Mayor Rex Richardson stands on Alamitos Beach in Downtown. Richardson discussed his first 11 months in office in a Q&A with the Business Journal (see page 3).

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal
Mayor Q&A

Mayor Rex Richardson reflects on 11 months in office

Philanthropy

Musica Angelica is bringing a free concert series to the Long Beach Public Library

Real Estate

One key thing is shelter capacity. Immediately looking for more space is important. We have to have permanent shelter. Now we’re north of 1,600 beds. We were able to get the Rescue Mission acquired with a great partner, which added to our capacity not only for ongoing shelter but a winter shelter. Every year, it’s been woeful. We’re at our winter limits already. Where you put the winter shelter. Now we run there to have that right again.

The other big part of this is outreach. Many of these folks have their own lawsuit. But the big city with our own health department and containment of care, and we do homeless outreach. But it wasn’t sufficient for the amount of encampments and street-level homelessness. So we expanded that. At the beginning of January, people still had to go to the Multi-Service Center. We put that on schools. We just rolled out our second Mobile Access Center that brings people out to help address some of the chronic homelessness issues. That’s helpful.

We’ve got to show progress on unsheltered homelessness by adding additional capacity. Tiny homes. For example: 33 may not be a big number but it’s important to those 33 families. But tiny homes are an experiment. If it works, you scale it. So it’s important to get right. [Previously expected to open this year, the city announced a new location for the tiny home project at the southeast corner of Spring Street and California Avenue, slated for a 2023 opening.]

By expanding that capacity that allows us to start thinking about how we address the next causes of the issues. We can’t live in a perpetual state of emergency, we have to start addressing root causes.

LBBJ: What is the city doing to address the root causes of homelessness such as mental illness, addiction and poverty?

RR: Moving forward, we’re gonna have to be able to produce housing faster. We found out that now we can approve within affordable housing at five and 10-year approvals. That’s great.

The progress on housing approvals across the nine jurisdictions combined. It’s not close. Our streamlining processes are working. But we have to answer the big question of subsidy. We basically

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Continued on page 4

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Q&A: Mayor Rex Richardson reflects on 11 months in office

Mayor Rex Richardson speaks during an economic forum at the Convention Center.

Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson, speaks during an economic forum at the Convention Center.

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Musica Angelica is bringing a free concert series to the Long Beach Public Library

By Chantay Jensen

This season, Musica Angelica is bringing its Baroque orchestra out of the concert hall and into a quintessential public space: The Long Beach Public Library.

The free Community Concert monthly series will begin Dec. 1 at the Billie Jean King Main Library before it’s offered at other branches across the city.

The concerts will offer the public a rare, up-close experience with the orchestra’s world-class musicians. For a show that might normally cost anywhere from $25 to $45, attendees will get access to the only local Baroque orchestra performing with period instruments free of charge.

“It’s a way to bring the art form directly to the community, and we feel that libraries are an ideal place because they’re a kind of meeting place for a lot of people,” said Musica Angelica Executive Director Martin B. Haynes.

“We think that’s just a fabulous way to bring period instruments playing directly to the community because there’s big issues about access to the arts.”

The new Community Concert series marks a sort of aspirational bridging for the 50-year-old orchestra, hitting their educational outreach, diversity and accessibility goals. The hour-long show will also include a lecture for both adults and children to enjoy.

The inaugural show will be led by Musica Angelica’s principal cellist Alexa Haynes-Pilón, a Baroque multi-instrumentalist who has performed with a slew of distinguished ensembles across North America and Europe. Among her many career points, her performance for animal gut-stringed cellos (the traditional practice for virtuosi) also made for a fitting recording credit on the grammy-winning television series “Hannibal.”

The Canadian-born musician is also quite the historian of early Baroque cello music. Her doctoral research at the University of Southern California zeroed in on Italian components from ensembles in Spain and Italy and works from Moderna, Ferrara and Bologna.

At the Community Concert on Dec. 1, she’ll be performing music from Giovanni Gabrieli, Giuseppe Colombi, Achille Galli and Tomaso Antonio Vitali — all of whom she says created music for cellos that’s well-suited for first-time listeners.

