To save Community Hospital, LB leaders took a risky gamble

By Kelly Puente and Brandon Richardson

At Long Beach City Hall, it was code blue for Community Hospital. For nearly a century, Community had served generations of residents in East Long Beach. With its Spanish Colonial architecture and small-town feel, it seemed like a throwback in an age of mega hospitals and vast health care systems. But behind the scenes, it was facing the modern realities of hospital economics. Only once in its six years as operator of the city-owned hospital had health care giant MemorialCare turned a profit on the small, 158-bed acute care facility. Over the decades, numerous other Community Hospital leaseholders had failed to make a go of it, too.

In early 2018, MemorialCare informed Long Beach officials it was terminating its lease with the city rather than spend tens of millions of dollars more in seismic repairs mandated by the state. MemorialCare’s decision to bow out would represent a death knell for Community Hospital and its emergency room unless city officials could find a new operator. A determined legion of “save our hospital” stakeholders kept the

Community Hospital property must be offered to affordable housing developers, state says

By Brandon Richardson

Long Beach’s plan to pay back significant losses to the operator of Community Hospital by transferring ownership of the hospital property is in jeopardy after the state ruled it must be offered on the open market to

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anticipated, boosting budget in property taxes than strained inventory Housing prices, rents Long Beach’s vacant lot fee faces court challenge

By Christopher Mas-Suarez

A fee that Long Beach charges to owners of vacant lots is facing a court challenge.

Frederico Sparrevohn, who owns a vacant lot in the city, filed a lawsuit with the Los Angeles Superior Court last month seeking to invalidate the $380 annual fee. Toward Jarvis Taxpayers Association staff attorney Laura Dougherty is representing Sparrevohn in the suit.

Sparrevohn’s argument rests on Proposition 218, also known as the Right to Vote on Taxes Act, which added two new articles to the California Constitution that limited local governments’ ability to raise certain taxes without voter approval, particularly those pertaining to property ownership.

Long Beach, for its part, has not yet filed a response to Sparrevohn’s April 8 complaint in court. City officials declined to comment on the litigation.

But according to the city’s municipal code, the fee is necessary to protect neighborhoods and commercial areas from becoming blighted due to the lack of adequate maintenance and security of vacant lots and to establish minimum standards of accountability on the owners or other responsible parties of vacant lots in order to protect the health, safety and welfare of the community.

Long Beach approved the fee in 2017 as part of the city’s Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone program, which is meant to promote agricultural activities in vacant lots by providing tax breaks, including relief from the aforementioned fee.

The program serves a two-fold purpose for the city to encourage the cleanliness of vacant lots and promote needed agricultural activity in the city.

The lawsuit

Sparrevohn, in his complaint, argued that it’s unconstitutional for Long Beach to require the fee of property owners without voter approval.

His lawsuit comes after an unsuccessful March 15 hearing with the city’s Board of Examiners, Appeals, and Condemnation. In that appeal, Sparrevohn explained that he purchased the lot over a decade ago with the hopes of building a home on the land, but said he was blindsided by fees that made construction too expensive for him.

“The city put so many roadblocks in my way that I gave up,” the appeal said. “They said that to get the building permit and pay for other requirements would be over $15,000.”

Sparrevohn also outlined the cost he already pays to maintain the lot, including a monthly mowing service every two weeks and paying “close to $5,000 in property taxes every through the early 2010s, average rates ranged from 6.5% to as high as 16.5%, according to Freddie Mac. Interest rates cooling off the market at this point is healthy, Mascaro said, adding that the recent trajectory is not sustainable.

“Buyers are having to do really irresponsible things to get into homes or to do things that they normally wouldn’t do that are irresponsible to get into homes—removing contingencies and sometimes inspection,” Mascaro said. “Historically, you would never advise your client to do that.”

As the market normalizes, buyers’ agents will have more leverage and be able to negotiate more responsible deals, Mascaro said.

Nationwide, median housing prices have spiked since the onset of the pandemic, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In early 2020, the median sales price of a house in the U.S. was $264,900. By the end of 2021, that figure had soared to over $420,000.

According to a report by Inspection Support Network, more than 23% of home sales in the Los Angeles Metro area were for more than $600,000—the third most of major metros nationwide.

In March of this year, the median price of a home in Los Angeles County was $875,000, up nearly 15% compared to the same time last year according to Redfin.

“Personal experience, I’m checking my home value on Zillow and it hasn’t stopped going up,” said Paul Coulson, director of the Center for Real Estate at UC Irvine. “The house price surge is still out of control. It’s flattening out a bit.”

The continued velocity in sales and other indicators do not show any signs that the market is a bubble about to pop, Coulson said. If priced properly, Mascaro said all house types are selling well— from four-uppers to luxury homes. Homes under the $1 million mark, however, are the most sought after, he said.

The buyers are a mix of first-timers and people upgrading into larger homes, Mascaro said. Despite reports across the nation, housing inventory in Long Beach is limited as speculator properties bought up by corporations as investments.

“We’re insulated from everything,” Mascaro said, noting that Long Beach continues to be a haven for more affordable housing when compared to many other LA and Orange county cities.

Corporations certainly are

High demand and an inventory count to rise amid strained inventory

From single-family to apartments, high demand and a low inventory continue to push sale prices and rents up, local real estate experts say, but increasing interest rates should calm the market. Interest rates have gone up significantly,” Phil Mascaro, operating principle of First Team Realty in Long Beach, noted, noting that sale-props properties across the city are still receiving multiple offers, though not as many as in previous months.

