pretty much a White, male-dominated industry.” The startup costs of cannabis businesses, from real estate to inventory, have proven prohibitive to many applicants, who have to prove financial need to qualify for Long Beach’s support program. Ongoing costs, like taxes and licensing fees, also present a challenge, said Edgar Cruz, founder of the Cannabis Commerce Council of Long Beach, an organization dedicated to representing applicants who need help. “We’ve seen dispensaries start when [recreational marijuana was legalized] run and fall flat on their faces,” Cruz said of the effect of compounding costs. The bill, Bradford said, would ease the financial burden placed on these applicants, lowering the barrier of entry to the industry. Long Beach councilmembers agreed. “Ultimately this bill will help the equity businesses play a larger role in their communities and we all have a responsibility to support equity programs,” said District 2 Councilwoman

Cindy Allen, who brought a motion to support the bill to the City Council on April 6. Councilmen Rex Richardson and Robert Uranga, both members of the city’s state legislation committee, signed onto the motion submitted by Allen. All councilmembers voted to support the bill in subsequent meetings on April 6 and 13. The Long Beach Collective Association also signaled its support for the proposed state law. “As an organization that has really gone from prohibition to legalization we’ve seen the issues that came from the war on drugs and prohibition,” said Adam Hijazi, president of the association. With cannabis now fully legalized in California, licensed companies—including those founded by social equity applicants—still compete with an illicit market that skirts taxes and the cost of regulation, Hijazi noted. “Lowering those costs gives companies a better ability to compete with the illicit market,” he said. “It’s going to be very helpful for equity applicants.”



Two cannabis products available at Catalyst Cannabis Co. in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Elliot Lewis

(Continued from Page 1)

Less than a week later, on Sept. 23, Lewis received a letter of termination from the cannabis association, citing—among other reasons—his “lobbying for city wide policy change for personal gain” against the organization’s code of conduct.

The association declined to comment on the circumstances of Lewis’ ouster, but a source privy to information on the decision suggested that Lewis’ pitch for higher taxes was less about altruism and more about currying favor with city leadership to benefit his business prospects down the line. It’s a charge Lewis doesn’t completely deny.

“We live in the real world,” he said. “I would never take a position that I don’t believe in. But at the same time, I realize that every position I take has a business impact, has a political impact. Anybody who says that’s not part of the calculation is just being insincere.”

Lewis has come a long way from growing a few plants in his basement as a student at UC Berkeley.

After 10 years spent in the real estate business, an experience he credits with providing him the necessary know-how to secure the most suitable locations for his cannabis businesses, he began entering the market with a few grows in the northern part of the state.

In 2015, he returned to his native Long Beach, where he obtained four dispensary

licenses and became a partial owner of two more licensed dispensaries, in addition to licenses in Santa Ana and Bellflower.

The growth of his businesses has not only been accompanied by scuffles with competitors but also with municipal battles throughout California.

Just months before his conflict with the industry association, his company had a parting of the ways with Connected, a well-established brand of cannabis products that had lent its name to Lewis’ dispensaries since their inception.

Connected did not respond to a request for comment on why it decided to terminate its licensing agreement with Lewis last year, but the Catalyst CEO said his aggressive pricing and overall reputation impeded Connected’s ability to sell to other retailers in the area.

“They initiated it because we were essentially hurting their sales,” Lewis said.

Lewis’ rough-and-tumble reputation and, by extension, that of his newly minted Catalyst brand, extends beyond Long Beach.

Over the past few years, Lewis and his associate, lawyer Damian Allen Martin, have sued cities from Morro Bay to San Bernardino in efforts to force changes in their cannabis licensing process that would give them a better shot at securing a license.

When the city of Oxnard received a complaint from Martin, acting as general counsel of Catalyst Cannabis Co., Chief Assistant City Attorney Ken Rozell said the city knew what was coming.

“Catalyst is known for being litigious,” Rozell said. “They’re known for their aggressive behavior.”

While it wasn’t the only factor, Rozell said, the company’s reputation played a role in the city’s decision to revise its licensing process. “We considered all factors and that was definitely part of it,” he acknowledged.