“These are some of the first guys to kind of dive into unaccompanied cello repertoire so it’s a lot more approachable because a lot of pieces are easy,” she said. “So, especially if there are children in the audience having a two- or three-minute piece is a bit more approachable.”

Audiences are not expected to know about 15 minutes of music. Children will also be given coloring materials and asked to draw whatever the music inspires.

In keeping with the orchestra’s ethos, Haynes-Pilón will perform with the audience — a replica Montagu cello, “which means it’s a 17th-century, it’s a style which gives you a deeper, more resonant sound,” she said. Her orchestras, she said, are a 17th-century model, crafted by English luthier John Morris in 1730, stay at her side during all performances.

“I have to buy its own seat for it,” she said, referring to the instrument that travels with her.

The other half of the program will include a lecture and audience and answer portion, the part Haynes-Pilón says will be the most rewarding.

‘Last opportunity’: What you need to know about giving to local nonprofits before the new year

By Alicia Robinson

Anyone who’s given to a charity may feel a bit overwhelmed this time of year with opportunities to donate. Thanksgiving meals, holiday gifts or just plain cash — and there’s a reason for that.

This year is an important time for nonprofits as they strive to reach certain goals and fulfill their missions up and beyond Dec. 31.

For those who work or volunteer for nonprofits and those who just want to kick a few extra dollars to a cause they care about, leaders of two Long Beach nonprofits have some advice for how to approach the season.

“The year end is significant because it’s the last opportunity that charities have to meet their annual fundraising goals,” he said. “And it also helps them raise the money they need to continue their activities for the next year, Long Beach Community Foundation CEO Marcelle Epley said.

The foundation provides grants to support local nonprofits and helps donors manage their contributions.

This is also a time of year when organizations review what they’ve been doing so supporters know how their donations were used and be persuaded to give a little more, said Maia Leigh Berry, executive director of the Nonprofit Partnership, an organization that offers resources such as planning help and leadership training for charities.

Some advise for nonprofits. Thank whoever has already given and show them the impact of their gifts with stories of how it served the community, Berry said, adding, “reach donors where they are, whether that’s on social media or even email, phone call or letter.”

Those who want to donate and are looking to have the greatest impact here in Long Beach should think about a time when they needed assistance — because we all did at some point, Epley said — and what kinds of help would have made a difference.

Where to give

For those who want to give before the year’s end, it can feel daunting to find and choose an organization to donate to. According to Berry, Long Beach

Gives can be a good place to start. Although the annual campaign ended in September — raising more than $2 million for 24 nonprofits — its website (longbeachgives.com) is still active and can be used to search for local charities by service or by City Council District. People can contact the organizations directly for information to donate directly. For those looking to help struggling families and the city’s unsheltered community, Epley suggested looking into Urban Community Outreach and Long Beach Community Table. Both nonprofits are a resource for food and clothing for those in need and are among local organizations working with the most vulnerable residents, she said.

Beyond these needs such as housing and food, Berry and Epley said organizations that serve youth particularly with mental health, learning loss from school disruptions, and activities and cultural programs are struggling to recover from the pandemic and meet existing demand. On the Long Beach Give website, there are 14 of these organizations listed.

The Community Foundation website also organizes funds people can give to the cause they benefit, such as education, animals and the environment.

For those who don’t have a sizeable salary or stock portfolios but still want to make a difference in their community, Epley said that no donation amount is insignificant because nonprofits work to stretch those funds as far as possible.

“Every person who’s making a charitable donation should feel really good about their donation,” she said.

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November 2023
CSULB aims to raise $74K for Giving Tuesday to mark the university’s 74th anniversary

By Marissa Tran

Cal State Long Beach’s 74 Foundation, a philanthropic branch of the university, is holding a campaign to raise money for scholarships, educational programs and campus renovations that will culminate on Giving Tuesday, Nov. 28.

The university has an internal goal to raise $74,000 to mark the institution’s 74th anniversary this year, said Christopher Reece, associate vice president of university relations.