Instead of receiving 30 offers for an appropriately priced property, Mascaro said he is seeing about 10. “They’re just flying off the shelf, but there is a little stink with days on market,” Mascaro added. Rather than seven to 10 days on the market, correctly priced properties are selling in about 15, he said.

Overpriced houses, however, are starting to push on the market.

Mascaro said: “It could be the kiss of death.”

Mascaro added: “Overpricing is a big mistake.”

The average interest rate for a 30-year fixed mortgage last year was less than 6%, data from Freddie Mac shows. Rates this year, however, have ballooned to around 6.5% as of April 26, according to Forbes. Even with the sharply increase, interest rates remain historically low, Mascaro said. From 1973
City receives $90M more in property taxes than anticipated, boosting budget

By Christian May-Szukic

Property tax revenue in Long Beach was significantly higher last year than officials expected—and it wasn’t because of a boost in residential real estate market.

The boost—which was almost five times more than the city expected—largely came thanks to an unexpected stream of revenues from reassessments in the city’s former Redevelopment Agency project areas. Those properties were targeted by the city’s Redevelopment Agency, which Gov. Jerry Brown shuttered in 2012, because they were in need of urban renewal.

The property tax revenue from those reassessments, which was the result of positive sales and improvement projects in areas like North Long Beach and Downtown, was one of the biggest contributors to a $2 million surplus in the overall general fund last fiscal year.

“Long Beach had a couple of large reassessments last fiscal year,” Revenue Management Officer Geraldine Alejo acknowledged it was an unusually productive year for those one-time payments, but she said there was no indication it was related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Property tax revenue, though, can vary significantly from one year to the next, for example, that could negatively impact the city’s overall budget moving forward, the following year’s revenue.

Assessment decisions that come too late in a fiscal year to be represented on that budget can be another major short-term source of unexpected revenues.

Generally, based on the way the city projects the budget, those surprise revenues are usually not positive. But it’s also possible for them to fall into the red. A successful appeal to a change in valuations from the Assessor’s office can compensate budget shortfalls in the long-term.

“There’s no indication that our 2022 budget is based on what we’re going to develop and to build up its low-density neighborhoods. The strategy would seemingly offer a win on two fronts: Single-family neighborhoods can largely maintain their character, and more construction in high-density areas could help bring down housing prices overall.

Because of that, Cowles said he believes the concessions so many people are already making—moving farther inland, say, for more space at a lower cost—are necessary, though not enough, no matter how Long Beach builds.

“We can’t satisfy everybody’s demand for everybody’s housing at affordable levels everywhere,” he said. “There will always be a tradeoff between location, price and the types of housing that people want to live in.”
By Jason Ruiz

Long Beach officials are hopeful that state money can fund the construction of up to 35 tiny homes and another motel conversion to quickly ramp up the amount of non-congregate shelter space—that is, shelter space that offers privacy for the people staying there—available in the city. Non-congregate shelters have proven more successful in convincing people experiencing homelessness to accept assistance, according to officials.

The City Council approved applications last month for up to $45 million in state funding that can be used for a multitude of purposes like converting non-residential buildings into residential space for those experiencing homelessness and acquiring hotels and motels, or building new homes.

Potential funding from the state is part of the Project Homekey initiative that the city and county have used to purchase multiple motels in the region to provide transitional housing for homeless people. If the city receives the funding it’s seeking, it could add between 300 and 500 rooms, according to Paul Duncan, the city’s homeless services bureau manager.

The tiny homes are proposed to be added at the Long Beach Multi-Service Center in West Long Beach, which would provide interim housing for adults experiencing chronic homelessness, meaning they’ve been homeless for more than a year and have some disabling condition, Duncan said in an interview.

The tiny homes and motel conversions offer small, individual living areas, which differ from the group shelters that can house dozens of people sleeping in the same room. The city has about 4,000 non-congregate units available between city-owned and leased Homekey sites, county-operated Homekey sites, and units that are able to be paid for through emergency motel vouchers.

“It has changed our ability in the way we’re able to engage with people who may not have been interested in what we were offering in the past,” Duncan said of the non-congregate shelter space the city already has.

The privacy and security that tiny homes provide can be life-changing, Duncan said, adding that the city is focusing on tiny home models that have their own restrooms attached.

The city is also converting a motel to create tiny homes specifically for adults experiencing chronic homelessness, meaning they’ve been homeless for more than a year and have some disabling condition.

The Multi-Service Center in Long Beach. (Courtesy of Inspection Support Network)

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Housing Prices

Continued on page 3

a bigger force in the market than they used to be,” Coulson said. “But there’s still not an overwhelming presence.”

Multifamily

The multifamily housing market is faring about the same—high demand and limited supply—Stepp Commercial Principal Principal Robert Stepp said. Similar to the single-family market, sale velocity for multifamily properties has slowed somewhat in 2022 due to increased interest rates.

Prices, however, remain strong, both for sales and rental rates, Stepp said. Over the past 12 months, asking rents have increased 6.5%, he said, “strongly rebounding from just 1.5% rent growth in the previous 12-month period.”

The January 2022 passage of Assembly Bill 1482, Stepp said, allows for rents to increase 5% plus the consumer price index. Recent inflation has contributed to the higher increase, he said.