Formerly shut out of the first round of licenses in Oxnard, the revised process allowed the company to reapply. This time, it made the cut. “I was told they did well,” Rozell said.

To hear Lewis tell it, his aggressive actions aren’t just good for his business, they also serve to support those he takes under his wing—including formerly disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

“Our ruthlessness helps the social equity issue,” he said. “In order to affect change, there has to be some level of political savvy and sharky-ness to make it work.”

At least one social equity applicant in Long Beach can vouch for that.

Carlos Zepeda, one of the original applicants to the city program, found himself disillusioned with the city’s commitment to helping entrepreneurs like himself succeed. Now, he will be opening a cannabis delivery service under the license of Catalyst Eastside dispensary scheduled to launch within the next month.

Lewis, Zepeda said, was the only established dispensary owner who responded to his request for support, despite a city policy requiring licensed businesses to help social equity applicants develop their

business plans.

“Right from the jump he started helping me, and that was before the social equity thing was what it is now,” Zepeda said. “He’s deep into the cannabis game, he has a lot of knowledge and he’s shared that knowledge with me.”

Most recently, Lewis has argued for more dispensary licenses in the city to be created specifically for social equity applicants. Under the title “Catalyst Cares,” the company has also participated in food drives, an event for veterans and expungement clinics to help people clear their cannabis-related criminal records.

These efforts, of course, aren’t exclusively charitable either. “We do the community outreach for its own good, but I think that’s also its own form of branding,” Lewis said.

In terms of growing his own brand, Lewis is currently in the process of obtaining a special permit from the city to open a cannabis dispensary in Downtown Long Beach, a proposal that has garnered support from a number of organizations, including the Downtown Long Beach Alliance.

“It’s basically built out, we’re just putting the finishing touches on it now,” Lewis said of the million-dollar project.

With several new dispensary locations on his whiteboard, it doesn’t look like Lewis’ campaign for dominance in the California cannabis industry will end anytime soon. Nor will his whatever-it-takes approach. “I’m not going for sainthood,” he said. “When it comes to winning licenses, this is bloodsport. We play for keeps.” ■

San Pedro Bay Ports' CAAP is a 'trailblazing' model for the rest of the country to follow, the EPA says



A zero-emission electrified rubber-tyred gantry crane moves containers on Pier J at the Port of Long Beach. Photo courtesy of the port.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

For the last 15 years, the San Pedro Bay Ports complex has been working toward ambitious environmental goals to drastically reduce emissions. Now, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is praising the ports' Clean Air Action Plan as a "groundbreaking program."

The plan is a partnership between the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, collectively known as the San Pedro Bay Ports, to reduce emission from all sources, including container ships, harbor craft, trucks, terminal equipment and locomotives.

"The Clean Air Action Plan is an excellent example of what can happen when port operators work with neighboring communities to develop and implement a robust plan, leading to positive impacts on air quality and emissions," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement. "While there is still lots of work to be done in San Pedro Bay, this trailblazing effort can serve as a model for the rest of the country to follow."

In Long Beach, the CAAP already has greatly reduced emissions compared to 2005 levels. Sulfur oxide has been reduced 97%, diesel particulate matter 88%, nitrogen oxide 58% and greenhouse gases 19%, according to the port's 2019 air emissions inventory. Data for 2020 will not be available until the fall.

The reductions have already met multiple milestones of the program. For example, the port aimed to decrease diesel particulate matter 77% and sulfur oxides by 93% by 2023. The port is just 1% shy of its goal to reduce nitrogen oxides 59% by 2023.

These emissions reductions were made while container throughput at the port increased 14%.

In 2017, the ports revisited the program, providing updates and revisions based on the work already completed. The revised CAAP is focused on greenhouse gas emissions reductions—a 40% decrease by 2030 and an 80% decrease by 2050 compared to 1990 levels.

Other goals include the capture of 100% of at-berth vessel emissions by 2030, zero truck emissions by 2035 and fully zero-emission terminal equipment by 2030.

