

LONG BEACH

BUSINESS JOURNAL

An edition of the Long Beach Post



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Guests wait to board a Catalina Express ship in Downtown Long Beach.

# Proposed regulation update could sink Catalina Express

By Brandon Richardson

For more than four decades, Catalina Express vessels have ferried millions of people between its namesake island and the mainland. The company weathered the coronavirus pandemic, only to come out the other side staring down a squall in the form of state regulations that could capsize the company.

Prior to the pandemic, Catalina Express averaged about 500,000 roundtrip passengers for a total of one million crossings each year, President Greg Bombard

said. Residents of Catalina Island account for about 14% of passenger traffic, he added, with the remainder being leisure travel.

In 2020, passenger volumes dropped 43%, according to Catalina Express data. But in 2021, the company saw almost a full recovery.

“People wanted to get out. They had been cooped up for a long time,” Bombard said. “We came back pretty strong—we weren’t quite at 2019 numbers but we were approaching them.”

Catalina Island was an attractive destination during the pandemic because of its

various outdoor offerings, including hiking, kayaking and more, Bombard said. After initial shutdowns, the island was desperate for visitors, as tourism is its main economic driver.

Founded in 1981, Catalina Express now has an eight-ship fleet that is the primary mode of transportation between the island and the mainland—both for visitors and island residents who cross regularly for work. With ports in Long Beach, Dana Point and San Pedro, the company has transported over 33 million in its 41-year history.

As air regulations have become

Continued on page 9

## ‘We’re not there yet’: Carnival Cruise Lines has long recovery ahead after pandemic hurdles

By Brandon Richardson

After being forced to anchor for well over a year, the recovery for the cruise industry is going to take time. Carnival Cruise Lines jump-started operations in July after a 16-month hiatus and, while loyal customers were ready to board, the company is still trailing behind pre-pandemic levels, according to Chief Communications Officer Chris Chiames.

“We’re not there yet—2019 was a great year for Carnival,” Chiames said. “So we still have work to do to get back to those levels.”

Carnival’s Long Beach operations

Continued on page 10

## Long Beach hotel tax revenue fell 48% amid pandemic, but it’s on the rise again

By Christian May-Suzuki

Long Beach’s hotels were hit hard by COVID-19, but the city’s Transient Occupancy Tax, known more commonly as the hotel bed tax, has remained an important source of revenue.

Until 2020, the rate of the tax in Long Beach was 12%, with half of the funds going to the city’s general fund and the other half being injected into a “Special Advertising and Promotions Fund” (SAP) that

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# Long Beach Post, Business Journal announce new leadership

Staff Reports

The Long Beach Post and Long Beach Business Journal, which make up Pacific Community Media, are pleased to announce a few structural changes that will better reflect the duties of the current leadership staff and the mission of both publications' business and editorial departments.

David Sommers, formerly publisher of both publications, has been promoted to chief operating officer of Pacific6, the parent company of Pacific Community Media. As COO

of Pacific6, Sommers will no longer have involvement in any editorial decisions or coverage planning, but will remain involved in long-term financial planning and corporate operations as a member of the Pacific Community Media board of directors.

Melissa Evans, formerly managing editor, will become executive editor of both publications, with final say over all editorial decisions. Jeremiah Dobruck will take on the role of managing editor, overseeing editorial coverage of the Post, and Hayley Munguia will continue in her role as editor of the Long Beach Business Journal.

Dennis Dean will continue as director of product and operations for the Post and LBBJ, as well as overseeing StudioLBP, our full service production and marketing arm. And Andrea Estrada remains as director of advertising, leading our business side and steering our revenue strategy.

And finally, the newest member of the leadership team is Sebastian Echeverry, who began as a reporter in May 2020, but has now been promoted to director of membership. His primary job is tending to our audience, which includes addressing concerns that readers have and

organizing events that bring our readers into the newsroom.

The Post and Business Journal are committed to maintaining a clear separation between the business and editorial operations; this is one of the core ethical principles that we take very seriously.

We believe news coverage should always be free of conflicts of interest and be driven only by the principles of fairness, integrity, accountability and transparency so that we can put the interests held by you—our readers, members and broader Long Beach community—above all else. ■

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**Editorial Deadline:**  
Two weeks prior to publication. Email press releases to editor@lbbj.com.

**Advertising Deadline:**  
Wednesday prior to publication.

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Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Mayor Robert Garcia speaks to local business owners, business leaders, city staff and more during a roundtable at Rose Park Roasters in Downtown Long Beach.

## FROM THE EDITOR: HAYLEY MUNGUIA Tourism rebound could help Downtown Long Beach bounce back

Downtown Long Beach is slowly coming back to life as COVID-19 restrictions continue to lift, but foot traffic in the area is still well below its pre-pandemic level.

It's a problem that has kept small businesses from fully reaping the benefits of the ongoing economic recovery—and one city officials are hoping to tackle.

Business owners spoke about the issue with Mayor Robert Garcia earlier this month during the first of nine "recovery roundtables" that Garcia is hosting in each City Council district to hear from business leaders about their concerns and challenges as Long Beach seeks to bounce back from the pandemic.

The first edition, in the 1st District that includes Downtown, focused both on the difficulties of how business has shifted during COVID-19 and on issues like homelessness and public safety.

"All of my workers are girls in their 20s, and they've had some bad incidents in the parking garage," The Pie Bar owner Laurie Gray told Garcia. "Some of them have been scared and have to be escorted to their car at night. So that's just my biggest concern right now—is that people don't feel safe working and visiting Downtown so that they can support small businesses."

Garcia and city staff present at the meeting, including Deputy Police Chief Gerardo Prieto, spoke about initiatives to better publicize appropriate city contacts for those concerns. Prieto also shared plans for an upcoming shift toward the use of patrol officers on bikes in the Downtown area.

But another key step to reviving Downtown Long Beach, Garcia said, will be bringing back the events and attractions that make Downtown unique. Their departure—while necessary to stem the public health crisis—left a void, and businesses are feeling the effects.

"There is dramatically less people out on the street," Garcia said. "When there's less people out on the street, there's less eyes out on the street, and there's more opportunities for problems."

"It's not just public safety—even issues around homelessness directly relate to how many people are out on the streets," he added. "We can solve so much by getting economic activity going."

To that end, Garcia—along with Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Steve Goodling and Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Jeremy Harris—said giving people a reason to visit Downtown Long Beach again will help address many of the problems the neighborhood's businesses are now facing.

Convention business has already started to return. The Trans-Pacific Maritime (TPM) conference came back earlier this month with a 90% attendance rate, Goodling said.

And while conventions draw people from across the country and the world, Garcia said other events will help spur local and regional tourism, as well.

"We're on a booking tear right now," he said. "We're just starting to book concerts and events and things like that. That's going to bring a lot of people on top of the conventions. Then there's the Grand Prix, there's Pride—there's certain weekends that bring a lot of people."

"We used to have concerts every few weeks," Garcia added. "They would bring in tens of thousands of people ... and those are finally coming back."

The hope, it seems, is that large events will be a key piece of bringing Downtown Long Beach back to a pre-pandemic normal. But city and business leaders also acknowledged that the large-scale shift to remote work also poses a challenge for the area's small businesses.

"A lot of our office buildings are not yet full," Garcia said. "We know that it's never going to be the same. We're never going to have as many folks in our corporate buildings as we did, and things have shifted, but we also have to encourage folks to come back to work."

Restaurants, dry cleaners and other small businesses, he noted, rely on the daytime activity that Downtown's office buildings generate.

"The small businesses are not going to survive," Garcia said, "if we don't encourage folks to come back."

But in the meantime, Harris said the business community is looking to a rebound in tourism—to both for business and pleasure—to fill in some of the gaps.

"This whole concept of, 'Hey, it's a benefit to work at home, stay at home,'" Harris said, "We all know, in Downtown, as the mayor alluded to earlier, that's not helping" small businesses.

"So what we've been doing," Harris added, "is we've gone around to all of our major hotel folks ... and really started a campaign to welcome back small business restaurants, during the daytime, to their attendees—whether it's conventions, whether it's overnight stays—and let them know there's mom-and-pop restaurants that are back open."

It may be a small glimpse of a bigger, citywide campaign.

"We want to get the city and the [Downtown Long Beach Alliance] and the CVB and the Chamber—all of our partners together on something to put out to encourage folks to come back, to shop, to dine," Garcia said. "The goal, at the end of these nine conversations, is: We want to get a little bit of a PR/marketing plan, kind of this 'welcome back' kind of plan. We don't know what that looks like yet. Obviously that's part of why we're talking to folks. We want to hear what the needs are." ■



# Rancho Los Cerritos turns pandemic obstacles into opportunity to grow

*Prior to COVID-19, Rancho Los Cerritos had a meager online presence. Now, the historic site has embraced the medium in addition to its in-person offerings.*

By Christian May-Suzuki

What happens when a museum with very little presence on the internet is forced to shift its operations virtually? The Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site was forced to answer that over the past two years, and Executive Director Alice Bruesehoff and her staff of 13 have turned the obstacles presented by the coronavirus into an opportunity to evolve.

The Rancho—located directly west of the Bixby Knolls neighborhood at 4600 Virginia Road—features a 19th century Monterrey-style adobe building and its adjacent outdoor space. The building served as a ranch for several operations throughout the mid- to late-1800s before being neglected and falling into disrepair through the early 1900s.

The site was acquired by the city of Long Beach and turned into a



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Visitors to the Rancho Los Cerritos Historical Site explore the inner courtyard, a popular venue for weddings and other events.

museum in 1955.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors have enjoyed the house and its grounds in the 67 years since, until March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic put in-person services on hold. Staff

at the Rancho knew early on that a lockdown was coming, so the transition to a new way of life was not as jarring as it was for many other businesses and organizations reliant on public interaction.

“I was very impressed with our

staff,” Bruesehoff told the Business Journal. “They started transitioning our programming very quickly to a virtual format.”

Prior to the pandemic, the virtual options to experience and learn about Rancho Los

Cerritos were limited, as was its audience, Bruesehoff said. The recent push online started with its afterschool program—Long Ago Long Beach—after in-person restrictions were implemented.

The educational outreach initiative started in 2017 and provides lessons taught “through a series of engaging social science workshops delivered in afterschool daycare settings around Long Beach,” according to the Rancho’s website. With no venue to deliver the program, staff quickly put together several videos and published them online.

“They were a little bit rough,” Bruesehoff said of the first videos. “But [staff] recorded a couple at the Rancho and included the activities that kids could do at home. And that was really our first foray into virtual programming.”

While it was a forced transition, Rancho staff embraced the new format, and it has paid dividends. As online and social media activity picked up, so too did the number of people paying attention to it, with views on the site’s Facebook page skyrocketing from a couple thousand to over 30,000, according to Bruesehoff.

Another symptom of the success that came with virtual programming was the widening of the audience exposed to the site. While in-person programming was limited in the number of people it could serve, the range of virtual programming is nearly limitless, Bruesehoff said

“It wasn’t just Long Beach and LA County and Orange County people coming to this site,” Bruesehoff said. “We started having an international audience

and we continue to [maintain it], which is impressive.”

While having the attention of people around the globe is a reason for optimism, it did not solve the monetary concerns that came with an in-person shutdown. Some relief came from the federal government in the form of the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, but much of the reason the site was able to remain fiscally sustainable was through the support of donors.

“We actually got some new donors,” Bruesehoff said. “And our current, very supportive donors, really stood by us during the pandemic and continue to—so we met and actually exceeded our COVID budget.”