“Every Giving Tuesday we set out on a really space where we want to reestablish relationships and show them all the different ways in which they can give back to the institution, give back to the students of today,” Reece said.

Reece said the campaign will fund three key scholarships per college, such as the 100+ Women Strong Scholarship through the College of Engineering and the Social Justice in Education Endowment in the College of Education.

Money will also go toward general scholarships such as the Catalyst for Change Scholarship, designed for students who want to impact racial and social justice.

Funding will also go to Beach athletics and the departments of continuing education and professional development.

CSULB’s Giving Tuesday is part of a larger effort to raise $875 million through the No Barriers campaign, launched in 2022 to help promote social mobility, institutional change and “elevate” baseline giving significantly.

“It’s time for us, an institution, to take a big leap up from where we were before,” said Reece. “The biggest step up is new endowments, new scholarships, new programs launched.”

The No Barriers campaign came after the university’s 2020 Strategic Plan identified institutional priorities and a Master Plan for campus renovation. Reece said he could not disclose how much money the campaign has raised but said the university was closing in on its goal.

Giving Tuesday is an internationally recognized day of philanthropy and charity. Donations during CSULB’s own Giving Tuesday come from alumni, relatives of alumni, faculty and staff, interested community members, and nonprofit leaders, among others.

Last year, the university raised more than $180,000 according to CSULB’s website and during the pandemic raised funds focusing on combatting food insecurity among students. The university will also hold its Beach Day of Giving in the spring.

Musica Angelica

Continued from page 6

“It’s all about accessibility, and you don’t even get that in a big concert hall because it’s the stage and the audience. You don’t get that kind of connection,” she said. “For the younger generations, it’s about planting that seed and sparking the imagination and allowing them to be curious and ask questions.”

“When I’m retired, I just want to know that maybe one of those outreach concerts got someone to start playing because they were excited about what they saw.”

Community Concerts with Haynes-Pilten will start at 5 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 2 at the Miller Room at the Bellie Jean King Main Library. The monthly concert series will continue weekly through March and through April with local artists scheduled at the L.A. Altos Neighborhood Library, the Dana Neighborhood Library and Michelle Obama Public Library.
Long Beach property values are up, which likely means more tax revenue for the city

The Los Angeles County Assessor determined the total value of all properties in the city for 2023 went up 6.8% over the previous year.

By Alicia Robinson

Long Beach’s general fund will likely see growth in its largest source of income this year: property taxes, after the Los Angeles County Assessor’s latest update to the property tax rolls.

Mayor Alejo recently closed out the rolls for 2023 (the county’s fiscal years run June 30 to July 1), and he announced this week that Long Beach’s total assessed value—the value determined by the city—rose by 6.8% since 2022, reaching $74.8 billion.

Properties are taxed based on their assessed value, with the tax money going to the county, cities, school districts and other agencies that serve the public.

In Long Beach’s last fiscal year, the city estimated it would receive about $2.4 billion from property taxes.

That constituted more than 50% of revenue to the general fund, which pays for basics such as police, paramedics, parks and street paving.

Other than dips in 2009 and 2020 related to the housing crash, the city’s total valuation has trended steadily upward for nearly two decades, according to data provided by the assessor’s office. Long Beach’s assessed value grew from 2012 to 2023 saw in largest year-over-year increase since 2009, and it beat the county’s overall 5.5% growth as well as the cities of Bellflower (up 5.4%), Lakewood (up 4.8%) and Signal Hill (up 4.7%).

Thanks to Proposition 13, any increases in California property assessments are capped at 2% a year, regardless of what happens in the larger market. But values get reassessed when properties are sold—the biggest growth in Long Beach and other cities, Prang said—and when new construction is completed.

That “avalanche of values” is what has led to continued increases in property taxes, said the city’s fiscal 2014 budget anticipates about 5% growth in property tax revenues, and Alejo said seeing that number tick upward is even more important as oil revenue continues to dry up.