"I remain optimistic that we will meet those goals. Challenges still remain—from technology to infrastructure to funding," said Matt Arms, director of environmental planning for the Port of Long Beach. "We're starting to overcome those challenges but ... we're going to have to continue to check in as we go."

The EPA case study noted the ports' plan presents useful best practices and lessons learned that other port authorities and near-port communities across the country could look to as a guide when developing similar plans. In particular, the EPA noted the ports'

collaboration with surrounding communities, their annual emissions inventories, setting quantified emissions targets, supporting technical innovation and developing partnerships with industry and government.

Environmental justice was a focal point of the EPA study, which noted nearby communities were able to elicit change by participating in environmental agency deliberations and cultivating relationships with local elected officials to "elevate port air quality issues to city, county and state political discussions."

"Overburdened communities near the San Pedro Bay Ports have borne the most direct air quality impacts of port operations," the study reads. "Communities in Southern California successfully drew attention to their concerns and accelerated the development and implementation of the CAAP"

In the way of advancing technology, the ports have awarded nearly \$80 million in grant funding to demonstrate near-zero emission equipment, which represents half the total cost of those projects, Arms said. In all, the port will ultimately have 65 pieces of zero-emissions equipment in operation at its terminals, including electrified rubber-tyred gantry cranes.

Nine of the container yard cranes are being operated by SSA Marine at Pier J, funded in large part by a \$9.7 million California Energy Commission grant. The port, the commission and Southern California

Edison have partnered to bring 25 zero- or near-zero emission cranes to Long Beach terminals to test their performance in a real-world setting.

"[The cranes] are notable because that's taking an existing piece of equipment ... and making it pure zero emissions," Arms said, noting they have a particularly high emissions profile. "Until this project, people weren't sure it would work."

Updated infrastructure, such as improved electrical grids and rail systems, also is necessary to meet emissions goals. The port's energy initiative is still underway, with the agency actively exploring the use of micro grids in partnership with SoCal Edison to make the electrical grid more resilient as additional electric, zero-emissions equipment is introduced.

The largest infrastructure upgrade underway at the port is its Pier B on-dock rail project, which aims to significantly increase the number of containers transported by train rather than truck. Planning for the \$870 million project—part of the port's \$1 billion rail capital improvement program—began over a decade ago, with the first new tracks expected to be operational in 2024 and more to come in phases through 2031.

Currently, 28% of cargo is transported in and out of the port on rail but the Pier B project aims to increase that to 35%, eliminating 750 truck trips for each full train, according to port estimates.

For the trucks that remain, the port has already begun implementation of its clean trucks program. In 2018, the port required any truck entering drayage service to be a 2014 model engine or newer.

“Since that time, we have had over 5,000 trucks registered that are now 2014 model or newer and 65% of trucks are 2010 or newer,” Arms said, noting that newer models produce less emissions. “It’s a big accomplishment.”

In March 2020, the ports implemented a \$10 per 20-foot equivalent unit fee for trucks that do not comply with emissions standards. The move was criticised by clean air advocacy groups who said the amount was too low to be an effective deterrent.

The fee also met with opposition from truckers who drive natural gas-fueled rigs, which are cleaner than traditional diesel engines. The drivers felt they should benefit from the same exemptions as zero-emission trucks powered by electric batteries or hydrogen fuel-cells, which are not yet on the roads en masse. Exemptions for low-emissions trucks are under review by the port, Arms said, and the fees are not yet being collected.

The San Pedro Bay Ports are drafting the groundwork for the next steps of the clean trucks program, laying out strategies to ensure reaching their 2035 goals, Arms said. The draft is expected to be released for public comment in the coming months, he added.

The California Energy Commission and the California Air Resources Board recently



A project footprint map for the Port of Long Beach's Pier B On-Dock Rail project. Image courtesy of the port.

announced a joint solicitation for a large-scale demonstration of a zero-emissions truck fleet, a concept previously published by the San Pedro Bay Ports. Arms said the ports have submitted to receive grant funding to host the demonstration and that he hopes to hear soon if they have been selected.

The San Pedro Bay Ports' plan has been

voluntary since its first iteration in 2006, Arms said. While he was reluctant to say it has spawned similar plans by other agencies, Arms said he has at the very least seen spin-offs of specific programs that can be traced back to the Southern California port complex.