The supply of rental units in Long Beach continues to lag behind demand and will continue to drive up prices, Stepp said. Many people seeking to purchase have been forced to remain in the rental market due to soaring home prices, he added. As a result, Stepp said the vacancy rate in Long Beach has reached a low of 3%, a decrease of 1.5% over the past 12 months.

And the city’s rental landscape is unlikely to change any time soon.

“While Long Beach has maintained a strong construction pipeline since 2016, most new rental inventory is in higher-end, four- and five-star product, where there is less demand,” Stepp said.

The vacancy rate for higher-end luxury units hovers around 8.5%, according to Stepp Commercial Senior Investment Associate Travis Traweek. Vacancy in low-income to moderate units, meanwhile, is at around 2.4%, which demonstrates a lack of affordable units in the region. Despite the reported population decline across the region, multifamily development remains at a deficit compared to demand due to “high construction costs, NIMBY sentiment and onerous permitting regulations, none of which seem to be going away soon,” Traweek added.

“Unless legislators commit to addressing the housing shortage in a meaningful way, California will continue to experience a housing shortage.”

Median home sale prices have dramatically increased since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Multi-Service Center in Long Beach.
What a new development on the 13-acre Elephant Lot would mean for the Grand Prix

By Jason Ruiz

The Aerocraft Grand Prix of Long Beach’s race weekend is officially canceled, but the decision has not taken the 13-acre lot by the Elephant Lot, something race organizers will be notified of the track, which would remain relatively unchanged.

Director Brian Ulaszewski said. “We diagramed it. The track was used to enforce Proposition 218. But it’s a pretty blatant violation of law.”

Under Proposition 218, local governments are also not allowed to increase these fees unless they are shown to directly correlate to the costs the city incurs. In Sparrevohn’s case, the complaint argues the fee is not directly correlated to any costs that Long Beach pays.

Looking forward

Despite the mixed results from previous complaints seeking to enforce Proposition 218, Dougherty said she was optimistic that Sparrevohn’s claim would be successful. “Well, I’m very optimistic about this case. This is definitely a property-related fee,” Dougherty said. “It could be well-intentioned, but it’s a pretty blatant violation of Prop. 218.”

However, the path to that potential success is uncertain. After a judicial conference on Aug. 8, in which lawyers from both sides will meet with the judge and each other to determine how to proceed, a judicial conference on Aug. 8, in which lawyers from both sides will meet with the judge and each other to determine how to proceed if Sparrevohn is not alone in his complaint. He has received more than 110 complaints about these fees, according to Dougherty, from Long Beach property owners. “There could be a lot of great ideas for property-related services,” she added. “Just make sure you do your polling and that it’s good enough to get approval of the property owners.”
Ace The Helpful Place

Real Estate May 3, 2022

BUSINESS JOURNAL

Grand Prix

Marina Green could offset the narrowing existing lanes to calm bike lanes and crosswalks and mobility elements like adding for state funding to help complete it. That project is estimated to cost $10 million, that the city has been planning for over 20 years. Drake Parks, which the city has to replace.

In two and renders portions of the chronic homelessness. leave because the real goal is to help situation, Duncan said there is no according to the memo.

There's no firm expectation for when the grant award could be announced, Duncan said, but if Long Beach gets the state money, it could come as soon as this month, which would set off a relatively short window to build housing out of a former Motel 6 near Cal State Long Beach since February 2021.

The homes could be built in as little as 60 to 90 days,<TAB> Tatum said.

Tiny Homes

Continued from page 6

Both are elements of the city's housing approach because the city doesn’t always have to be in its concept is that the Grand Prix Downtown Long Beach's shoreline. community's vision of the future of construction projects.

Before the June 6 City Council meeting that the City Council has been/acquiring space in other parts of the city for tiny home villages has not progressed. Deputy City Manager Linda Tatum said during the April 19 City Council meeting that the city is looking but has not identified another site outside of the Multi-Service Center.

It’s also not clear which motel the city could try to buy for conversion if it wins the grant money. The City Council has been meeting closed door sessions for months to discuss the possible acquisition of state-owned motels.

The list includes a few in Downtown like the Vagabond Inn and the Travelodge that is located next to the popular restaurant The Breakfast Bar. It also includes a Motel 6 near Cal State Long Beach City College and the Colonial Inn located next to Long Beach Poly High School.

The city has operated an unt Homekey site at the former Best Western in the Washington neighborhood where people began living in March 2021. Los Angeles County has run a 43-room interim housing operation out of a former Motel 6 near Cal State Long Beach since February 2021.

If they’re engaging with staff and trying to transition into a permanent situation, Duncan said, there is no real deadline on when they need to have the new goal is to help keep them from falling back into chronic homelessness.

An earlier request from Commissioner Al Hunter to look at acquiring space in other parts of the city for tiny home villages has not progressed. Deputy City Manager Linda Tatum said during the April 19 City Council meeting that the city is looking but has not identified another site outside of the Multi-Service Center.

I don’t often write about houses that have just been sold, but today I’m sort of drooling over this house that was on the market for the first time since it was built in 1978. And, anyway, it’s not likely too many readers are going to feel left out by the fact that I didn’t mention this house before it went on the late last month for $2.5 million by Listing Realtor Keith Muirhead.

The home at 8640 Lido Lane is a stunning Cape cod-style three-story home, and when I told Muirhead that I think it’s one of the best-looking homes in Naples, he said, “I’ve heard that about 10 times this year.”