Both Prang and Alejo said it’s a challenge to predict future property tax activity because the data they have is backward-looking and then’s lag time between when annual assessments are done, than tax bills are sent, and when the payments are due. However, Prang said he’s seen fairly consistent growth, though less than the county and many cities saw this year.

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PRICEY NEW APARTMENTS IN DOWNTOWN ARE ALREADY NEARLY FULL; WHAT THAT SAYS ABOUT OUR HOUSING MARKET

Nearly all of the new residential towers and low-rises popping up around Downtown Long Beach are almost full—and it happened fast.

Even with the relatively high prices compared to the rest of the city, the new skyscrapers and high-end residential buildings have had no problem finding tenants. In fact, according to the Downtown Long Beach Alliance’s most recent economic profile, the 22 properties built in the area since 2010 were already 95% full. Out of 3,492 new units listed, only 342 were unoccupied.

Even one of the newest buildings, the 432-unit Omni East Village, which just opened this February, is already 95.6% full, Austin Metoyer, president and CEO of the Downtown Long Beach Alliance, recently told me.

“People are moving into Downtown to fill these residential buildings that are going up,” Austin said. The Magnolia building, which opened last May, was almost half full in only three months, with 46% of its units rented out by July of that year. That building now sits at a 96.5% occupancy rate with 137 of 142 homes leased.

Even the Shoreline Gateway tower, with some of the highest rents in the city, is almost 95% full.

Part of why there’s so much demand for new housing now is because the city hasn’t seen enough construction to keep pace with demand for the last 30 years. Between 1991 and 2016, the city of Long Beach never permitted the construction of more than 1,000 new homes in a year, which is thousands less than the state said were needed to keep up with housing needs.

That lack of excess housing, of course, had a direct impact on rising rents.

“The biggest driver of rents next quarter is vacancy in the previous quarter, so when vacancy is low, rents go up,” said Richard Green, director of the Los Angeles Trade Development Center and co-author of the 2022 Casden Multifamily Forecast Report.

But studies have shown that adding supply, even on the high end of the market, helps prevent rents from growing.

“Most people believe there are separate markets for new ‘luxury’ apartments, single-family homes, and lower rent, older buildings,” said Shane Phillips of the UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. But, “Research shows these are all part of the same market, and when you change one part it affects the whole market.”

“A new apartment building [even] in a lower- or middle-income area, leads to lower rent growth in surrounding buildings because of increased competition,” Phillips said, echoing the report from the Center he authored in 2021.

And, he said, “Not building housing doesn’t stop people from moving to a place.”

We’re gonna have somewhere between 1,500 to 2,000 units come online in the next few years,” Metoyer, the ISLA CEO, said. “And that could bring down some of these rents that we’re seeing because of the additional supply.”

Already in the pipeline are more than 1,000 new homes in Long Beach by 2029, there’s sure to be more developments on the way.

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In fact, rent prices are down 5.1% in Long Beach citywide after the construction of more than 1,200 new units in 2022.

As long as buildings are filling up, the best way to stop runaway rent growth could be with more construction. And with a state mandate to plan for more than 26,000 new homes in Long Beach by 2029, there’s sure to be more developments on the way.

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People imagine because market-rate units are expensive that people are coming from somewhere else, but we have lots of rich people here,” he said. “People have kids, people graduate, people want to move out and get their own space. If we don’t create these spaces there’s just more demand for a fixed stock of housing.”

This means all the new units built in the past few years have likely helped insulate existing buildings from rent hikes, even as we’ve attracted hundreds of new high-paying jobs in the aerospace and health care sectors.

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Varden Hotel may be demolished after all

By Jason Ruiz

A months-long battle over whether the Dolly Varden Hotel will be demolished may have ended at a meeting on Nov. 2, after the Long Beach Planning Commission sided with a developer on their appeal to make way for a new eight-story housing development.

A developer is looking to knock down the 90-year-old hotel down to make room for an eight-story, 145-unit apartment building with an underground parking garage. The residential project would also save the hotel’s historic rooftop sign and place it on top of the new building.