Prior to the pandemic, tours of the Rancho house served as the main attraction for donors, Bruesehoff said. However, it was its grounds that were key in reopening Rancho Los Cerritos to the public.

Unlike other museums that are mostly confined to indoor spaces, Rancho Los Cerritos features gardens and other outdoor areas that the city of Long Beach deemed “an essential resource for the health and well-being of the community,” according to a press release announcing its reopening in June 2020.

Guests were allowed to visit the Rancho gardens again on June 10, 2020, but the mark of the pandemic was still apparent, shown by the sharp decrease in traffic when compared to the over 26,000 visitors the site used to see on an annual basis. However, the rebound was strong enough to encourage Bruesehoff and her team.



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Adam Sanchez, 42, and his 1-year-old daughter Natalia enjoy the garden at the Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site.

“In 2020, we saw 8,000 people come through, which obviously is a big drop...and then last year in 2021 we saw 7,000 people come through,” Bruesehoff said. “What it pointed out to us is, even in the height of COVID, people were still coming.”

The lessons learned by Rancho Los Cerritos staff also helped improve the in-person programming the site offers. Bruesehoff said she learned to give her audience more distance during their visits, allowing them to have more control over their experience.

Prior to the pandemic, Rancho Los Cerritos only offered a guided tour of the site. Today, the Rancho offers both guided and self-guided tours through various mediums, giving people the option to decide what will be most beneficial for them.

“[What] everyone discovered

during the pandemic is there [are] different ways of learning,” Bruesehoff said. “People have very different comfort levels. Managing those expectations, I think, is going to be key for all historical sites and museums.”

Bruesehoff said she hopes this approach will continue to diversify programs to reach and serve as many people as they can. She and the Rancho staff continue to use what they learned during the pandemic to improve the overall experience for guests, integrating the virtual approach taken during the pandemic with the traditional in-person experience that can’t be replicated online.

“We’re talking with our community about what they want from the Rancho,” Bruesehoff said, “as opposed to telling them what we think they need to.” ■

## Long Beach nonprofit presents Cambodian Restaurant Week

By Laura Anaya-Morga

Following the success of January’s Black Restaurant Week organized by the nonprofit Long Beach Food & Beverage, Cambodian Restaurant Week will come to the city this October to celebrate various Cambodian-owned food businesses across the city.

“This will give our local Cambodian community the opportunity to share our culture and cuisine with all food lovers in Long Beach and encourage them to try something they may not have experienced before,” said Chef “T” Tarak Visoth Ouk, co-organizer and executive chef at Gladstone’s in Long Beach.

Ouk and Terri Henry, the founder of Long Beach Food & Beverage, saw the need to celebrate Cambodian-owned restaurants and food

businesses in the city with the largest Cambodian community in the U.S.

The inaugural Long Beach Cambodian Restaurant Week will take place Oct. 9-16. The eight-day event will highlight Cambodian-owned restaurants and will feature \$5, \$10, \$15 and \$20 prix fixe menus at participating restaurants across the city. According to Henry, restaurants that participated in Black Restaurant Week saw up to double their usual sales throughout the week.

“I think as a whole community as a Cambodian community, we want to be heard. ... The voice of food has its own power,” said Ouk, who believes there are dozens of Cambodian-owned restaurants in Long Beach that deserve attention.

The Long Beach nonprofit was created a few years ago in an effort to receive funding for events like this, said Henry. In 2020, a request for



Courtesy of chef Tarak Visoth Ouk

Cambodian ginger and scallion fish dish by Chef “T” Tarak Visoth Ouk.

proposals secured \$30,000 from the city to host online cooking classes and more. Now, Henry relies on sponsors to keep these events going and to help businesses that may have had a tough time throughout the pandemic.

Restaurants interested in participating can register through the Long Beach Cambodian Restaurant Week website. The registration fee is \$100 and will include marketing and

promotion leading up to the event, including banners, posters, tents and T-shirts, said Henry.

She hopes to expand these events by hosting a Filipino Restaurant Week, a Hispanic Restaurant Week and more in the future.

“I’m trying to bring people together. So what better way to bring people together than through food?” said Henry. ■

## City Council approves regulations to protect legal short-term rentals in coastal zone

By Jason Ruiz

To make sure it can crack down on unregistered short-term rentals along its coastline, Long Beach is reserving space for homeowners there who plan on renting out their entire properties to guests. And while the city allows census blocks to petition to ban short-term rentals altogether, Long Beach is also making it harder to approve such bans in seaside neighborhoods.

It’s been more than a year since Long Beach first adopted its ordinance that governs how short-term rentals—such as those listed on sites like Airbnb—are regulated in the city, but it hasn’t yet been able to enforce those rules in the city’s coastal zone, something

that would require a sign-off from California’s Coastal Commission, which is charged with ensuring adequate public access to the state’s beaches.

The city’s ordinance requires operators to register with the city, pay taxes similar to what hotels pay and follow a list of regulations to prevent the properties from becoming public nuisances. It also caps at 800 the number of permissible “unhosted” rental units, meaning the owner of the unit isn’t on-site during a guest’s stay.

At the request of the Coastal Commission, the City Council voted 8-0 at its March 8 meeting to make sure at least 350 of those unhosted units are allowed in the city’s coastal zone, which generally includes neighborhoods south

of Broadway like Belmont Shore, Naples and other neighborhoods east of Alamitos Avenue.

But the language of the amendment led some to believe it would actually allow for over 1,100 unhosted units citywide, which they said could exacerbate housing shortages.

“Are you going to let the California Coastal Commission bully the City Council?” said Elsa Tung, a program manager with Long Beach Forward, claiming that the amendment was overriding the city’s existing ordinance.

While the amendment would allow for up to 350 unhosted units in the coastal zone, the city wouldn’t be able to enforce its 800-unit cap until the coastal zone hit its allotment, something that some

community members interpreted to mean the new citywide cap would be 1,150.

That notion was struck down by multiple council members including Councilwoman Suzie Price, who represents southeast Long Beach neighborhoods, many of which are in the coastal zone.

“Let me make it abundantly clear, I have no intention of going over that 800 cap,” Price said.

Price proposed that city staff alert the council when the city reaches 700 applications for unhosted units so it could consider changing the city’s ordinance by possibly reducing the citywide cap.

Christopher Koontz, the city’s deputy director of development services, said the city currently has about 200 registered unhosted

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# Long Beach hopes to have Queen Mary considered for national monument status



The Queen Mary sits vacant in Queensway Bay beside the Long Beach Cruise Terminal.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Long Beach officials are hoping the federal government has a sentimental soft spot for the historic ocean liner that has been parked off the city’s coast for 55 years.

By Kelly Puente

Long Beach is planning to reopen the historic Queen Mary by the end of this year, and in the meantime, the city is looking to have the ship

considered for national monument status, which could bring in federal dollars for restoration. Built in the 1930s, the Queen Mary is currently designated as a national historic landmark and has been owned by the city since its arrival in 1967. National monument status would mean the federal government would own the ship and would then be responsible for funding the repairs and maintenance. But achieving that status isn’t easy. The United States has 129 national monuments, including the Statue of Liberty, that are designated by either presidential proclamation or Congressional approval. In a memo released Friday, city staffers recommended that Long Beach work with a consultant to

research and prepare a compelling proposal. This issue will come back to the City Council for approval in the coming weeks. The push for possible federal funds comes as the city faces millions of dollars in critical repairs for the ship. Long Beach has so far approved \$5.5 million in funds for urgent work that would allow the Queen Mary to reopen, but a report from a marine engineering firm last year said the ship would need \$23 million in repairs to stay “viable” over the next two years. The city estimates that urgent work will take at least 180 to 270 days to be completed, and that the ship can be reopened by the end of this year for special events and hospitality services.

In the first of five critical projects that kicked off last month, Long Beach removed 20 of the Queen Mary’s badly corroded lifeboats. The 36-foot-long boats are sitting in the ship’s parking lot as the city prepares to auction them to qualified nonprofits that would focus on preservation. The deadline for bidders is March 25. In the next step, the city is planning to install an emergency power generator, along with bilge pumps and a flooding alarm system. The city is also looking to remove the abandoned “Scorpion” Soviet submarine, which has been moored next to the Queen Mary as a tourist attraction for nearly two decades. It was closed to the public in 2015 after it fell into disrepair. The city’s lawyers are attempting to have the submarine’s alleged owner, Palm Springs resident Ed Skowron, remove the vessel, but he hasn’t responded to multiple requests and the city is now mulling a lawsuit, officials said. “The City Attorney has issued several written demands to the submarine owner to remove its submarine, but the owner has failed to respond and attorneys representing the owner have not responded to several attempts to discuss the matter,” the memo stated. The city is now looking into possible options including bringing the submarine onto land for dismantling or towing it to another location for recycling. The land removal would mean less pollution but could be costly, city staffers noted in the memo. Long Beach owns the Queen Mary but for decades leased it to a string of failed operators. Last year, former operator Urban Commons gave up the lease in bankruptcy court, leaving the city on the hook for millions of dollars in urgent repairs. Long Beach is now negotiating transferring control of the ship to the Harbor Commission, which oversees the Port of Long Beach. ■

## Short-Term Rentals

Continued from page 5

short-term rental units outside of the coastal zone and could accommodate the 350 units proposed in the new amendment. Koontz warned the council that the city couldn’t regulate unregistered rental units in the coastal zone until an ordinance was fully approved by the Coastal

Commission. He added that it would be easier to request language revisions to the city’s stance on the upper limit of units rather than start from scratch. “In order to do the enforcement that’s needed today, we need something on the books,” Koontz said. At the request of the Coastal Commission, the city also made it harder for communities in the coastal zone to seek a ban on short-term rentals in their neighborhoods.

Part of the original ordinance approved in 2020 allowed for census blocks to organize and petition to bar short-term rentals within those census blocks. At its March 8 meeting, the council approved a requested change that will require the petition process to be followed by the acquisition of a local coastal development permit, a process governed by the Coastal Commission, which would hold a hearing to determine if the

desired ban is proper and doesn’t inhibit affordable access to the coast, would not restrict both unhosted and hosted units in the coastal zone to less than 425, and would be necessary to protect the neighborhood from nuisance properties that could endanger public health or affect the character of the neighborhood. An amended version of the city’s ordinance will be sent back to the Coastal Commission for consideration at a future meeting. ■

## Hotel Tax

Continued from cover

the city uses to pay for advertising, promotional and public relations projects on top of special events calling positive attention to Long Beach. It also includes a \$5 million allocation to the Long Beach Conventions and Visitors Bureau. But voters passed Measure B in March 2020, and the hotel bed tax rate rose by one percentage point, with the money raised from this increase going into the general fund and then being allocated to several local arts organizations and the Long Beach Convention Center. The pandemic’s impact on the hotel bed tax revenue—and, in turn, on local arts and tourism groups—was immediate. Revenue in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 from the hotel bed tax totaled about \$31 million per year, and the share placed in the general fund accounted for about 3% of its total revenue. But the total revenue from the tax dropped to \$21 million the next fiscal year, and again to \$19 million in the most recent fiscal year. Revenue Management Officer Geraldine Alejo, though, said on a recent Zoom call that there’s reason for optimism. “We started to see good news towards the end of 2021,” Alejo said. While the general fund was able to mask its loss with revenue from more prominent general fund sources, such as sales and property tax revenues that outpaced expectations, the hotel bed tax is essential to the SAP’s functions, with about 85% of the fund’s revenue coming from the tax, according to the city. And though general fund revenue is not quite as reliant on the tax, the hotel bed tax still provides a significant chunk, accounting for about 2% of the fund’s total revenue in the last

fiscal year. The tax was the 12th largest general fund revenue source despite the steep decline. President and CEO of the Long Beach Conventions and Visitors Bureau Steve Goodling said that his organization felt the effects and was forced to cut back on several positions that were important to the bureau. “As with any organization, during the pandemic, we had to make adjustments, and we did,” Goodling said in an interview. “Sadly, there were positions that took care of customers when they were here: convention service directors,” he added. “If you have no conventions coming in, there’s no work. And so sadly, there are individuals who were not able to work during the pandemic, because there was no work for them to do.” COVID-19 did bring a rather sudden drop in revenue from the hotel bed tax, but large fluctuations of the hotel bed tax are not unheard of. SAP funding history shows sudden massive declines in prior recessions—a 32% drop in fiscal year 2002 and a 19% decline in fiscal year 2009. “Despite improvement, TOT continues to be an extremely volatile revenue source and is heavily dependent on conventions and business travel,” the city’s FY 2021 End of Year Performance Report said. While it fell below the expectations originally presented in the measure, the roughly \$1.5 million the fund generated in the last fiscal year has been helpful for Measure B’s intended beneficiaries. Three of the organizations—Musica Angelica, Musical Theater West, and Long Beach Symphony—confirmed that they have received the funds, and said that they have used the money to stay afloat. “We could not be more grateful for this critical funding,” Long Beach Symphony President Kelly Ruggirelo said over email, “which supported maintaining a reduced staff in preparation for relaunching concerts this past fall.” ■



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Guests check into the West in Downtown Long Beach.