The house is like the 36 neighboring homes along the so-called Gold Coast, or, as it’s even more extravagantly termed, Corso di Oro of Naples. Most of the homes were built in the late 1970s and 1980s (though one was built as recently as 2020) after the last remaining 3.5 acres of land in Naples was opened up for development.

Initially, early developers wanted to build downtown and luxury high-rise along the stretch of land that arches along the Alamitos Bay waterfront from The Toledo to Appian Way on a new street that would be called Lido Lane.

Not surprisingly, Neapolitan NIMBYs reacted angry and was being considered and argued that multi-family residences would overcrowd the area, bring congestion to Naples’ narrow streets and curtail access to the bay. Where these Beach Planning Department rejected that plan, J.C. Abbott, then president of the Naples Improvement Association, praised the department for restoring “the unique character of Naples.”

And so the Crown Dr was cut up into 37 lots with private boat docks that sold quickly, starting at about $3 million each, and the new residents erected what were, for the most part, more three-story homes—nabbed it and could be generously described as monstrous—as along the picturesque Lido Lane.

The home at 8640 Lido Lane is exceptionally attractive and tasteful. At just 2,953 square feet, it’s a mere diminutive residence on the Gold Coast, where the homes are routinely sui generis (though one was built as recently as 2020) after the last remaining 3.5 acres of land in Naples was opened up for development.

In addition to its four bedrooms and four baths, it has a very inviting sunroom at the front, that it would benefit from a look and feel of its surroundings and further it’s one of the best-looking homes in Naples.

The home on Lido Lane overlooks Overlook Park, or, sometimes still, called Naples Plaza, which brackets views from the house with its towering palms and gives the impression of a sweeping green space of the property, albeit one that locals and visitors often walk across or picnic on, particularly at sunsets. The property includes a private 40-foot U-shaped dock which Muirhead says can accommodate two large boats along with whatever other aqua toys you might have.

It’s equipped, of course, with a spacious kitchen with the expected high-end appliances. In addition to its four bedrooms and four baths, it has a very inviting sunroom at the front, that it would benefit from a look and feel of its surroundings and further it’s one of the best-looking homes in Naples.

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State approves Long Beach housing plan, but city has more work ahead to meet its goals

By Jason Ruiz

California officials have approved Long Beach’s plan for building new housing, but the city will still have to make room for another 10,000 units on a sped-up deadline thanks to a recently passed state law—or potentially be frozen out of state and federal funding sources.

Local officials concede they are unlikely to meet an Oct. 15 deadline for the additional units, but they are hopeful the state and federal governments will look favorably upon their efforts to achieve their overall housing goal of zoning for 26,500 units set by the Southern California Association of Governments, or SCAG.

“It’s our understanding that our work in good faith and making progress as expeditiously as possible will be looked well upon,” said Alison Spindler-Ruiz, the city’s acting planning bureau manager who worked closely on the city’s plan, called the Housing Element.

At stake is potentially millions in state and federal grants that would help the city build housing for those at or below 60% of the area median income, people experiencing homelessness or other housing needs. Those funds will become available in May.

But a major deadline looms, thanks to Assembly Bill 1398, which became law in September. The bill was intended to prevent cities from passing non-compliant housing plans to avoid penalties, with the hope of speeding up housing production. But it has put jurisdictions like Long Beach in an impossible situation of quickly rezoning large swaths of parcels, a process that requires public noticing, votes by local legislative bodies and months of gathering community input.

The law is so new that it’s unclear what enforcement will look like after Oct. 15. State housing officials said earlier this year that cities working toward compliance in good faith would factor into any kind of penalties, and those who are not “would be at the head of the line for enforcement.”

There is the possibility that a new bill could be introduced to clean up some of the unintended consequences brought on by AB 1398, but in the meantime, the city said it’s pleased to have gained compliance. Spindler-Ruiz said that Long Beach was one of the first of the 191 cities that make up the SCAG to achieve compliance with the state.

The city must meet the Oct. 15 deadline because it submitted a revised Housing Element right up against a February deadline, and the plan did not get approved in time. It will now have one year, instead of three years, to implement its new zoning plan.

The city, however, has just begun an ambitious rezoning effort in Central Long Beach, which it expects will take at least a year to complete. Known as the Zone In: City Core plan, the project area includes many of the parcels the city identified in the Housing Element as sites for potential future development. Those parcels will be rezoned over the next year and will make a significant dent in the city’s inventory of parcels that needs to be rezoned.

Spindler-Ruiz said the city had considered trying to zone the parcels within the area faster to try and meet the October deadline, but ultimately decided it was more appropriate to allow the community to give input on those parcels as part of the full year-long process.

After that process is complete, the city will move on to other areas like the Santa Fe Corridor, which has a temporary development ban until it can be appropriately rezoned.
It was a job for which he there were concerns about the...occurred before the council voted on...staff had warned would probably...property that it’s owned since the...of dollars for the operator’s losses,...after just 11 months, leaving Long...leased Community...agreement that shifted the financial...crushing consequences.