For months, questions over whether the three-story hotel and its sign should be preserved have prevented the project from moving forward.

The appeal was filed after the city’s Cultural Heritage Commission said in July that the project could move forward if the city’s Cultural Heritage Commission said in July that the project could move forward if the project not feasible,” said Ryan Caldera, a senior project manager with Studio 111, which designed the building.

The Planning Commission’s decision on the appeal is final, according to city officials. The project had been stalled at the Cultural Heritage Commission because it needed to sign off on what would happen to the historic Dolly Varden sign atop the hotel, which was declared historic in 1995.

The hotel building, however, was never given the same designation, despite multiple assessments of its historic value; one presented to the Cultural Heritage Commission in June said the hotel was not historically significant.

The hotel survived the 1933 earthquake, and its neon sign boasting a “Bath in Every Room” has lit up Pacific Avenue for decades. Conservationists had pushed to preserve both, citing the Art Deco design and ties to important people in the city’s past.

The project requires demolition of the three-story hotel and removal of its historic rooftop sign, which will be refurbished and placed on the seventh-floor rooftop deck of the new residential building. Planning commissioners also approved the project’s entitlements at the Nov. 2 meeting in a separate vote.

Before voting to approve the appeal, Commissioner Jane Templin asked whether the three-story hotel and its sign should be preserved (emphasis added).

“I think the decision is final,” said Planning Commission chair Richard Lewis. “I’m not sure what to make of it.”

The Planning Commission’s decision on the appeal is final, according to city officials.

Continued on page 16
21-story residential tower approved for former Long Beach Cafe site

Downtown Long Beach could get a new residential tower after the Planning Commission approved plans for a 21-story, 203-unit residential building at the site of the former Long Beach Cafe. The building will include 13 studios, two one-bedroom units, 96 two-bedroom units and a mix of studio units (16), one-bedroom (60) and two-bedroom units (12), in accordance with a land use plan approved by the developer. It would replace the existing Long Beach Cafe, which has been owned by the Seminole tribe since 2009.

The project will include 429 rooms, 50,000 square feet of conference and meeting space, an outdoor pool and a three-story atrium. The outdoor rooftop bar and lounge will be the highest on the West Coast, according to a city announcement.

The glass tower will include 16 floors, 50,000 square feet of dining and meeting space as well as an outdoor pool and a three-story atrium. The outdoor rooftop bar and lounge will be the highest on the West Coast, according to a city announcement.

The contract will include a bonus if the project's 203 units account for the day-to-day life of people who are going to live in and around this building, Broughton said.

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Long Beach postpones vote on street vendor law

By Jesse Ruiz

Street vendors will eventually have a pathway to legally operate in Long Beach, but vendors will have to wait at least until next month before they know what the rules will be after the City Council asked Nov. 14 for more changes to the proposed local ordinance.

The rules are being crafted because of a new state law, Senate Bill 946, which went into effect in 2019 and decentralized street vending but also allowed cities to set safety and health rules. The rules can’t be crafted to protect brick-and-mortar businesses or other interests.

Council members were scheduled to vote Nov. 14 on the ordinance, but they asked for more changes to the proposed rules including how much money the city would provide to subsidize permits and insurance for vendors, and where flashing signs would be allowed to be used by vendors.

“The barriers to get compliant, we need to limit, and lower them so we get more folks in on the pathway to compliance,” said Mayor Rex Richardson.

The proposed fees to get started outlined by vendors who showed up to the Nov. 14 meeting said that the fees could be too high for people who are already not making much money by selling food and goods on city streets. They asked for the requirement for insurance to be eliminated and other bans on selling in certain parts of the city to be lifted.

“Street vendors are a crucial part of our communities and should be allowed to sell their products to the community,” said Marcel Cruz, associate director of Organizing and Empowerment (Órale). “The proposed restrictions are creating barriers and not opportunities.”

They pointed to the city of Los Angeles, which has proposed lowering its city permits from $543 to $272 to get more vendors to actually register with the city.

While council members discussed the possibility of letting vendors operate without insurance as long as they indemnify the city from any accidents, they ultimately decided to require it after city management told the council that the city could still be held liable.