“When the CAAP was adopted, we were definitely ahead of the state and everybody

else,” Arms said. “We stepped ahead to get those early emission reductions. Then, not only did state regulations start to catch up, but now other states and ports are starting to adopt some of those programs and some of those goals. We throw down the target ... and it’s our hope and desire that other people follow.” ■

RECYCLING AND REDUCING WASTE AT BUSINESSES IN LONG BEACH

COMMERCIAL RECYCLING



State law (AB 341) requires all multi-family (apartment) properties with five or more units and commercial properties that generate four or more cubic yards of waste per week to arrange for recycling services.

COMMERCIAL ORGANICS RECYCLING



State law (AB 1826) requires all multi-family (apartment) properties with five or more units and commercial properties that generate two or more cubic yards of waste per week to arrange for organic waste recycling services. Organics include food, yard trimmings, and food-soiled paper.

EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE ORDINANCE



Long Beach Municipal Code (Chapter 8.63) prohibits the use and sale of single-use food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam and rigid polystyrene #6. Straws and utensils may be given only upon request and straws cannot be made from plastic or bio-plastic.

For questions or assistance regarding compliance, please email lbrecycles@longbeach.gov

El Dorado Park duck pond could close for up to a year for renovations

■ By JASON RUIZ
Reporter

The El Dorado Park duck pond is set for a massive overhaul that will close the East Long Beach duck destination for about a year as repairs are made to fix leaks, improve ADA access and transform it into a recycled-water reservoir.

Councilwoman Stacy Mungo Flanigan said the improvements to the pond will increase water circulation to improve water quality, smooth out sidewalks and portions of the parking lots that have buckled over the decades, and create a better home all around for the scores of waterfowl that make their homes there.

The \$4.55 million project will also improve green space around the pond by installing new wetlands areas around it while transforming the pond into a reservoir that will be used to irrigate the neighboring El Dorado Park Golf Course. Funding for the project is expected to be split among Measure A revenue, the Long Beach Water Department and Measure W funds.

Using the pond as a reservoir is expected to free up about 10% of the city's capacity to store more water



Standing on cracked and crumbling sidewalks, people feed the various bird species that call the El Dorado duck pond home, Friday, April 9, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

and help eliminate periods where

water can't be captured by city facilities because storage tanks are full.

The constant movement of water could rid the pond of the murky, green stew that the ducks, turtles and other waterfowl currently swim in.

"It will be better for the ducks; right now the water is pretty stagnant," Mungo Flanigan said.

While Mungo Flanigan is excited that the project is moving forward, she noted that it almost fell through multiple times.

Getting so many different constituencies together to support this project was tough, she explained, but after five years of work the project is now months away from a potential ground-breaking. She said the project had to satisfy multiple groups, including environmentalists, bird lovers and parents who frequent the pond with their children.

"At every turn there was another problem," Mungo Flanigan said of the effort to get the pond renovated. "It took the collaboration of Public Works, the Water Department, Parks and Recreation and the community to finally get to a point where we can restore what I remember as a beautiful duck pond I went to as a child 35 years ago."

Once a contractor is selected by the city and approved by the City Council, the pond could be closed for about a year starting in mid-July. However, the window for contractors to bid on the contract has been extended by two weeks and will now

close on April 28.

Because the pond will be drained to have a new liner and other elements installed, a fence will be erected around the site. Notices for the construction will likely be posted sometime in June, said Jennifer Carey, a spokesperson for Long Beach Public Works.

No work will be started at the pond until two biological nesting surveys are completed, but Carey said that the city has been assured that the wildlife will naturally relocate, and return when the work is completed.

Some of the animals will require help with relocating. Mungo said the city is working with the Reptile Zoo, a rescue organization in Fountain Valley, to find homes for red-eared slider turtles that live in the pond and are considered invasive species.

Carey said that a lot of the improvements scheduled for the duck pond will be similar to those performed by the city at Colorado Lagoon in 2016 when the lagoon was dredged and plant life was added to help with water quality.