The company picked by the City...Even before the lease was inked,...Under pressure to get a deal,...“We were devastated when we...it's failing for a...from his efforts to save the hospital and its emergency services. He says he lost $5 million...it was a mental health facility, which would...area, Molina now says. He says he mostly...by Molina Healthcare, one of the...City officials acknowledge they...the number of reasons and [we were]...managed to see if there was a way we could keep it open,” says John...we were there...We were Community Hospital...But we were Community Hospital...occurred before the council voted on...that a matter no less important than...of the closure, transport times rose...By then, Community Hospital...MemorialCare to the state. From...the facility reported a net loss of nearly $47.2 million, only...penny in 2025 of $243,757. Bishop,...from the dais and the audience was...City officials acknowledge they...Molina’s late father founded Long Beach-based Molina Healthcare, one of the country's largest providers for Medicare patients and others with government-subsidized health insurance. Molina, a former chief financial officer of Molina Healthcare, embarked on an ambitious expansion and development in Long Beach. Among other eye-catching projects, Molina and Pacifi6 purchased the historic but deteriorating building known as Ocean Boulevard Hotel and converted it into a hip boutique hotel, a vision that remains unrealized. That same year, he also bought the Pacific Design Center. Molina was now the news coverage of his hometown. In recent interviews, Long Beach officials said that in the months after the MemorialCare closure, the department was able to “absorb” both the impact of just 2% being added to citywide transport and response times. In 2017, the last year MemorialCare operated Community Hospital, the average transport time was 5 minutes, according to fire officials. In 2019, the first full year of the closure, transport times rose to 9 minutes. Ambulance response times increased from 5–5.5 minutes to 9–9.5 minutes.

As for concerns that other emergency rooms would become more crowded with an influx of new patients, the numbers again told a different story. Representatives of the city’s four other hospitals with emergency departments—Memorial St. Mary, Lakewood Regional and Los Alamitos—told the Business Journal they experienced only a small spick in patients after the MemorialCare closure and that the impact was minimal.

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The Community Hospital story hit close to home; here’s why we felt compelled to confront it:

Our mission at the Long Beach Post and Long Beach Business Journal is to give the news impartially, “without fear or favor”—words famously written by the publisher of the New York Times in 1896. Holding news impartially, “without fear or favor”—our values laid out in the mission statement—we felt compelled to confront. One of the public figures worthy of news coverage, along with the editors at the Post and Business Journal, treated the people who donate in support of our mission, we could not shy away from an important topic just because it hit close to home.

We needed to approach and evaluate this story like any other. To do that, reporters Kelly Puente and Brandon Richardson, along with the help of the Post and Business Journal, treated Molina, Dowling and Sommers strictly as public figures worthy of news coverage, not as owners or directors of our board.

Molina, Dawling and Sommers have no involvement in our day-to-day editorial operation and no mechanism to directly influence our coverage. Still, pursuing this story—and not knowing what our reporting would uncover—put us in the position of potentially publishing unflattering information about the people who ultimately control our parent company. It was an awkward situation but one we felt compelled to confront because the values laid out in the mission statement of the Post and Business Journal is integrity, telling the truth “even when it’s hard” and “even when it affects our bottom line.”

If we were going to keep that promise to our readers and the hundreds of community members who donate in support of our mission, we could not shy away from an important topic just because it hit close to home.

The Community Hospital supporter holds up his sign during a hearing on a new operator for Community Hospital Long Beach on Thursday, May 27, 2021. (Photo by Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal)
Continued from page 17

By Thomas Modica, City Manager

It opened and then it closed. But it did open, and that was the goal the council wanted.

continued from page 17

The California Department of Public Health was concerned about understaffing and ordered it to shut down in less than 30 days. Longtime community supporters say the hospital was broken. Kathy Berry, Community’s former public relations director, says the staff had fewer than 200 hours trying to save the hospital and were left without when Molina’s MWN pulled back.

The hospital’s operator due to a 2019 law that made hospitals affordable housing developers. The Long Beach Fire Department officials say, the hospital was seeing the outcry among former employees equipment, Vasilomanolakis says. sending them elsewhere because itself was turning people away or to endure grueling waits.

fear they’d become infected or have away from emergency rooms out of pandemic was keeping many people they were seeing about 75 patients a

But the patient count also

"The fact of the matter is, when Memorial closed the emergency room, they were seeing about 73 patients a day," Molina says. "We needed to hit the ground running on this."

Officials say it’s hard to know why patients failed to materialize at Community but speculated the pandemic was keeping many people away from emergency rooms out of fear they’d become infected or have to endure grueling waits. But the patient count also remained low because the hospital itself was turning people away or sending them elsewhere because of staffing shortages and a lack of awareness, Vasilomanolakis says.

The hospital did not, for example, have a basic imaging device known as a C-arm, used for X-rays of bone fractures. Vasilomanolakis says it was ordered but geld held up in the pandemic’s massive supply chain backlog. The device arrived, he says, after the hospital had closed.

Vasilomanolakis says the hospital also did not have a fully implemented electronic patient record system. The medical staff had to hand-write in notations, which slowed down Community’s operations and "made everyone’s job more difficult," the cardiologist says. But ultimately, like Memorial before him, Molina says it was the personnel issues, which she stated required to be completed by 2025, that sunk its efforts. Molina says soaring construction costs during the pandemic pushed the hospital’s tax bill from around $30 million to $37 million. "With all those costs in mind, there just was no way to make it work.

And with that, a warning by the economic team before the City Council’s vote had come to pass. "Any unexpected high cost of the retrofit," it said in its lease analysis, could lead to a financial feasibility failure to keep the hospital open.

A massive disappointment!

In November, Molina gave a 90-day state-required notice that MWN was closing Community.

Dozens gathered for the ribbon-cutting ceremony and grand reopening of Community Hospital Long Beach on Thursday, May 27, 2021.

Dr. J. Maria Molina takes a City Council hearing about an operator of Community Hospital on June 18, 2018.