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Courtesy of the CVB

Samantha Mehlinger, vice president of communications for the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, shows off the organization's Poppy Award, won for its innovative marketing amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau wins California Poppy Award for innovation in marketing

*The organization was honored at the California Poppy Awards, which are held biannually to recognize tourism organizations representing both destinations and businesses.*

By Christian May-Suzuki

When Samantha Mehlinger joined the Long Beach Conventions & Visitors Bureau to head a new communications team, she knew she would have to find a new approach to be successful.

Communications plays a vital role in the CVB's mission, but branching out required hard work and innovation, especially with the effects of the pandemic looming over the tourism industry. Some of that work was recognized last month when the bureau won the "Best Content Marketing" at the California Poppy Awards, which recognizes tourism promotion organizations from cities and businesses.

The CVB was selected out of a pool of 248 entries, a record for the awards.

The CVB submitted its "Long Beach Days & Getaways" campaign, which launched in May 2021, for consideration. Mehlinger's team created original itineraries for visitors that highlighted the uniqueness of Long Beach neighborhoods and businesses.

The itineraries used original photos and video footage alongside "listicles" to highlight the unique cultural scenes throughout the city, while inviting viewers to "imagine themselves making the same trip to Long Beach."

"I wanted to authentically represent the destinations because I feel that all of those unique lanes are the reason why people come here," Mehlinger told the Business Journal.

Using its recently updated website, the CVB was able to present these listicles in an aesthetically pleasing way, Mehlinger said. With bold text and typography as well as an interactive interface, the campaign reimaged how a list of Long Beach destinations could

be presented to the public—both residents and visitors alike.

To generate content, the bureau hired local freelance writers and Long Beach-based film crew Media 360. The focus on local talent is a unique way for the CVB to make its content more appealing to algorithms used by Google and other search engines, Mehlinger said.

"I think having all local creators crafting this stuff, from local writers to local photographers to local videographers, causes those algorithms to realize what we are producing is: real expert and local content," Mehlinger said.

Finding new and creative ways to spread the message is also something the bureau has been able to do, Mehlinger said. The summer campaign, in particular, focused on broadcasting through the website and Instagram, but many other options emerged that helped the CVB reach a broader audience.

A new relationship with the state's tourism board—Visit California—materialized as a result of the campaign, with the state agency's "Travel Stories" serving as a perfect platform to expand the reach of the getaways series. The platform, which has since been rebranded as "Localhood," hosted snippets of the campaign videos on its website, bringing in a great deal of traffic for Long Beach, according to Mehlinger.

"It was about being innovative with the platforms that we are using," she said. "And making sure all of those platforms are pointing back to the same content and driving traffic to our site and the businesses and attractions as well."

These combined efforts produced results greater than even the most lofty of expectations, Mehlinger said. One of the entries, titled "Cycle Stories," received national attention and brought in over one million impressions on Google.

The results also increased the overall traffic on CVB media platforms, which continues to rise, according to Mehlinger. The CVB saw rapid growth on social media, including 3,500 new Instagram followers—a 190% increase and well above the goal of 1,000.

Moving forward, Mehlinger said the bureau isn't necessarily looking to do anything radical to promote the city. She believes the city and its appeal speaks for itself, and the CVB's mission is simply to spread the word to as many people as possible.

"I think that if we showcase Long Beach as it is," Mehlinger said, "we will automatically look unique." ■

## Catalina Express

Continued from cover

more stringent through the years, Catalina Express has upgraded its engines to reduce emissions accordingly, Bombard said. Marine diesel engines are categorized by tier: Tier 1 being the oldest and dirtiest, and Tier 4 being the newest and cleanest.

In 2009, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) approved a regulation that required Catalina Express to update its fleet again to cleaner Tier 3 engines, a process the company began five years ago. Upgrading an engine to Tier 3 requires modifying the existing engine with more modern parts and costs about \$4 million per vessel, Bombard said.

Four of the company's ships have already been upgraded to Tier 3 and a fifth is currently in San Diego undergoing the same transition, expected to be completed in late April or early May, Bombard said. Two more ships are slated to be upgraded this year, he added.

This spring, however, the CARB is expected to vote on a proposed amendment to the regulation

that would require Catalina Express to further update its ships to Tier 4—a much costlier endeavor, according to Bombard. A Tier 3 engine cannot simply be upgraded, he explained. Rather an entirely new, much larger and heavier engine is required.

"We would lose about 56% of our passenger complement because it would add so much weight to the vessel," Bombard said. "It has structural design limits: if you add weight to a vessel, you've got to take it off some other way."

For about \$9 million each, Bombard said Catalina Express vessels could be upgraded with Tier 4 engines but the reduced capacity would effectively increase the company's carbon footprint per passenger. The other option, he said, is building an entirely new fleet to the tune of \$20 million per ship, which is not possible without financial assistance from the state and federal governments.

Despite the fact that the proposed regulation has not been approved, the company already is actively engaging CARB and seeking grant funding, Bombard said. The company has started a change.org petition urging the board to assist for the sake of the island and its economy.

Unfortunately, most state and federal funding is for the transition to zero-emission technology, Bombard said. The company is willing to transition to an electric- or hydrogen-fueled fleet, he said, but the technology simply does not exist for ships with similar capacity and range required for Catalina Express.

Zero-emission ferries are being tested in San Francisco, Bombard said, but they travel at half the speed and with seating for only 70 passengers compared to his vessels' capacity of just under 400.

If the proposal passes and Catalina Express does not receive grants to offset costs, Bombard said it could force the company out of business. And without Catalina Express, the island's economy would be devastated.

"The zealous pursuit of good goals cannot destroy the livelihoods and lives of the people they are intended to protect," Catalina Mayor Anni Marshall wrote in a November 2021 opinion piece. While the goals are admirable, Marshall said, the proposed regulation must be "rejected or significantly modified," lest it "kill off our hospitality-based economy."

The island economy relies on Catalina Express and other vessels

subject to the proposed regulation for the transport of visitors and goods to the island. The pandemic already took its toll on the island economically, Marshall said, noting that the harbor fund and associated reserves, which pay for maintenance and city-funded services along the waterfront, already have been depleted.

While the regulation would financially impact mainland-based operations such as fishing boats, whale watching businesses and more, it would cause "disproportionate harm and suffering" to the island's nearly 4,100 residents and dozens of businesses, Marshall said.

"Imagine the uproar if transportation into and out of any other California city was halved and residents couldn't easily get to medical appointments, jobs, or shopping for necessities," Marshall wrote.

Bombard, for his part, said he does not believe the state would allow Catalina Express's critical service to fall by the wayside.

"We try to look at the positive side of it because the negative side doesn't take us anywhere except out of business," Bombard said. "And I don't believe the state's looking to do that." ■

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A Catalina Express ship leaves Downtown Long Beach.



### Carnival Recovery

Continued from cover

restarted in late August when the Panorama, the newest and largest ship based in the city, departed for a seven-day excursion along the Mexican Riviera. The first new cruise ship on the West Coast in almost 20 years, Panorama can accommodate just over 4,000 passengers but was operating at about 75% capacity for the safety of all aboard.

The company’s other Long Beach-based ships—Miracle and Radiance, the latter of which recently underwent a \$200 million makeover—began running their routes not long after. In May, when the Splendor begins service out of Seattle, all 23 Carnival Cruise Line ships will be back in service, Chiames said.

“We’re really excited about that,” Chiames said. “We’ve always had tremendous loyalty from our guests and they ... clearly expressed a desire to get back to cruising.”

That desire resulted in guests willingly complying with increased safety protocols, Chiames said, which included being vaccinated, showing proof of a negative test and masking. While the mask mandate has been removed for most parts of the ship, Carnival still recommends



Carnival Radiance sits anchored in Queensway Bay as passengers board for its next excursion to Ensenada, Mexico.

guests wear them indoors, Chiames said. They are still required in some venues, he added.

The vaccination requirement, on the other hand, remains wholly intact: 95% of passengers on each vessel must be vaccinated against the coronavirus, including booster shots, Chiames said. Additionally, everyone, regardless of vaccination status, must show proof of a negative test before embarking.

“Quite frankly, while I think there was concern across the

industry for [mandates], it really hasn’t been as much of an issue as one might have thought,” Chiames said. “People were just so anxious and happy to get back to cruising that they complied.”

Carnival is leading the cruise industry as it recovers from the devastating impacts of the pandemic, which halted operations for almost a year and a half, Chiames said. Combined, the Carnival Corporation—parent company of Carnival Cruise Lines and Princess

Cruise, among others—reported nearly \$19.8 billion in net losses in 2020 and 2021, according to financial records, compared to over \$6.15 billion of total net income in 2018 and 2019.

In 2019, 700,000 passengers embarked on a Carnival vessel out of Long Beach, according to an economic impact study by the Port of Long Beach. That level of passenger traffic makes the Long Beach the busiest cruise terminal in the state and fifth in the nation behind PortMiami, Port Canaveral, Port Everglades and the Port of Galveston, Carnival spokeswoman Anne Madison said.

Prior to the pandemic, Long Beach cruise passengers generated more than \$125 million annually in direct spending on goods, services, meals and hotels in the city, in addition to what Carnival purchases in goods and services for the ships embarking from the port, Madison said. The Long Beach operation generates \$25 million in federal taxes and \$19 million in state and local taxes.

“Carnival Cruise Lines provides a tremendous economic impact for the City of Long Beach in terms of the direct and indirect visitor spending,” Economic Development Director John Keisler said in an email, adding that “over \$3 million in passenger, parking and other fees help pay for important city services that benefit our residents.”

Statewide, the cruise industry served 1.25 million passengers out of four ports in 2019, Madison said. Those passengers generated \$2.6 billion in direct spending, supporting more than 50,000 jobs and \$3.32 billion in wages.