She added that the changes would also make the pond a more efficient stormwater capture tool for the city that it will be able to use for irrigation.

"It's such a large water facility that it just makes sense that we make better use of it, especially in California," Carey said. ■

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Long Beach officials identify 11-acre parcel along LA River as top space for future park

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

Long Beach officials released a 47-page report this week analyzing what empty parcels of land in the city could be transformed into a public park.

The top piece of land identified as the best location for a park was an 11-acre property located north of the 405 Freeway along the Los Angeles River that's under Los Angeles County jurisdiction. The parcel of land is located in Councilman Al Austin's 8th District.

"The report indicates the county has halted any other plans for this property in order to discuss with the city the potential of open space," Johnathan Kraus, Austin's chief of staff, said.

On top of interest from the county to convert this open space into a park, the location was hailed by Long Beach officials as the top spot because it was unused, undeveloped and did not have any previous financial burdens.

Officials estimated it would cost \$27.5 million to redevelop the site. They also projected a cost of \$179,300 to annually maintain the land and about \$80,300 to cover operational costs of a potential park.

The site sits close to the LA River and is accessible via the river's miles-long bike path along and away from the city.

The location also sits on the western side of a proposed storage facility and RV parking lot, which has been a hot-button issue within neighborhood groups since the beginning of the year. Property management company InSite Property Group has been in talks with the city after purchasing land next to the county's property to create a personal storage facility.

Residents in opposition to the project formed a coalition called Riverpark and have pushed back against the project and demanded the space be converted into a park instead.

Austin called on city staff in February to look into the feasibility of acquiring other parcels of land that were not in escrow or owned by a private company.

The two-month-long analysis pinpointed 122 parcels of land with great opportunity to develop a park, which in total equals 403.42 acres of open space.

The 112 sites were filtered down to nine sites based on efficiency to transform them into a park and if they were



People move along the LA River's pedestrian path in Long Beach. File photo.

up for lease or sale.

The list was further filtered down to the one site located along the LA River.

The next step for Long Beach officials is to bring an item to the City Council for direction on how to proceed following the report's findings. It was not immediately clear when that would take place. Kraus said the city will continue its talks with the county to reach an agreement and to seek federal or state funding to pay for the entire process of converting the land into a park.

If talks between the county and the city are successful, city planners would need funding to begin a community planning process for this site, as no park plan currently exists.

An estimated funding amount of \$100,000 would be needed for this process and it is likely to take eight to 10 months to gather input from the public.

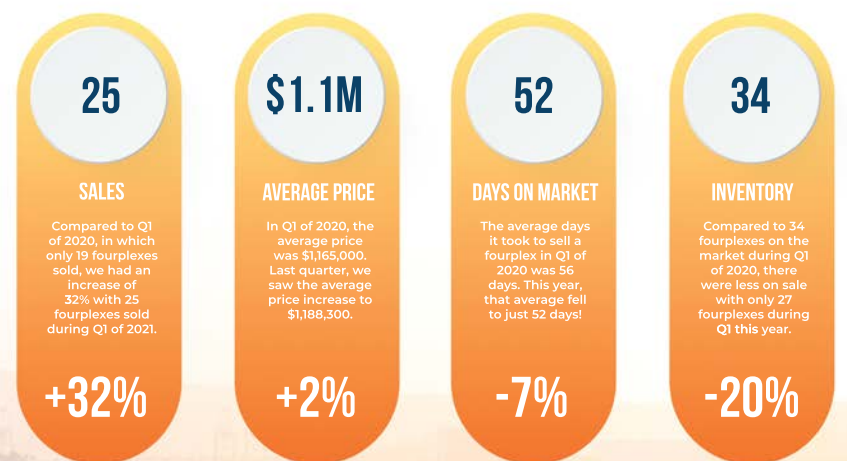
This would be followed by the creation of a technical park design and securing clearance through the state's environmental quality act for the park development project. An estimated funding amount of \$300,000 to \$500,000 would be needed for this process, according to the report.