If the state finds the standing, the city must declare the Community Hospital property as surplus a period of 120 days and then notify any available to affordable housing developers registered with the state. Developers have 60 days to respond. Once bids have been made, the city is obligated to engage in "good faith negotiations" with developers for 90 days and submit "good faith negotiations" with the city is obligated to engage in the process. If the state finds the standing, the city must declare the Community Hospital property as surplus a period of 120 days and then notify any affordable housing developers registered with the state. Developers have 60 days to respond. Once bids have been made, the city is obligated to engage in "good faith negotiations" with developers for 90 days and submit "good faith negotiations" with the city is obligated to engage in the process.

"It opened and then it closed. But it did open, and that was the goal the council wanted." - Thomas Modica, City Manager
Long Beach unemployment drops to 5%

By Brandon Richardson

Unemployment in Long Beach dropped half a percentage point to 5% in March, according to data published by the California Employment Development Department, marking the eighth consecutive month the rate has decreased.

The unemployment rate was 10.7% in July of last year and has steadily decreased each month.

“We have seen the employment nearly restored to pre-pandemic levels,” Nick Schultz, executive director of the city’s Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network, said in an email to the Business Journal.

Long Beach unemployment was 4.8% in February 2020 before it ballooned amid the pandemic.

Year-over-year, the leisure and hospitality sector has increased countywide by 106,800, or 28%.

The sector is leading the state’s post-pandemic economic recovery, accounting for 50% of the total nonfarm job growth over the last year.

The county’s professional and business services sector saw a decrease of 4,800 jobs from February to March, which is its greatest month-over-month shrinkage, the state report reads. Trade, transportation and utilities reported the state’s largest, 6,600 jobs—4,800 in health care and social assistance, and 1,800 in educational services—from February to March, according to state data.

Leisure and hospitality, one of the leading sectors of the state, added 5,800 jobs last month.

“The strong job gains relative to the nation will continue, since California has more ground to recover compared to the rest of the country,” Taner Osman, research manager at Beacon Economics and the Center for Economic Forecasting, said in a statement, adding that rising interest rates and inflation are not expected to slow employment growth.

Long Beach Airport’s state-of-the-art ticketing lobby opens to the public May 4

By Christian May-Suzuki and Brandon Richardson

Long Beach Airport is ready to show off its $16 million new ticketing lobby.

City and airport officials gathered last week for the ribbon-cutting of the new facility, which opens for public use on May 4.

The lobby, which is part of the $410 million Phase II Terminal Area Improvement program, features state-of-the-art amenities built to accommodate the modern traveler.

The project, though, hasn’t been without its hurdles. Delays and rising costs had significant impacts on the construction process.

“We have successfully navigated the challenges brought by the pandemic through the partnership as a team,” Long Beach Airport Director Cynthia Guaday said at the April 27 ceremony.

The new 16,700-square-foot building offers new ticketing kiosks that are touchless outside of an initial input. It’s one example of how facilities continue to adapt to life in the wake of the pandemic.

“These improvements will enhance the features that make Long Beach Airport unparalleled as the transportation hub of choice of Southern California,” Long Beach Councilmember Daryl Supernaw said at the ceremony.

Unlike traditional terminals—which use designated spaces for particular airlines—the lobby accommodates airlines based on current demands for their services.

A new checked bag inspection system will also be installed to upgrade the facility as a way to further expedite the check-in process for departing travelers. The almost 5,000-foot facility will be connected directly to the ticketing lobby and feature new explosive detection systems to maximize safety.

“Our ticketing lobby and our state-of-the-art baggage inspection systems are great additions to what is already, in my opinion, the best and easiest place to fly in and out the entire state of California,” Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia said.

“Today really marks the beginning of the second phase of improvements to our airport.”

The celebration came shortly after airport officials announced that the number of passengers traveling through Long Beach Airport continued to rebound in March, spurred by spring vacationers.

A total of 270,700 people passed through the airport in March, an increase of over 115% compared to the same month last year, according to airport data.

“Commercial passenger” numbers, Guaday said in an email, “surpassed the previous month and doubled the number of March 2020.”

March 2020, of course, is when air travel came to a halt at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We’re pleased to see spring travelers enjoying our.waiting, convenient travel experience and making LGB their airport of choice,” Guaday added.

Passenger volumes, however, continue to trail behind pre-pandemic levels by about 6%. In March 2019, 183,730 people traveled through the small municipal airport.

The figure is also a 23% decrease compared to March 2018, airport data shows.

Long Beach’s recovery is faring better than national air travel overall, according to data from the U.S. Transportation Security Administration. Last month, 64.6 million people traveled through U.S. airports, a 63% increase from last year and a 19% increase from 2020. U.S. travel, however, continues to trail behind March 2019 figures by 12.4%, data shows.

Back in Long Beach, a total of 3,301 tons of cargo were handled at the airport, up nearly 28% from the same month last year but down 7.2% from 2020. Total air cargo tonnage remains nearly 28% below pre-pandemic levels, which is not surprising considering Fauli’s recent extension of its daily flight slot after more than 30 years of operating at the facility.
San Pedro Bay ports both record best quarters ever

By Christian May-Suárez

The San Pedro Bay ports keep breaking records.

The Port of Long Beach and Port of Los Angeles both recorded their best first quarters ever this year, the agencies announced last month, capped off by the most productive three months of this year marked the fourth quarter of the year.