After decades of sailing out of San Pedro, Carnival moved into its current Long Beach home in 2003. Carnival has spent nearly two decades strengthening its Long Beach operation, Chiames said, including the expansion of the cruise terminal next door to the Queen Mary and the increased capacity of the three ships that now call the city home.

Aside from being easily accessible, Chiames said Long Beach’s tourism economy, including numerous Downtown hotels, countless restaurants and various entertainment options is ideal for Carnival.

“A lot of people like to get in the night before to get settled,” Chiames said. “They like to be able to start their vacation in a relaxed way and not race to the ship.”

Chiames said the response of the Long Beach business community to the return of cruises has been appreciated after two years of turbulence.

“Even if employees at local hotels and restaurants never cruise, they love the symbolism of the cruise ships being back in the port and seeing the carnival funnel,” Chiames said, “because it means more business.” ■

### Innovation center set to open Downtown

By Hayley Munguia

After years of planning and construction, the Shaun Lumachi Innovation Center is finally slated to open later this month in Downtown Long Beach.

The folks behind the center—which will operate as a partnership between the city of Long Beach, Long Beach City College and the private co-working company BLANKSPACES—hope it will become a hub for entrepreneurship in Long Beach.

“We’re bringing together the government, an educational institution and the private sector to provide an actual physical space for entrepreneurs and startups,” Long Beach’s Economic Development Director John Keisler said by phone. “And through that space, we’ll not only build the infrastructure for entrepreneurship but also provide the technical assistance and access to capital. So that’s the big context here. This is what makes it unique.”

Long Beach owns the building, at 309 Pine Ave., and it will be used day-to-day as a BLANKSPACES co-working site. Long Beach City College’s Small Business Development Center will also provide programming, one-on-one consultation and other support for small businesses at the center.

The site is named in honor of the late Shaun Lumachi, a well-known



The Shaun Lumachi Innovation Center is slated to open in Downtown Long Beach in March 2022.

entrepreneur and small business advocate in Long Beach who co-founded the Long Beach Post in 2007. Lumachi died in a car crash in 2011.

The center bearing his name does not yet have an opening date, but officials are confident it will start welcoming workers and entrepreneurs later this month.

The opening has been a long time coming. The Long Beach City Council first approved a lease agreement that formalized the partnership in late 2017, and the idea at the time was to open up the center the following year. But construction issues caused delays, and then the

COVID-19 pandemic hit.

“It’s been a long stretch—two years for [a request for proposals], four years from pre-construction to construction, so it’s great” to finally be opening, BLANKSPACES’ founder Jerome Chang said in a phone interview. “But just like everyone else, opening a location or business during the pandemic—I have some concerns or anxieties, but I also have optimism.”

If there were ever a time to open a center dedicated to supporting entrepreneurship, though, the post-recession era of a pandemic, when restrictions are finally easing, may

### Port of Long Beach records busiest February ever

*A backlog of vessels and shipping containers kept dockworkers busy in what is usually a slow month at the port.*

By Brandon Richardson

Still working through a backlog of vessels and containers, the Port of Long Beach moved more cargo last month than in any February in its 112-year history, officials announced earlier this month.

Dockworkers and terminal operators moved 796,560 20-foot-equivalent units—the standard measure of a shipping container—last month, a 3.2% increase over the same month in 2021, which was a historic high. Imports increased 4.4% to 390,335 TEUs, while exports decreased 1.2% to 117,935 TEUs.

The number of empty containers moving through the port increased 3.5% to 288,290 TEUs.

“We are moving record amounts of cargo and catching up with the ongoing surge of imports,” Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement. “Meanwhile, we are proceeding with measures we will need in the long term, such as development of our Supply

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### City to look at new elevated rail system for port cargo transportation—but it won’t be cheap

By Jason Ruiz

Long Beach is expected to take a closer look at an innovative zero-emissions cargo transportation system that could reduce pollution and speed up goods movement at the Port of Long Beach—but it would require the city to issue hundreds of millions of dollars in bonds.

Known as a “Freedom Village,” the proposal would involve the creation of an elevated magnetic levitation system that would move cargo containers from the port onto a futuristic rail system that could be suspended above existing roads.

The rail system could reduce truck trips on the 710 Freeway by 30,000 per day, according to a white paper from the Infrastructure Funding Alliance, a nonprofit group that has pitched the idea to Long Beach

port and city officials. It would use similar technology already in use in commercial rail systems in Asia. Containers would be transported

The Long Beach and Los Angeles ports processed a record 20 million container units in 2021, with ships anchoring offshore a common sight

*“We’ve got to start taking steps to make our local health benefits better for our frontline communities.”*

- Cindy Allen, Councilwoman

to a new freight village north of the Cal Cartage site near West Long Beach where they could be transported by truck or train to rail yards in LA or to their final destinations.

as they waited to be unloaded. Federal and state legislators have pledged to invest in port complexes to speed up goods movement. “The bottlenecks brought on by

the pandemic and the cost increases that are now resulting from what is happening in the supply chain ought to be enough of a signal that the current system needs to be altered,” said Mark Pisano, president of the Infrastructure Funding Alliance. “This is a vehicle to alter the current system.”

Pisano, who previously was the head of the Southern California Association of Governments, added that the current freeways were not designed to handle the volume of truck traffic now present at the ports.

The City Council voted at its March 8 meeting to dedicate more resources to studying the idea, with multiple committees holding public meetings and city officials gathering more details on financing, how the project would work and how it would affect jobs at the port.

“We want to look at the pros and

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# Rocket Lab completes first launch of 2022

By Brandon Richardson

Another satellite is orbiting Earth following a successful mission by the Long Beach-based rocket manufacturer and launch service provider Rocket Lab, the firm announced late last month.

Dubbed “The Owl’s Night Continues,” the mission blasted off Feb. 28 at 12:37 p.m. local time. Rocket Lab’s Electron rocket carried and successfully delivered a synthetic aperture radar (SAR) StriX satellite for Japanese Earth imaging company Synspec.

The satellite is one piece of Synspec’s plan for a 30-satellite constellation designed to detect millimeter-level changes to the Earth’s surface from space, regardless of weather conditions and time of day.

“We are proud to continue our partnership with Synspec and to have provided flexibility around launch timing,” Rocket Lab founder and CEO Peter Beck said in the announcement, referring to the fact that the launch was originally



Rocket Lab’s “The Owl’s Night Continues” mission takes off from the firm’s New Zealand complex.

scheduled for a later date but was moved up on the manifest to accommodate Synspec’s needs.

“We look forward to our upcoming missions with Synspec as they grow their SAR constellation,” Beck added.

The mission was a follow-up to “The Owl’s Night Begins” in

December 2020, during which Rocket Lab delivered one StriX satellite for Synspec. Following that mission’s success, the firm inked a three-launch deal.

A second launch is slated for this year, with the third planned for 2023.

“With the successful insertion of our second SAR satellite, we will be able to

improve our technology for operating multiple satellites and strengthen our data services,” Synspec founder and CEO Motoyuki Arai said in the announcement. “With this achievement, we will accelerate the expansion of a thirty SAR satellite constellation and enhance our data analysis technology to realize a ‘learning world’ for a sustainable future.”

“The Owl’s Night Continues” was Rocket Lab’s 24th Electron launch—the first of 2022—and its payload marks the 110th satellite the firm has put into orbit.

The mission departed from the Rocket Lab’s Launch Complex 1, Pad B, facility on New Zealand’s Mahia Peninsula. This is the first time the firm utilized the pad.

Moving forward, the ability to use two pads at its New Zealand complex will eliminate recycle time between missions, giving Rocket Lab the ability to increase launch frequency and responsiveness, the firm stated.

Rocket Lab had six launches last year, one of which failed. Details for the firm’s next mission are expected to be announced soon. ■

## Innovation Center

Continued from page 11

be ideal.

“Post-COVID, the office market has changed,” Keisler said, “and we’re learning that we’re fitting into that really nicely. It’s perfect.”

Specifically, Keisler pointed to the fact that many companies are moving away from the traditional large office space and instead providing more flexibility for employees. For workers who prefer to work in an office, or who want a space to meet with clients outside of their own homes, Keisler said renting out a desk in a place like BLANKSPACES can be much cheaper for companies while still meeting employees’ needs.

Part of the reason the partnership made sense even before the pandemic, Keisler and Chang said, was that research indicated many companies were already moving toward more virtual operations. COVID-19 only accelerated that momentum.

Chang pointed to a paper JLL published in early 2019 that predicted that flexible space like co-working sites would comprise 30% of the office market by 2030.

“Since the pandemic, a lot of the industry folks and real estate folks have believed that we might hit that 30% faster,” Chang said. “We actually think this is a windfall for us.”

While the co-working space will benefit large established companies as well as small business owners, the programming provided by Long Beach City College’s Small Business Development Center will be geared toward entrepreneurs who are finding their footing.

Pat Nye, the director of Long Beach City College’s Economic Development Division, said it will be a place where small business owners can get hands-on training for everything from how to access capital to drawing up a business plan.

“For everything you might imagine a small business experiencing, we have experts that can sit down and coach them one-on-one,” Nye said.

The SBDC will also likely offer workshops and other programming at the center as needed.

As for what the Shaun Lumachi Innovation Center will mean for the Long Beach economy more broadly, Keisler said he hopes it will both spur innovation and encourage entrepreneurs to set up shop here and stay for good.

“It’s a place for nascent, early-stage startups to come out of our universities and community colleges and to have a place in Long Beach,” he said. “It’s going to be a massive, massive help for us post-COVID, not only to attract new talent but to retain the talent that’s already here.” ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

## Hawaiian opens maintenance facility at Long Beach Airport, bringing more jobs

By Brandon Richardson

Almost four years after making its debut at Long Beach Airport, Hawaiian Airlines opened a new line maintenance base at the small municipal facility, the company announced today.

The 3,000-square-foot facility, which is Hawaiian’s fourth maintenance and supply base in North America, will include one of the airline’s largest stocking warehouses. The hangar and office is located on Donald Douglas Drive, northeast of the historic terminal.

“This facility will allow us greater operational flexibility, which in turn provides our guests with a seamless and enjoyable travel experience,” Beau Tatsumara, vice president of maintenance and engineering for Hawaiian, said.

JetBlue previously occupied the space before pulling out of Long Beach entirely in October 2020, taking jobs with it.

Hawaiian’s new facility creates 17 new positions, the company stated, including mechanics who will perform scheduled and non-scheduled maintenance on the airline’s Airbus A321

passenger jet fleet. Maintenance will include inspections, brake service, fluid checks and tire services, among others.

Hawaiian began flying out of Long Beach in summer 2018 with nonstop service to Honolulu. It was the first and only airline to offer flights to the island state at the time. On March 9, 2021, Hawaiian added a second daily flight—nonstop service to Maui.

Days later, on March 11, Southwest—Long Beach Airport’s largest carrier—announced its own daily nonstop service to Honolulu. Southwest announced a second daily flight to Honolulu in May. ■



Courtesy of the city of Long Beach

## 10-story senior care facility approved for Downtown

By Christian May-Suzuki

The Regency Palms assisted living facility in Downtown Long Beach will see a major expansion in the form of a 10-story, 78-room project at 810 Pine Ave., which was approved unanimously by Long Beach’s Planning Commission late last month.

This “Regency Palms II,” next door to the original Regency Palms at 117 E. Eighth St., will replace a 46-space parking lot with “a residential care facility [that

provides] hotel-like amenities to avoid an institutional or clinical feel,” according to a staff report accompanying the presentation of the project at last week’s meeting. The building, designed by Irvine-based KTG Architecture & Planning, will complement the original Regency Palms, with similar but updated facilities.