The whole process from land acquisition to construction would take roughly two years, according to the report. ■



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New Park Space

(Continued from Page 1)

Charles Rivers Drake. Bluff Park was built by housing developers as a way to enhance homes along Ocean Boulevard and later donated to the city.

What would have been the city's largest park at the time, located where Willow Springs currently sits, was abandoned when oil was discovered in the area in 1921. Development reduced the Willow Springs site from a planned 200 acres to just over 48 acres.

Purchasing land for El Dorado Park was approved by the City Council with the park's northernmost section (El Dorado East) being purchased with bonds. Now the largest park in the city, El Dorado is about 400 acres.

Some of those parks were inaccessible to communities of color because of policies like redlining that kept non-Whites segregated from areas of the city that had the most green space. The effect of that is still felt today with the largest parks located near single-family neighborhoods where fewer people have access to them.

The city has made efforts in recent years to expand park space in West Long Beach. While one project to replace the Terminal Island Freeway with a greenbelt has stalled, another to build a new Shoemaker Bridge is moving forward. That project could see the old bridge turned into open space as well as connect Drake and Chavez parks.

The city has also purchased smaller parcels of private land like Tanaka Park and is working to install a greenbelt along the 91 Freeway as well as bringing Lincoln Park back to life as one of the last legs of the City Hall rebuild.

Now officials are looking at spaces that will continue to close the park-equity gap.

First, the city would have to find a willing seller and then come up with the funding to buy and develop the land, something that could cost tens of millions of dollars. Then it would have to increase the parks department budget, or stretch the current park maintenance funds, to pay for the upkeep and



A family walks along a trail at the El Dorado Nature Center in East Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

programming for the newly developed green space.

The report noted that the city's 3,125 acres of parks and open space are already underfunded.

The \$20-million park maintenance shortfall, something made worse when city departments were forced to make cuts due to the pandemic, has resulted in grass going unwatered, community centers closing due to lack of funding and nearly half of the city's 29,000 trees left dying, dead or diseased.

"That is a reality that we have to face here in Long Beach," said Meredith Reynolds, a planning manager in the parks department. "If we're spreading the same budget around, all park acreage suffers across the board."

Reynolds and Jackson said the city would not be pursuing residential parcels to convert to park land but could focus on areas around the Los Angeles River where many chunks of open space are owned by Los Angeles County or

Southern California Edison.

But it won't be cheap

The study identified opportunity sites along the river—which runs along the eastern flank of West Long Beach and up through North Long Beach—with development estimates ranging from about \$30 million to a high of \$67 million. It did not list acquisition costs because the city has yet to start negotiations with any of the owners.

Working with another public agency could create "mission alignment," Reynolds said, which could be helpful since the county does own a lot of property along the river. Last week the city began preliminary talks with the county to use 11 acres of land straddling the river just north of the 405 Freeway.

But turning them into parks is going to require funding and patience.

There is a variety of city revenue sources (Measure A) and county taxes that the city can tap into for park funding. The report also points out that Pres-

ident Joe Biden's upcoming infrastructure plan, which could put \$2 trillion in federal funding into capital improvement projects nationwide, could also be a source.

But even with funding available, the stars have to align, Reynolds said.

"If we were able to get every grant we applied for in the sequence we needed, it would still take two to four years," Reynolds said of the timeline to build a park. "And that has never been the case in my experience in this department."

Reynolds pointed to a more realistic scenario in the DeForest Wetlands project. The project's \$8.5 million in grant money came in waves that spanned 11 years.

Trinka Roswell, the executive director of Partners of Parks, a non-profit in the city that works to activate and improve Long Beach parks, said that equity can be achieved quicker and cheaper by investing in programs.

"I think given our current budget crisis we're in a better position to affect communities by bolstering programming in communities," Roswell said.

She pointed to the Be S.A.F.E. program, a summer parks program that provides supervised activities for youth when school is out. The program has struggled to maintain funding, and in some years has had to eliminate park locations from its list of programming.

But with \$25 million, the low-end of what acquiring a parcel along the LA River could cost, Roswell said the Be S.A.F.E. program could be fully funded at 11 parks in the city year-round for 25 years.