In March, the Port of Los Angeles processed 595,874,400-foot equivalent units—the standard measure for shipping cargo—which marked its third consecutive monthly cargo record and third-best month ever, behind the 1,012,048 TEUs recorded in May and 981,294 TEUs in October 2020. Overall, the first quarter of 2022 was 5.3% higher for the Port than last year’s record.

And in Long Beach, the first three months of this year marked the port’s best quarter ever. Dockworkers moved a total of 2,460,695 TEUs, up 3.6% from last year’s first quarter and 7.4% more TEUs than the previous record in 2020. In March, the Port of Long Beach moved 863,355 TEUs, up 2.7% from the previous record for March, which was set last year.

“Our dockworkers should be commended for a successful March by going above and beyond to keep goods moving,” Long Beach Harbor Commission President Steven Neal said in a statement. “Our partnerships with labor industry continue to make us a leader in trans-Pacific trade.”

Imports were a major part of the increase in Long Beach, where workers moved 1,206,949 TEUs in the first quarter, a 5.4% increase over the same period last year. It also barely eclipsed the 1,310,332 TEUs imported in the port’s third-quarter of 2021.

Imports will continue to rise as we continue to clear the line of ships waiting to enter our Port and move containers off the docks,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement. “Collaborating with our industry stakeholders has led to notable improvements across the supply chain.”

Exports, meanwhile, were down 5.4% from last year’s first quarter, at 1,204,747 TEUs, while exports were down by about 10.5%, to 317,409 TEUs. Imports have now decliner and are down by 32% last year, in July of the last 43 months at Los Angeles’ port.

The updated cargo data was released as part of a project supported by the Port of Long Beach, which took one step closer to becoming a reality. The U.S. Maritime Administration issued its final environmental impact statement for the port’s proposed Pier B On-Dock Support Facility last month, clearing the way to claim federal funding for the project.

While the Maritime Administration awarded $25.7 million to the port for the project late last year, the funds could not be disbursed until the agency formally approved the project with its environmental impact statement.

“This allows us to receive those federal funds, while we continue to clear the line of ships waiting to enter our Port and move containers off the docks,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement. “Collaborating with our industry stakeholders has led to notable improvements across the supply chain.”

San Pedro Bay’s organic recycling program expands to all commercial refuse accounts in 2023

By Brandon Richardson

Long Beach keeps mask mandate in place on public transit

By Brandon Richardson

Despite the recent decision by a federal judge in Florida, Long Beach local health agencies, however, disputes the CDC’s order, which includes the Port of Long Beach, and will remain in place unless the agency formally approves the project with its environmental impact statement.

One of Rocket Lab’s Electron spacecraft prepares for launch.

Rock Lab plans for 1st launch from U.S. soil

By Brandon Richardson

Earth orbit across missions beginning later this year, the Long Beach rocket manufacturer and launch service provider announced last month.

The first of these three missions will be a rideshare carrying three HawkEye satellites among others. It is slated to be Rocket Lab’s inaugural Electron rocket launch from the firm’s Launch Complex 1 on Wallops Island, Virginia—the company’s first launch on U.S. soil. Rocket Lab’s Launch Complex 1 is located in New Zealand.

The rideshare mission will launch no earlier than December, the company announced through the port in November, while the Port of Long Beach is scheduled to launch its first satellite in March 2023.

Rocket Lab provides the flexibility we need to fulfill our mission and our mandate to include everyone’s voices,” said Long Beach’s Deputy Mayor Bob Avedisian in a statement. “We are committed to providing comprehensive access to space and giving everyone a voice in the future of space exploration.”
Long Beach is determining how to spend HUD funds over the next 5 years—and changes could be coming

By Christian May-Suzuki

Changes may be coming to the way Long Beach spends its annual allotment of funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Long Beach is in the midst of updating its Consolidated Plan, a five-year document that serves as part of the application process for HUD funds, which city officials say will total over $8 million this year. Final numbers have not yet been released by HUD.

The city spends the money on a variety of programs to help support economically disadvantaged communities, including grants for small businesses, housing projects and repairs to public spaces. But during a City Council study session late last month, City Councilmember Rich Richardson cast more critical attention on some aspects of the city’s past use of the funds—and city officials have indicated that the draft documents released for public review and comment this month could reflect some of that feedback.

Specifically, Richardson pointed to business grants, which have historically been capped at $2,000. Richardson said those grants could be more effective if they weren’t so thinly spread.

“Like a lot of locals, I was frustrated when I learned, that the streets were $2,000 then, and I think they’re still $2,000 now,” Richardson said during the session. “I just don’t see the impact in an area.”

City staff didn’t dive into specifics about the grants during the meeting, but documents show that 119 startups and businesses were awarded a total of $45,300 in 2021. And another $500,000 in Consolidated Plan spending, in Richardson’s eyes, has been the lack of support for the city’s Business Improvement Districts. While Long Beach does work with BIDs as part of the plan’s conceptualization and development, BIDs should not only be consulted, but also considered for direct financial support.

“Some of these BIDs, they could use the money,” Richardson said. While city staff did not directly respond to the councilmember’s comments at the time, a statement from the Development Services Department, Housing and Neighborhood Services Bureau following the meeting said the council received “positive feedback” in particular from the council.

“When finalizing the draft Consolidated Plan, staff will be taking into consideration the comments and suggestions from all of the community meetings, the council session and study the 40 in public hearing held by the Long Beach Community Investment Co.,” the bureau’s statement said.