The 126-foot-tall building will have two levels of parking—a subterranean structure and the entirety of the second floor—totaling 86 new parking spots, along with 16 bicycle parking stations. Car parking will be assisted by mechanical

## Long Beach unemployment continues to fall, but remains above most of LA County

By Brandon Richardson

Unemployment in Long Beach continued its slow but steady decline in January but remains higher than nearly 72% of other Los Angeles County cities, according to data released by the California Employment Development Department.

In January, Long Beach’s unadjusted unemployment dropped to 6.4%, down from 6.7% the month before. At the county level, meanwhile, unemployment only decreased from 6.2% in December to 6.1% last in January.

While unemployment did decline in the city, both the labor force and number of employed residents decreased, the data shows. Long Beach’s labor force declined from 234,900 in December to 233,800 in January, with the number of employed residents dropping by 500 over the same period.

“Employment has declined because we are still roughly 18,000 jobs, or 10%, less than we had in 2019,” Nick Schultz, executive director of Long Beach’s Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network, told the Business Journal. “Leisure and hospitality makes up about 50%

of that loss, mostly in jobs that require face-to-face interaction.”

The labor force declined for two reasons, Schultz said: More people are gravitating toward independent contractor jobs and the rising number of business license applications.

“People are betting on themselves rather than making themselves available to a payroll employer,” Schultz said.

Countywide, the labor force number of employed residents increased by 21,500 and 26,600 people, respectively.

Across the state, the unemployment rate held steady at 5.8%, according to the EDD, compared to 4% nationwide. The state began 2021 with an unemployment rate of 8.8%.

“California’s labor market performed more impressively in 2021 than original estimates had suggested,” Taner Osman, research manager at Beacon Economics and the Center for Economic Forecasting, said in a statement. “The state added jobs at a rate that was more than 50% greater than the national growth rate, and with abundant job openings and more room to grow, we expect to see California’s labor market continue to outperform the national economy in 2022.” ■



Courtesy of Virgin Orbit

Virgin Orbit staff inspect the LauncherOne system prior to launch.

By Brandon Richardson

In a historic moment for the U.K. space industry, a satellite developed in Wales will be blasted into space for the first time ever, carried aboard Long Beach-based Virgin Orbit’s LauncherOne, the firms announced this week.

Slated for this summer, the launch will carry European in-space manufacturing tech start-up Space Forge’s new small-class vehicle, the ForgeStar. The platform is the first step in the development of a world-first service for the manufacturing of next-generation supermaterials in space.

The launch is part of a broader U.K.-U.S. mission to open the country’s first domestic space port. The mission will be the first out of Spaceport Cornwall



COLUMNIST: TIM GROBATY

Looking for inexpensive homes?

Goodbye, Golden State; hello, Rust Belt

People seem to think that houses in Long Beach—or all of California—cost too much. It’s a feeling borne out by the fact that, yes, they do cost too much, especially ones that you’d be satisfied and even happy to own and live in. Something in Long Beach that would make you feel satisfied and happy to own is, sad to say, realistically achievable by paying something in the neighborhood of \$850,000. Maybe less if you’re more easy to please than many people.

People in town mutter darkly about what they feel they need to do to buy a house is move out to the desert communities, but those properties, while a bit more affordable, are still expensive, especially when you wake up in the morning and discover you’re in the desert again.

The property website Realtor.com has compiled

a list of the 10 U.S cities where houses are a lot more affordable, with scores of homes under \$100,000, and particularly nice ones in the \$250,000 range. Of the cities listed, the closest town to the Pacific Ocean is Topeka, Kansas.

If you’re looking for an easily affordable house, you might find yourself needing to bolt out of California—something many readers seem to be particularly happy to consider. Here are the top five cities Realtor.com recommends:

**Peoria, Illinois:** You can spend \$1 million on a house in Peoria, but it’s going to be a lot of house and you don’t have much to choose from. There’s just one listed currently, a five-bed, six-bath, 7,664-square-foot house on 3.5 acres with views of the Illinois River. It would go for several million dollars in Long Beach if you could find a

place to put it.

But we were talking about the least-expensive places, and Realtor.com puts Peoria at the top of the list with a median list price of \$98,000, although our cousin who’s a professor at Peoria’s Bradley University tells me that that figure has recently skyrocketed by 18% this year to \$150,000.

Which is still on the low side for Long Beachers, where \$150,000 will cover the rent for about six years.

You can buy perfectly fine houses all day long in Peoria for under \$140,000, and many for under \$100,000.

Consider a recently remodeled home with an attached apartment. It looks like it was based on a child’s drawing of a house, minus curly smoke rising from the chimney. It could use some

scrubbing, but it’s listed at an incredible \$69,900, making your monthly payment \$369 after closing costs of \$16,700 and change. And look! The apartment, according to the listing, should rent for \$550. You’re making money while just sitting around playing solitaire. You want to live like a king, live in the apartment and rent the main house for \$875, profit!

**Terre Haute, Indiana:** Hop in the car to travel 178 miles to the next state, where Terre Haute is the No. 2 town on the Realtor.com list of inexpensive cities for home buyers.

In inexpensive towns, you can not only get an inexpensive home. You can get a mansion for under a million dollars. Sell your rather common Long Beach home for a tad over the median list price of \$745,000 and move to Terre Haute (ignore the steady exodus of locals driving out of town as you’re driving in), and plunk it all on a five-bed, five-bath, 8,762 square-foot home on 3.4 acres with four fireplaces, tennis court, pool, pool house, putting green, a basement theater room and eight heated garage bays. Be sure to tell everyone you’re from California. They’ll love and admire you for it.

But, again, we’re looking for inexpensive, and there are several Terre Haute houses for under \$100,000 and even a smattering under \$50,000, but let’s not go too low. Can you swing \$130,000? That’s enough for a sort of eccentrically designed, but not uncharming, four-bedroom, three-bath

home with 2,774 square feet of living space on a 6,000-square-foot lot. It was built in 1900, making it older than most Long Beach homes, but it’s not age, it’s experience. You can’t teach this house anything. Oh, and I call the bedroom in the tower.

**Saginaw, Michigan:** You’re not going to stand there and tell me you wouldn’t be happy in this three-bed, one-bath home (aside from the snow, the mosquitos and the summers). The house is as close to Mid-Century Modern as you’re going to find in Saginaw at just a tiny fraction of what you’d pay for a Cliff May in Long Beach. This one’s listed at just \$104,500. Saginaw, a once-fairly booming auto town, now has an unemployment rate nearly 2 percentage points higher than the national average at 5.7%, according to Realtor.com, and with about a third of residents living below the poverty rate, it’s hard for people here to come up with a down payment. There’s plenty of inventory and you can choose from dozens at \$100,000 or much lower.

Another one, though, checks off many Mid-Modern boxes. It was built in 1955, it has a vaulted, exposed-beam living room ceiling along with a wood-burning fireplace, it makes ample use of glass in the front of the house and its kitchen and bathroom are totally stock in keeping with the mid-century decor: mint green for the kitchen with wood cabinets, and pink for the bathroom, also with wooden cabinetry. The

1,274-square-foot home sits on a quarter-acre and includes a screened-in porch next to the garage.

**Youngstown, Ohio:** Like many other once-glorious manufacturing towns in the Rust Belt that have fallen over the last couple of decades, Youngstown has been dropping in population with one of the results being a surplus of extremely affordable housing. That said, the town has been experiencing a bit of a real estate boom recently, as it catches up with the boom in most of the country. Prices have been rising, and bidding wars are commonplace, according to Realtor.com, though it’s nowhere near as savage as it’s been in California. The median listing price is \$118,000, which means, as you would surmise, that there are plenty under \$100,000.

But let’s go big with this market and pony up \$149,000 for a fairly amazing two-story Colonial, with three bedrooms and two baths in 1,824 square feet on a third of an acre. The 1931 home has a spacious living room with a large bay window bracketed between built-in shelves and cabinets. It’s set in a historic location in the Mill Creek Park area and a short walk to Newport Lake and numerous creeks and hiking/walking trails. It’s so idyllic-sounding that I’m slowly talking myself into buying it.

**Davenport, Iowa:** Ah, Davenport, the heart of the Heartland. The median list price in this town that’s one-fourth of the Quad Cities (you can learn the other three later) is \$127,400, and we’re now getting out of the territory where you’ll find many homes below \$100,000. It’s a fairly vibrant town, at least by Iowa standards, hosting many community-centered events throughout the year, including the Mississippi Valley Blues Festival, Downtown Davenport Street Fest, and one of the largest St. Patrick’s Day parades in the nation.

Let’s go up to \$165,000 and put it on a three-bedroom, one-bath home with a totally remodeled kitchen and bathroom and a huge and welcoming front deck for relaxing, people-watching, enjoying coffee or a cocktail and whatever excitement you can see in Davenport. It’s a couple of blocks shy of the flood zone from the nearby creek, which the locals call the Mississippi River. ■



Peoria, Illinois



Terre Haute, Indiana



Saginaw, Michigan



Youngstown, Ohio



Davenport, Iowa

City budget deficit shrinks to \$12M, but officials still face potential funding issues

By Jason Ruiz

The once-daunting hole Long Beach officials anticipated in next year’s budget has shrunk by almost \$24 million, according to new projections presented to the City Council earlier this month.

The direst projections for the fiscal year starting in October had previously put the shortfall as high as \$36 million, but the city’s financial management team said that number is now closer to \$12 million—an amount that could be covered by leftover pandemic relief funds from the federal government.

Grace Yoon, a budget manager with the city, said Long Beach

will be able to avoid any cuts to services this year because prior budgets performed better than expected during the pandemic. That meant the city didn’t have to use all of the \$76 million in American Rescue Act funding it had put into reserves or previously earmarked for maintaining services.

Using the leftover funds to prop up city services won’t cut into any of the other programs—like renter relief and small business recovery—the federal money is also covering, according to Yoon.

Using the funds will help solve this year’s issue, but the \$12 million deficit will be passed onto the next fiscal year because it’s a structural funding problem. The new projected

deficit for the 2024 fiscal year is \$20.8 million.

**What’s helping the city?**

A number of positive things have happened since the initial \$36 million deficit projection last year. And things have improved even since December, when Yoon told the council that the budget deficit was likely to shrink.

Sales tax and property taxes fueled by the sale of homes during a historically expensive housing market have helped infuse the city’s general fund with additional revenue, as have increased utility users’ taxes. Combined, those sources of revenue increased by \$18.6 million since the last budget update late last year.

Other more volatile revenue streams like oil are also trending up. Yoon said the city will continue to budget as if oil were selling for \$55 per barrel, but skyrocketing gas prices have been pushed up by increasingly expensive oil.

Crude oil has been trading for

over \$100 per barrel since late February, and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and sanctions announced by President Joe Biden, including a ban on importing Russian oil and natural gas, could further roil the market.

Yoon said that any additional funds seen from oil production in Long Beach would likely be made available as one-time funds for the council to use in either this current fiscal year or in the next one starting in October.

Other things, such as settlements and judgments paid out by the city and workers’ compensation claims, have seen some reductions. The city’s contributions to employee retirement plans saw a small increase of \$500,000, but Yoon said that was the lowest it’s been in years and there’s a possibility that next year could see the city pay less than this year.

**Future concerns for the city**

One of the single largest budget issues facing the city is the outcome

Continued on page 21

Commission approves 2 office buildings with 14 for-sale units at Douglas Park

By Christian May-Suzuki

Douglas Park’s expansion is set to continue with the addition of a new creative commercial space.