"I feel strongly about park equity but I think we have a better way of delivering that sooner by improving programming than expanding green space, because it does take time," Roswell said. ■



Kids play soccer at Silverado Park in West Long Beach. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

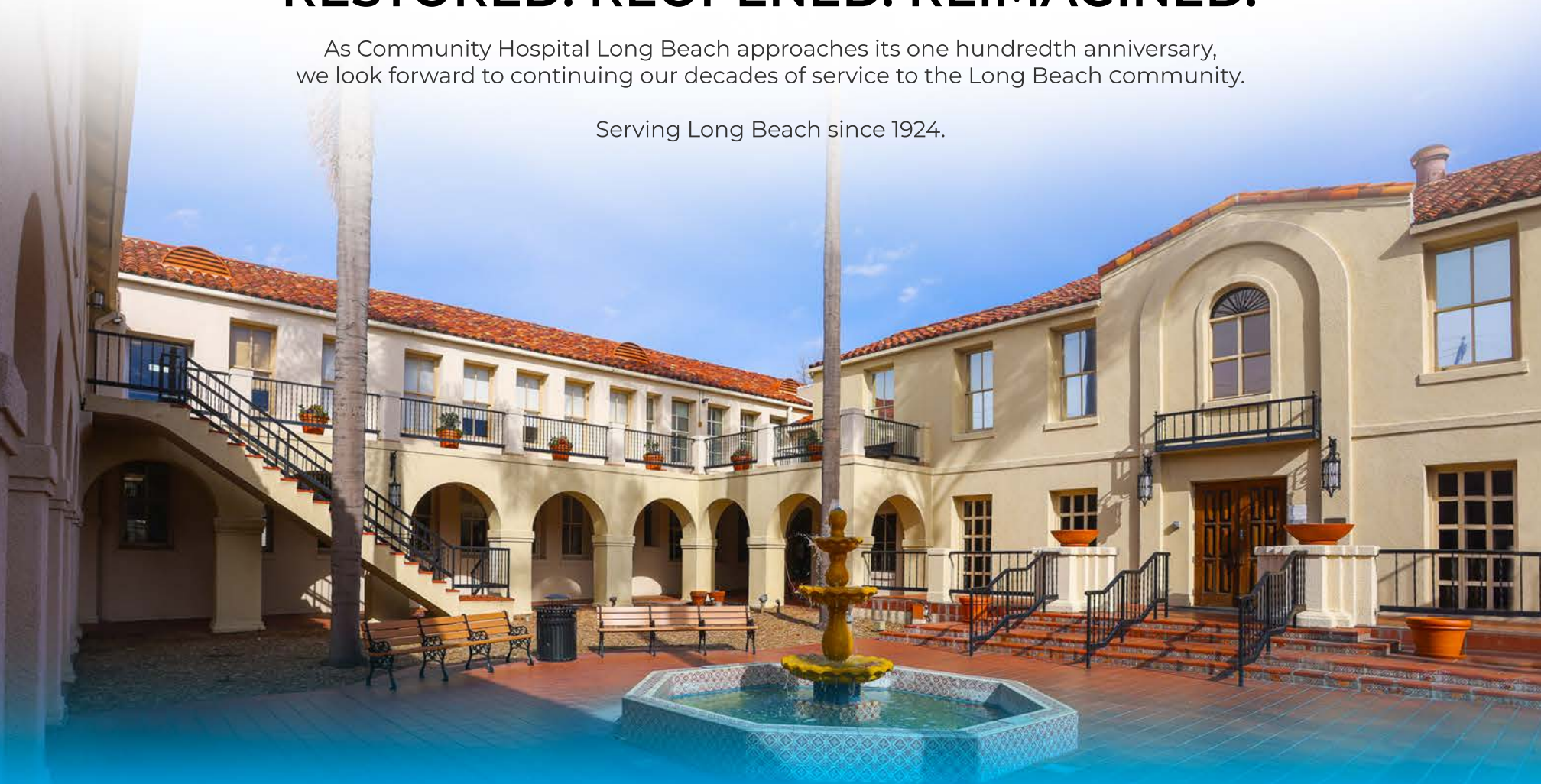


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