The city’s high costs were also discussed, however, in the Housing and Urban Development's $2,000 limit to state estimates for use “to rehabilitate, preserve, and continue to operate emergency shelters and transitional shelters, provide essential social services, and prevent homelessness,” according to the HUD Exchange website.

The draft Consolidated Plan will be published May 14 and available for public review and comment for 30 days. There will be a final public hearing with the Long Beach Community Investment Co. on June 15, and the City Council is slated to accept the plan in July.

Punk rock coffee shop Rad Coffee opens in Bixby Knolls

By Chastity Jensen

Even if you’ve never tried Rad Coffee’s bone-shakingly intense drinks, there’s a good chance you’ve gotten a glimpse of the company’s eye-catching skull logo or seen the viral video that introduced millions of people to one of its newest outlets, often topped with colored whipped cream and bits of cereal like Lucky Charms and Cheerios.

The punk-rocker-themed beverage company’s logo has been around since 2015, and its new location—the third in the Los Angeles area—opened on the outskirts of Long Beach, taking over the Atlantic Avenue storefront that used to house Donut Bar.

The new location—the third in addition to Upland and Corona—was

Under HUD guidelines, households that are low income can receive up to $90,000 in low-interest federal loans. A typical median income—meaning up to $86,720 for a family of one or $112,940 for a family of four—is considered low income. Most of the eligible communities in Long Beach, Central and West Long Beach. The HOME Program, meanwhile, is estimated to bring about $68,000 to Long Beach this year. HOME funds must be spent on creating and maintaining affordable housing.

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Abandoning the city’s oil production will be an expensive and long process that could include years of decommissioning wells—and then continued work to ensure Long Beach’s surface operations are not affected after it halts oil production, something that’s expected to happen in 2025.

Long Beach has a projected $537 million in costs to seal up wells that are currently sized or idle but could produce. Abandoning the wells could take between three and five years, and that could be followed by as many as 15 years of continued intake water into the ground under the city to ensure it remains stable.

The city plans to end oil production in 2025, and has about $4.3 million set aside for that purpose. Abandoning wells could cost the city $90,000 to $250,000 each. Long Beach oil wells include 410 wells located across 14 oil fields.

In 2015, the city’s goal of ending oil production was set to 2025. As of 2019, 150 wells were still operating, but the city has indicated its plan to end oil production by 2025.

The city is also still looking for a site that can handle processing all the residual assets. While the state law requires cities to comply with the new organic recycling program in southern California, in particular lacks the existing infrastructure to process organics waste separately from other trash. Many communities in southern California only handle food scraps or yard waste, not both.

The city has already found a site in Los Angeles County but the city is still looking for a location that can provide service to every city in the region, sources say. The city will still need a disposal site separate from Long Beach’s, as it’s set up to handle only food waste.

With oil production expected to continue through at least 2025, the city plans to continue to produce oil to afford to cover the costs ahead of them.

By Christian May-Suzuki

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Continued from page 24

Rad Coffee, which has its own parking, opened last week on the 3502 block of Atlantic Avenue.

Jade Valore, one of the co-owners, said the concept was born from a desire to create a unique style that clicks so well with the city, said co-owner Jade Valore.

The shop features a similar ambiance to Rad’s other locations—lots of horror movie posters, concert flyer memorabilia and skateboard decks on the wall. Jade Valore said this location feels more retro thanks to the checkered flooring and neon-green walls. It also features a gaming area dubbed the “horrorcade,” a collection of horror-themed pinball machines that is a popular feature in the Covina store.

And then there’s the coffee. Bright, sweet, and powerfully caffeinated. “The Great White,” for instance, is a four-shot espresso concoction with cold brew concentrate, white mocha, and organic almond and caramel sauces. Patrons can also opt to pour their drink over ice and top it with “Bonea Brew,” which adds another two shots of espresso and more cream.

But where Jade believes she struck marketing gold was with her idea to create an eye-catching skull logo. A horror fanatic who dreamed of directing movies herself, the morbid theme fit perfectly for Jade, but it was unheard of in the world of coffee.

“Nobody had a skeleton logo. Nobody did. That was a really big deal for us,” Jade said.

But it was Rad Coffee’s creative take on blended drinks that, arguably, propelled the independent coffee shop to the heights of its popularity. In 2018, Rad Coffee caught the attention of Business Insider for its uniquely topped and colorful blended drinks.

The video Business Insider published was short, only 35 seconds, but it catapulted the business into the spotlight.

“It got over 20 million views and the rest was history,” Jade recalled.

“I mean, we had lines down the street. That was a pivotal point in Rad Coffee’s life.”

In 2018 the couple started their feature on Upland, a Necessary move due to high demand, and just last year they opened their downtown Covina location. They also were finally able to achieve their initial idea of a coffee truck, which travels to various cities around Southern California— including Lakewood and Whittier, where the couple was able to test the demand in the Long Beach area before committing to the Britty Rolls shop.

Last year Jade made the 2021 Forbes 30 under 30 list for Rad Coffee. The company, Jade said, made almost $8 million in 2020.

“I always wanted people to know that we did not come from money. Nobody gave us a ticket. We worked our butts off,” Jade said. “It’s really important (to us) for people to know that there are two young people out there making a difference in the coffee world.”

Rad Coffee opened at 3502 Atlantic Ave. on April 22 under limited hours from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., until May 8 when hours of operation will be from 6 a.m. to midnight every day.

San Pedro Bay Ports

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