Long Beach’s Planning Commission voted at its March 3 meeting to approve plans for the “Airway at Douglas Park” project at 3810 Stineman Court, which will consist of two buildings hosting a total of 14 commercial units. The site lies on the border of Long Beach and the city of Lakewood, with the Lakewood Golf Course bordering the project to the north.

For years, the lot was vacant due to environmental factors. After a Boeing manufacturing plant was decommissioned, contaminated soil made the site unsuitable for development. But the soil has been sufficiently remediated, which the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality

Control Board confirmed in 2006, and the city now sees the lot as a prime opportunity to “put a long-standing vacant site to productive use.”

“Developing it with commercial/ office condominiums [will] provide office space for businesses, bring high-paying jobs to the City and complement the light-industrial, research and development, manufacturing, retail, and hotel uses that are currently at Douglas Park,” the staff report read.

The buildings will take up just under 58,000 square feet, with the first comprising eight commercial units in 26,472 square feet of space and the second consisting of six commercial units in 31,526 square feet. The tenants will be divided evenly across two floors in each building. DRA Architects principal and co-owner Carrie Hoshino, who represented the applicant at the meeting, said that the



Courtesy of the city of Long Beach  
Long Beach’s Planning Commission voted Thursday, March 3, 2022, to approve plans for the “Airway at Douglas Park” project at 3810 Stineman Court.

project was looking to attract “high-tech and other creative uses.”

The remainder of the 160,621-square-foot lot is dedicated to 230 parking stalls for the site, including 58 spaces for electric vehicles and 12 bike parking spots.

The plan for the design, according to a city review, is “harmonious and consistent within itself and its surrounding area.” Initial renderings of the project show a unique look highlighted by “wall wing accents and cutouts” using a monochromatic color scheme with splashes of blue and green.

Decorative paint graphics and an open courtyard will contribute to a more casual aesthetic, and offices will be sleekly designed with canopies, roof extensions, and glass roll-up doors among other features. ■



# Employees at Starbucks coffee shops in Long Beach, Lakewood seek to unionize

By Crystal Niebla

As the move to unionize Starbucks stores nationwide gains momentum, a union organization announced earlier this month that local stores in Long Beach and Lakewood have submitted a petition to seek unionization.

Starbucks Workers United, the worker group behind the nationwide unionization effort, identified the Starbucks locations at 3390 E. Seventh St. near Redondo Avenue and 4833 Candlewood St. near Lakewood Boulevard as two locations seeking to organize.

In two separate petitions signed by 14 and 19 employees at the Long Beach and Lakewood locations, respectively, employees wrote they are overworked, understaffed and underpaid with “wages that keep us constantly struggling” with inflation. Other top complaints included unfair scheduling and inadequate COVID-19 policies.

A Starbucks spokesperson said that after the pandemic, the corporation “met and exceeded the direction of the CDC and the federal government” with COVID-19 protocols, offering sick pay, isolation pay with a positive COVID test, limiting store to takeout and adjusting hours of operation for certain stores.

Nationwide, Starbucks employees say that the corporation has slashed hours “almost very suddenly,” according to Josie Serrano, a barista at the Seventh Street coffee shop who signed a petition, echoing the sentiments of Starbucks Workers United.

Serrano, whose pronouns are they/them, works part-time and said that they have personally seen about a 25% reduction in work hours.

“It seems very coincidental that all this is happening from coast to coast as we’re hitting about 130 stores that have begun or succeeded in the unionization process,” said Serrano,



A young woman looks at her drink as she exits Starbucks at Seventh Street and Redondo Avenue.

a four-year veteran for the company.

When asked to address allegations of retaliation of cutting hours, the Starbucks spokesperson said the company remains focused on creating the best situation for its partners, “and maintaining open, transparent and direct conversations.” The Starbucks spokesperson was not immediately available to confirm if there has been a trend of work-hour reductions.

On top of the recent hour reductions, Serrano said when they first started working for the company, multiple partners performed one task, such as preparing a latte. But now, Serrano said responsibilities have converged. One person now performs the work of three to five people, for example. One worker, they recalled, was so

overwhelmed that they needed a moment to cry in the backroom.

“It’s hard because you see this at not only our store but lots of stores,” Serrano said. “We kind of just feel like it’s a good time to hop on that momentum... and really try to get ourselves heard with collective bargaining.”

Starbucks, the multi-billion dollar global corporation, has remained against the idea of unions for their employees, who they call “partners.”

“Our position since the beginning is that ... we want every single one of our partners’ rights to be respected,” and the company currently “operates as a cohesive unit and we want to preserve that working relationship,” a Starbucks spokesperson said.

Tyler Keeling, a barista trainer at

the Lakewood location and a six-year veteran for the company, said that the Starbucks corporation has “structural” issues with its workers.

Keeling, who serves as a committee member within the Starbucks Workers United and also signed the petition, said the group’s petition with the public intent to unionize is one of the first steps in the unionization process. He anticipates the process might take a few months. The timeline is up to the discretion of the National Labor Relations Board, he said. What follows is a hearing with the Board, scheduling a voting date and, finally, a vote, he said.

Starbucks corporation wants to have a more direct relationship with workers and is encouraging partners to vote no. ■

Additionally, research shows that manufacturing certain materials in space could reduce carbon emissions by 75%, according to the announcement, which is the equivalent of removing all gas-powered cars from the U.K.

“Space Forge is joining the growing community of space innovators advancing space technologies for the betterment of our world,” Virgin Orbit CEO Dan Hart said in the announcement. “Their commitment to sustainability builds a foundation for future growth in the industry that we at Virgin Orbit are proud to be part of.” ■

## Virgin Orbit

Continued from page 13

in Newquay, Cornwall.

“We’re thrilled to be making U.K. history with our first launch,” Space Forge CEO Joshua Western said in the announcement. “We will demonstrate the use of space for good through in-space manufacturing and reliable return and it’s brilliant that both Virgin Orbit and Spaceport Cornwall share our ambitions.”

Earth is not ideal for

manufacturing certain materials, Western told The Guardian in December, due to gravity, the dense atmosphere and impacts on the environment. In space, however, gravity would not interfere with the mixing of materials and the vacuum of space would eliminate contamination during the manufacturing process.

Optical fiber manufacturing experiments conducted by NASA almost 25 years ago, for example, demonstrated that a zero-gravity environment produced ZBLAN (zirconium, barium, lanthanum,

aluminum, and sodium) fibers with fewer defects and impurities. During the experiment, the fiber manufactured on Earth showed surface defects that would scatter and degrade optical signals.

Ultimately, the goal is that the ForgeStar’s automated robotic system will direct the manufacturing and testing of alloys, pharmaceuticals and electronic components while the satellite orbits Earth for one to six months. At the end of the production cycle, the satellite would then return to Earth where the materials and products could be retrieved.



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

Land movers parked in the corner of the property where Long Beach Senior will be built during the groundbreaking at the 900 block of East Pacific Coast Highway.

## Affordable senior housing project breaks ground

By Christian May-Suzuki

More affordable housing is on its way to Long Beach, as officials celebrated the groundbreaking of a forthcoming 68-unit complex earlier this month.

Mercy Housing’s four-story Long Beach Senior affordable housing

development, at 901-941 E. Pacific Coast Highway, will provide housing for seniors ages 55 and up who either have limited incomes or are veterans who have struggled with homelessness.

“As a veteran, I am happy this project will help my fellow veterans,” Long Beach Senior Citizen Advisory Commissioner Robert

Finney said.

Of the 68 units that will be made available, 15 will be reserved for those whose income is \$19,725 or less, which is 25% of the area median income, according to the developer. Another 18 units will be for people with incomes at or below \$23,670 annually, 25 will be reserved for people earning \$31,560 or below, and nine will be for people with incomes of \$47,340 and below, which is 60% of the area median income, according to the developer.

One unit will be reserved for an on-site manager.

“This is a population that absolutely needs this project,” Los Angeles County Development Authority Executive Director Emilio Salas said at the March 9 groundbreaking.

The ground floor of the property will serve as an amenity hub that will include a lounge, bike workshop and storage space and a tenant-driven “community benefit space.” Its second floor features an outdoor courtyard alongside units to provide tenants with outdoor space. There will also be 38 parking spaces for residents, visitors and staff.

Many of the features of the property seek to accomplish a daunting task: serving the

development’s residents while placating concerns from residents in the single-family neighborhood to the north of the site.

A list of these features—solicited from community feedback from Sept. 30, 2019, to April 30, 2020—includes a 5-foot widening plus improvements to the small alleyway separating the project from the homes, placement of the courtyard on the north side of the project and a building facade design “inspired by local Long Beach architecture.”

“We deserve the kind of housing that people need and feel proud to live in,” Councilwoman Suely Saro, whose 6th District includes the development, said. “This area is going to get transformed.”

The architecture/design firm Studio One Eleven has a history of successful affordable housing developments in Long Beach, including The Annex, The Court, and the Senior Arts Colony. In particular, the Senior Colony was recognized by the Los Angeles Business Journal as the “Multi-Family Project of the Year” in 2014.

The leasing process is anticipated to begin next spring, with the first residents moving in during fall 2023. For more information on the project, visit [longbeachsenior.org](http://longbeachsenior.org). ■

# Our gratitude knows no bounds.

Today we thank doctors everywhere.  
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There are a lot of people to thank during Doctors’ Day. Many of whom aren’t doctors at all. Every doctor has someone who has helped them get to where they are today. People who never stop caring and always offer encouragement. So here’s to the family, friends, parents, children, coworkers, and furry companions who support our physicians. And, to the doctors who give so much of themselves to care for our communities—thank you, thank you, thank you, for all that you do.

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# West Coast dockworkers, including at LA and Long Beach ports, refuse to move Russian cargo

By Brandon Richardson

Exports destined for Russia as well as imports from the warring nation will not be moved through the West Coast, with 20,000 workers at 29 seaports announcing their stand of solidarity with Ukraine.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which represents about 20,000 workers up and down the coast, announced earlier this month that Russian goods will not be handled due to the country's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, which officially began almost two weeks ago on Feb. 24.

"With this action in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, we send a strong message that we unequivocally condemn the Russian invasion,"

ILWU International President Willie Adams said in a statement.

"West Coast dockworkers are proud to do our part to join with those around the world who are bravely taking a stand and making sacrifices for the good of Ukraine," Adams added.

The impacts of the ILWU's decision to forgo the movement of Russian goods will likely not exacerbate the ongoing supply chain crisis, according to a union spokesperson, given the number of U.S. businesses and governments that are already refusing to work with Russia.

At the San Pedro Bay ports, Russian goods make up only a tiny fraction of imports and exports. In Long Beach, trade with Russia only accounts for 0.04% of container

cargo and 2-3% of oil. Similarly, at the Port of Long Angeles, trade with Russia is "negligible," making up less than 0.2% of all cargo, according to spokeswoman Rachel Campbell.

"While a relatively small share of the Port's trade is with Russia, the Port of Long Beach nevertheless stands in solidarity with the ILWU and the City of Long Beach," Port of Long Beach spokesman Lee Peterson said in an email.

Similar to its relationship with other nations, including China, the United States suffers from a trade imbalance with Russia. The U.S. imports far more goods from the European-Asian nation than it exports to it.

The trade imbalance has favored Russia since the 1990s, according to

data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The imbalance grew almost every year from more than \$231 million in 1996 to a peak of \$26.3 billion in 2011.

During President Barack Obama's second term, the imbalance steadily decreased to a low of just over \$8.7 billion in 2016. However, the imbalance again trended upward following the election of President Donald Trump. By 2019, the imbalance had rebounded to nearly \$16.5 billion.

The pandemic stifled the imbalance growth in 2020, as the trade industry was slammed by slowdowns due to sickness and other challenges related to the pandemic. The imbalance fell to just over \$12 billion but bounced back to over \$23.3 billion in 2021, its second-highest level ever. ■

## Senior Housing

Continued from page 12

stackers. Sandwiched between the two parking areas will be a lobby and main reception space on the first floor.

The third and fourth floors will be reserved for amenities, including an outdoor terrace on the third floor and private patios on the fourth floor. The building's 60 private and 18 semi-private rooms for residents will be spread across the fifth-to-eighth floors, while a roof terrace and deck will comprise the top two levels.

The development's approval, though, didn't come without resistance.

The project will also include the 2-foot expansion of the alley directly east of the property, at Tribune Court—which poses a major concern for the neighbors to the north at 838 Pine Ave. They noted at the Planning Commission's Feb. 17 meeting that the alleyway serves as their only path to enter and exit the building's underground parking, and it's the only way for garbage trucks to access the bins at the building.

"We cannot imagine how you are going to properly manage that level of activity" in the alleyway, resident Leanna Noble said.

Other concerns from nearby residents focused on privacy, light and airflow due to the project's proximity to other residential buildings.

"The closeness of the structure, walls, and windows is a major concern," said Christopher Pluck, a resident at the Temple Lofts directly east of the lot at 835 Locust Ave.

To address some of those concerns, the city laid out a set of conditions for the project to be approved, which included adding a loading zone to the west of the project, on Pine Avenue, to discourage deliveries and other idling in the Tribune Court alley. Additionally, the developer will be required to "consult with the Home Owners' Associations of the adjacent buildings to facilitate a coordinated pick-up agreeable to all parties."

To address privacy, the developer, UPC 810 Pine Avenue, LLC, has also included plans for panel screens on windows that directly overlook residential properties as well as the installation of landscaping buffers like planters in the outdoor spaces to further obstruct the view. However, the city has also required the firm to coordinate with the residents at 838 Pine Ave. to provide landscaping improvements like furniture, shading devices and other landscaping buffers to improve privacy for units on the first floor.

Representatives for UPC 810 Pine Avenue could not be reached for comment on their plans, and KTG Architecture & Planning declined to comment. ■

## Port of Long Beach

Continued from page 11

Chain Information Highway data solution, which provides greater cargo visibility, connectivity and predictability."

Operations normally would slow in February, as factories in East Asia—including China, a major trading partner for the San Pedro Bay ports—shutter for two weeks in observation of Lunar New Year. However, with the lingering supply chain crisis, the ports continue to work through a backlog of imports.

For over a year, container ships have had to wait their turn at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Twice in January, the number of container ships backed up reached 106. Most of the ships were anchored more than 40 miles off the coast thanks to efforts by several agencies to reduce environmental impacts on residents of the area.

As of March 9, the backlog was down to 50 vessels, only three of which were within 40 miles of the coast, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California.

In early March, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which represents about 20,000



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal  
Long Beach Container Terminal as seen from the Port of Los Angeles.

workers at 29 seaports up and down the West Coast, announced dockworkers would not handle cargo from or destined for Russia as a sign of solidarity with Ukraine, which has been under siege by Russian forces for 16 days. The move, however, is not expected to exacerbate supply chain issues due to the large number of businesses and agencies who are refusing to do

business with the warring nation.

Port officials said economic activity is expected to rebound after inflation reduced consumer spending during the first quarter of the year. Inflation, now at 8%, is expected to peak at 8.1% this month, according to a new report from Beacon Economics. By the end of the year, the Beacon report states inflation will decline to 6.8%. ■

# Prolonged oil-price spike could boost Belmont Pool project

By Jason Ruiz

The soaring cost of oil is causing financial strain for consumers, but it could prove to be a boon for some Long Beach infrastructure projects like the Belmont Beach and Aquatics Center.

High-profile projects along the coast in Long Beach are often funded by the city's Tidelands fund, a highly volatile pot of money because it comes in large part from oil revenue.

The current fiscal year's oil production was projected to generate over \$98 million at a conservative assumed price of \$55 per barrel, but earlier this month Long Beach oil was selling for between \$116 and \$125 per barrel.

Though any excess revenue due to a higher price could be used for one-time expenses, Robert Dowell, the city's director of energy resources, said it's too early to determine how much that might be.

Just because oil is currently selling for over twice what the city is budgeting doesn't necessarily mean the city will take in twice as much oil revenue, Dowell said. The costs of drilling new wells and new labor and property taxes, which factors in the value of the oil in the ground, have to be recouped before profits are realized, he said.

The price of a barrel of oil has been hovering around \$130 per barrel this week and could approach the all-time high peak of \$147.02 that

was seen in 2008, depending on how long sanctions are in place against Russian oil and how long Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues to affect global markets.

Dowell, along with City Manager Tom Modica, said that oil prices are one of the hardest things to project. Prices are reliant on a number of factors, including multiple countries setting prices and producers wanting to produce.

"What we do know is whatever number they think it's going to be, it's probably wrong," Dowell said of oil prices.

**Belmont Pool**

Tidelands funds are used only to pay for services in the coastal area, including police, but also for infrastructure projects like the new pool or replacing the Belmont Pier, both of which were identified in 2018 as eight projects the city wanted to complete by 2028.

The Belmont Plaza Olympic Pool was deemed unsafe due to seismic concerns in 2013 and was demolished, with the city pledging to replace it with a larger, safer, more modern complex.

The pool complex, which was last projected to cost \$85 million, has been stalled by residents challenging its environmental review process as well as the California Coastal Commission asking the city to revise plans to make the pull more accessible to all communities in Long Beach.

The city has resubmitted its application to the commission and

has moved forward with the design process as it waits for approval in anticipation of completing construction ahead of the 2028 Olympic Games. The pool has an outside shot of hosting events, according to city officials.

One of the largest obstacles, outside of bureaucratic delays, has been the cost.

The city has previously said that about \$61 million is allocated for the pool's construction, leaving a potential funding gap of over \$20 million. Modica said earlier this month that the city is working on a financing plan that it feels very confident about that could be before the City Council by the end of the year.

Excess oil revenue could positively affect the pool's construction, Modica said, but inflation likely has also driven up the cost of construction.

"You won't really know it until you bid it," Modica said. "But anecdotally we're seeing prices rise across the board."

Modica noted that most oil in Long Beach doesn't actually get refined into gasoline but is used to make other things like asphalt. Still, the current market conditions could lead to excess funds that could boost the Tidelands fund in the coming year.

With the prices seen over the past three to four months, Modica said there's a high likelihood that there would be excess funds over what the city had budgeted for, which could be used for lifeguards, beach maintenance and

infrastructure projects.

"One of the big projects we're looking to fund is the Belmont Pool," Modica said.

**Local oil operations**

Long Beach oversees the production of approximately 22,000 barrels per day at the Wilmington Oil Field, but interest in drilling new oil wells or re-establishing old ones is rising.

Dowell said drilling new wells will require investing a lot of money upfront, potentially hundreds of thousands to fix broken or non-working wells, but revenue benefits could be seen within a few months.

To say how much extra revenue would be speculating on a very speculative market, Dowell said. He pointed to April 2020, when crude oil prices dipped into negative territory, compared to recent speculation that the price of oil per barrel could reach as high as \$240.

How much of a benefit the city could see would depend on how long the market continues to support oil barrels selling for over \$100.

In 2008 crude oil averaged nearly \$100 per barrel for the year and it was a boon for the city's Tidelands fund. The city budgeted for about \$127 million in oil revenue that year, but by year's end, it had reached nearly \$514 million. After subtracting operating costs and materials, the fund ended with \$84.8 million.

"It was a very good year," Dowell said. ■

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## Rail System

Continued from page 11

the cons,” said Councilwoman Cindy Allen, who’s requesting a deeper look into the idea. “I think that’s the right first step at this point, and it will allow us to have additional information and analysis of any specifics of the project.”

Allen said she’d want to have at least three community meetings to gauge interest from the public while the city examines if it has an interest in pursuing the project.

### How does it get paid for?

Freedom Village would come with an estimated price tag of over \$500 million if all phases of it are implemented. Pisano said his group would pursue federal and state grants, but they don’t want to bet the future of the project on funding that may not materialize.

If the city chooses to move forward with this project, it would have to create a special financing district and issue revenue-backed bonds, Pisano said. In order to create a financing district, the revenue streams would have to be identified to show that they cover the repayment of the bonds issued. Pisano is confident that the

project could pay for itself between fees that would be charged for cargo containers to use the aerial transport system, the sale of excess energy created and stored in the battery cells that could also be used to provide power to the port and the potential sale of land that is freed up by removing utility lines that currently send power to the port.

The financing district could choose to allow part of the property taxes within the financing district to be used as a source to help pay back the bonds, but Pisano said that is not currently in his group’s proposal. However, the white paper did note that if the city chose to include the city’s central business district in the footprint, the combination of reduced emissions and truck traffic could result in a substantial increase in assessed land value, which the city and the district could benefit from.

Ultimately the district would be responsible for the bonds, but Pisano said the project would benefit both the public and private sectors. Pisano said the project has had early support from environmental justice groups who want cleaner air and better quality of life for frontline communities and from labor groups who would be employed during the construction process and after the project’s completion.

Allen said she was concerned about the city having to forfeit property taxes to help the project along, but said it was time to start making bold moves on pollution reduction on the west side of the city. Allen, a breast cancer survivor, pointed to her own upbringing in West Long Beach and linked it to her cancer, which she said was not hereditary.

“We’ve got to start taking steps to make our local health benefits better for our frontline communities,” Allen said.

### What are the benefits?

The white paper highlights the project’s potential to both speed up cargo movement while reducing pollution and simultaneously creating excess energy, which can be stored and used for on-dock purposes like powering ships or distributed for use in electric vehicles.

It touts an ability to initially move 1,200 containers per day on its system, with the potential to eventually move up to 10,000 containers to and from the port complexes daily once the project is fully built out.

That reduction in truck trips (10.8 million annually according to the paper) could dramatically reduce pollution while freeing up some land along the Los Angeles River for open-space or housing production.

The annual emissions reductions cited in the paper are substantial, with over 240 million kilograms of carbon dioxide and other pollutants like diesel particulates potentially being removed from the region’s air.

Pisano said bonds would be issued to help fund the project, but he also pointed to the revenues from rents, charges to use the cargo transportation system and the sale of energy

production that could be generated through the project’s use of battery storage technology. Superconducting tape that will generate the energy is proposed to be incorporated into the overhead cargo transportation system.

The ability to finance the project was made possible through recent state legislation that allows elected bodies like a city council or board of supervisors to create enhanced infrastructure financing districts. The districts can issue revenue-backed bonds and also give up their rights to certain tax revenues for as long as 45 years.

The most recently adopted law, Assembly Bill 313, allows these districts to be created to pay for things like highways, water treatment facilities, libraries, parks and port infrastructure among other uses. AB 313 would also exempt Long Beach Unified and Long Beach City College from losing their share of property taxes within a financing district.

Long Beach has entered into similar deals in the past few months to help finance two housing projects Downtown that sought to create more affordable units for middle-income households. Those deals could see the city eventually buy back the properties over the next few decades, and one deal was written so that the city did not forgo its share of property taxes over the life of the agreement.

Pisano said the project would operate like a public-private partnership, where it would be owned by the newly formed district but have an operator that would be decided through a request-for-proposal process. That could be the port, a private entity or a nonprofit organization, Pisano said. ■

# Boys & Girls Club provides well-rounded support for increased number of youth

Tess Kazenoff

The Boys & Girls Club of Long Beach is meeting the increased needs of students across Long Beach by engaging them in academic support and recreation.

Students ages 6 to 18 attend the Long Beach center, which is one of 4,700 locations across the country. However, every club is able to function independently, allowing each to evaluate the needs of its individual community.

At Boys & Girls Club, 90% of participants are lower-income, and the organization provides workshops and education focused on breaking the cycle of poverty.

While afternoons at the center always involve academic support and homework help, recreation and exposure to new activities is also emphasized to its participants.

Providing well-rounded support is central to the club’s mission, and kids participate in a new program each day, varying from sports, literacy clubs or art projects.

“Sometimes you need a little spark to get inside of you to show interest in something,” said events and development associate Erika Parrish. “If you’re not exposed to

it, you’re never going to know, so we like to include them and gently guide them into everything that we’re doing.”

This month the club’s basketball league is back up and running after a hiatus, and Parrish hopes the soccer league will soon follow.

“The more kids can find something positive to be engaged in, that is where their mentality will focus all the time,” said Parrish. “We want to show them everything that they can be capable of.”

Whether their futures lead to community college, a trade school, a four-year institution, or something else, kids at Boys & Girls Club are shown all the possibilities that are available to them, she said.

Students are able to speak with and seek mentorship from people in all types of fields, varying from mechanics and automobiles, to medical and law, all who demonstrate a clear path towards a career, Parrish said.

“When you feel like you’re stuck in a place and don’t have anywhere to go is where the trouble sets in,” said Parrish. “They just need a helping hand to show them what’s possible.”

While admittance to the club



Courtesy of the Boys & Girls Club of Long Beach

The Boys & Girls Club offers various education and career programs for each age group, through tutoring, mentoring, and helping students achieve their potential. Photo courtesy of Boys & Girls Club of Long Beach.

is only \$15 for the entire school year (with a highly discounted summer program available as well), funds can be a challenge for the organization, said Parrish, especially considering the rising costs as of late.

“We have the programs in place,” said Parrish. “In order to keep expanding them and allowing more children to come in, we just need the funds in place to sustain them at \$15 per member for a full school year with our doors open.”

During the pandemic, Boys & Girls Club was one of the few nonprofits to keep its doors entirely open, while extending its services

to children of first responders.

“Nothing’s worse than worrying about where your kid is or if they’re safe while you’re trying to take care of others,” said Parrish.

In addition, the club worked to recognize and address the mental health struggles facing many youth since the pandemic, she said.

As a response to the rising need, the club increased its recreation time and activities as well as its virtual mentoring services, ensuring connection with anyone who didn’t feel comfortable coming in person or couldn’t due to transportation issues.

“Now what we’re finding is things are getting stable, but our

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POPULAR CHOICE

Courtesy of the city of Long Beach

A rendering from the Freedom Village white paper shows an elevated track where cargo containers are transported using magnetic tracks.

## City Budget

Continued from page 14

of a lawsuit it’s facing for charging its Water Department fees to access city-owned water and sewer lines. The Water Department, in turn, passes those costs onto its customers.

Voters ultimately approved the practice by passing Measure M in 2018, which generates millions of dollars per year for the general fund, but it was challenged in court for violating a state law that mandates utility providers charge for only the cost of providing service.

An appeals court ruled against the city in December, and now the city is waiting for the California Supreme Court to hear its case in hopes it overturns the appellate court ruling that said that Measure M was unconstitutional.

If the city loses the case, or the court refuses to hear it, it would mean a loss of \$9 million per year going forward. The city would also have to pay back millions it has already spent. The sum could be

as high as \$42 million and could require the city to issue judgment bonds to pay back the money.

A smaller, temporary reduction to the city’s general fund will start this year when the city finally starts paying into a countywide homeless tax that the city has benefited from for the past six years but hasn’t contributed to because its local sales tax increase, Measure A, put Long Beach at the ceiling of allowable local taxes.

For the next four-plus years, Measure A will be reduced by 25% to allow for some of Long Beach’s sales tax revenue to feed into the county’s homelessness tax. For consumers, the sales tax rate will remain the same—the only difference being where the money is directed. The change is projected to cost the city’s general fund between \$10 million and \$16 million per year until September 2027.

Unfunded or underfunded programs like the city’s road repair plan, park maintenance and other obligations that have been deferred, though, still remain and total nearly \$3 billion.

The city must also figure out how it will comply with a new statewide organic recycling law that could require it to buy new trucks, hire new drivers and contract with a facility to process organic waste.

That investment is expected to be offset by “significant” rate increases, Yoon said.

### What’s next?

The budget is required to be adopted before the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1 and has traditionally been adopted in September.

The city started its budget cycle early this year and for the first time ever added community meetings before the proposed budget was released, which has traditionally happened in July.

The public meetings were eventually cut in half and moved online due to a winter surge of COVID-19 cases. At the meetings, residents called for greater funding for things like libraries, road repairs, and affordable housing while others argued whether the police departments should have more or less funding.

A community budget survey circulated earlier this year to gauge what residents’ priorities were before the budget is drawn up yielded 723 responses, most of which (56%) were from the three East Long Beach City Council districts, which are generally wealthier and whiter than the rest of the city.

A community activist criticized the survey during the March 8 City Council meeting for not being representative of the city as a whole. While just 28% of the city is White, according to the most recent census, 53% of survey respondents identified as White. Long Beach is nearly 43% Hispanic and 17% of survey respondents identified as Latino.

Feedback from the survey could help city officials determine where to focus funding in the next budget. An initial budget release should happen in the next few months followed by months of public meetings held by the City Council and its Budget Oversight Committee, where residents can weigh in on the proposed spending plan. ■



### Boys & Girls Club

Continued from page 21

kids are still having a harder time just kind of coping with it all,” said Parrish.

The club has also worked to combat the academic gap due to the pandemic, mostly impacting students’ math and reading skills, said Parrish.

“We’re always putting our kids first and foremost, and every generation has different needs and different wants, and we try to always be on the cutting edge of that so we can help support them,” said Parrish.

Tutors try to make learning fun at the center, incorporating movement and other active components to illustrate math concepts, always with the goal of keeping kids engaged.

The club generally connects to students through Long Beach Unified schools, although calls from social workers are also relatively common, as is word of mouth.

“Our kids have so much fun that they try to bring their friends over,” said Parrish.

Students are allowed to attend as often as they want and for as long as they want, although the goal is to keep them at the center

from 2 to 6 p.m., said Parrish, as that is most likely to keep them out of trouble.

“We have a location over by Cabrillo that has experienced some gang violence recently that’s escalating,” said Parrish. “Keeping these kids in the club is the safest place for them to be, so we have to make it super fun.”

On April 6, community members are invited to celebrate the club’s most accomplished high schoolers at the annual Youth of the Year event, which awards each finalist with scholarships. The winning candidate moves on to regional, state, and national events, with the opportunity to continue winning more scholarships.

“We’ve had candidates who have risen up from homelessness, assault, the foster care system, abuse . . . and through our programming and just because of the wonderful people that they are, are coming into their own,” said Parrish. “We would love to share that with the community and have them there to see the wonderful work that we do but see these amazing people who benefit from the help that they’ve been given.”

The Youth of the Year event is on April 6, at 6 p.m. at Hotel Maya. View more information at [bgclublb.org/YOY](http://bgclublb.org/YOY). ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A man walks by signage showcasing the new Mosaic branding for the Downtown shopping center formerly known as City Place and The Streets.

## Former City Place shopping center rebranded yet again

By Christian May-Suzuki

The shopping center formerly known as City Place—then The Streets and then City Place again—has yet another new name: Mosaic. A name change would be incomplete without new branding, which has been plastered on windows along Fourth Street between The Promenade and Long Beach Boulevard.

Creative firm Dean&Co announced the rebranding earlier this month in collaboration with property owners Turnbridge Equities, Waterford Property Group and Monument Square Investment.

Centered on establishing a new visual identity, the change was inspired by local art, according to Dean&Co co-founder Matt Dean. The name draws inspiration from “Recreation in Long Beach,” the 38-by-22-foot mosaic at Harvey Milk Park as well as other art from the area and input from community members—from residents to retail owners to security guards.

“It was vital for us to have an open, honest dialog with those quintessential stakeholders, to gain the key intel we needed to develop the new brand,” Dean said in an email.

The entire visual identity of the shopping center has been changed, according to Dean, including the logo, brand guidelines, on-site window signage, the website and social media pages, marketing brochures, story books and more.

While there have been no structural changes to the buildings within the center, which spans from Third Street to Sixth Street and Pine Avenue to Long Beach Boulevard, windows throughout the area have been covered by signs showing off the new design.

The rebrand comes as the property owners move to implement plans to demolish part of the shopping center for a mixed-use development. The nearly 50-year old Found Theater, which had been in the space since 2005, recently held its farewell party with a March 30 move-out date looming.

“Mosaic’s rebrand brings a bold, new vision of historic Downtown,” Dean said, “while also celebrating Long Beach’s eclectic culture.” ■

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Join the Catalina community and businesses by visiting [www.change.org/catalinaexpress](http://www.change.org/catalinaexpress) to sign an important petition NOW to help us protect Catalina Island’s economy and vital tourism industry!

Catalina Express, the essential ferry service that transports passengers to and from the Island, is facing new regulations from the California Air Resources Board (CARB). Under CARB’s current proposed rules, which would take effect in **2023**, Catalina Express ferries will again be required to modify the engines on all their vessels. The cost to repower an existing vessel is \$7 million but will displace approximately 50% of the passenger capacity. The cost to build a new vessel is approximately \$20 million, costing a combined total of upwards of \$120 million. State funding is needed to make this transition feasible. Without financial assistance from the State, these proposed rules will **significantly disrupt the transport of residents, visitors, and workers, while also negatively impacting transportation safety, efficiency, reliability, and affordability.**

Your voice makes a difference! As CARB plans to act on this important proposal in early Spring, express your support now for Catalina Express and share your concerns about CARB’s current proposed regulations that could harm Catalina Island tourism without new funding.

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Furnish and Deliver Gaskets	WD-17-22	03/24/2022
Queen Mary Lifeboat Disposition	RFP ED22-031	03/25/2022
Alamitos Tanks 19 & 20 Conversion Project (REO-0208)	WD-41-22	03/28/2022
Ford F-750 Flat Bed Tow Truck Car Carrier	ITB FS22-026	03/29/2022
Alamitos Tanks No. 8 & 10 Rehabilitation Project (EO-3558)	WD-34-22	03/29/2022
S-25 Sewer Lift Station Rehabilitation (SC-0367)	WD-40-22	03/29/2022
As Needed Professional Land Surveying Services	RFQ PW22-012	04/21/2022

[To receive notifications of bid opportunities, register with the City of Long Beach at www.longbeach.gov/purchasing](http://www.longbeach.gov/purchasing)  
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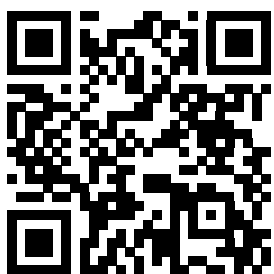
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