“In actuality, these are vendors who don’t have lots of assets and aren’t going to be able to pay for a several hundred thousand dollar lawsuit or even a major injury,” City Manager Tom Mouse said, asking that the city could have to pay for damages.

Tyler Bonanno-Curley, acting deputy director of the city’s Bureau of Business Services, was the person who explained that the city is looking at using $50,000 in recovery act funds to help vendors pay for permits and purchase approved sidewalk vending carts.

The original proposal was for vendors to qualify for up to $1,000 in reimbursements in their first year of operation but Richardson asked that it be increased to $1,500, which would pay for permits and insurance over the first year.

Other changes to the proposed law would ban if the use of flashing signs in areas with lots of traffic, or a large volume of accidents, something that will be determined by the city’s traffic engineer over the next few weeks.

This is part of a long road for the new ordinance. The City Council postponed a vote on it in May after members requested a number of revisions in hopes of expanding where vendors could operate. Some of these recommendations were part of the new version of the ordinance presented Nov. 14, but others, like a request that vendors be able to sell goods around the Pike shopping outlets, were not.

Areas used by businesses with contracts with the city, like the beach concession stands and the Long Beach Convention Center, are off-limits for vendors on the future.

The Pike and the sidewalk space around it would also be off-limits because it’s a city lease and this property is maintained by a private company.

The council asked if the city could ask the lessees to allow vendors to operate on the sidewalks around the Pike, but any answer was unclear.

“I absolutely doubt they’re going to let any vendors down there if it’s in the case,” Councilmember Cindy Allen said. “Do you think they have if they say no?”

The city’s lease with the Pike runs through 2040. However, areas in the coastal zone won’t be subject to the new ordinance until the California Coastal Commission approves the city’s law, which likely won’t happen until 2024.

That means bans from operating at the Pike or other places that would be put in place by this law wouldn’t be enforceable. Those include vendors having to be 20 feet away from other vendors, 25 feet away from fire access points, 5 feet away from bus stops, Metro stops and above-ground structures like electrical boxes and 15 feet away from fire hydrants, public restrooms and dining patios.

Long Beach’s new rules will also set administrative penalties that can cost hundreds of dollars for vendors who violate the ordinance. Those would escalate with continued violations and be doubled for vendors violating the city’s ordinance without acquiring necessary permits first.

The city is looking to add a complaint portal to the Go Long Beach app where people can report vendors who are out of compliance, but the city says that it will need with an education approach first.

Tara Mortensen, the city’s business services bureau manager, said that the city is looking at education being held before.

“We’re going to have hosts on the ground at sites and locations where vendors are making sure that they’re aware of what the rules are and let them know we want to help them,” Mortensen said.

The City Council’s next scheduled meeting is Tuesday, Dec. 5. It’s unclear if the street vendor ordinance will be ready for a vote by that meeting.

App launches to offer rewards, help local small businesses

By Jackie Ruiz

Martessa Lujan opened her custom balloon store, Dreamy Disco, on Nov. 13 to celebrate the kickoff of Shop Long Beach, a citywide initiative that includes an app to offer customers rewards and help support local small businesses.

Through the app, Lujan says she’s gained new customers and expanded her business reach.

“You could call it a part of Shop Long Beach because it is a program designed to promote and increase my sales,” she said.

The app, called Localight, can be downloaded here. It shows what points and discounts customers will earn for specific businesses by using the app.

The Shop Long Beach initiative is meant to help businesses like Lujan’s. At 5659 Atlantic Ave., her shop offers balloons for various occasions and specialty items crafted by local artists to enhance the uniqueness of any event.

By bolstering small businesses like Dreamy Disco with a rewards program to build dedicated customers, the program is meant to fortify the local economy.

This technology is also meant to make local businesses easier for customers to find.

Emily Kazim, executive director for the Long Beach Center for Economic Inclusion at Long Beach, said the app is proving to be a valuable tool.

“It is pretty easy to use. You just download it, you operate at the top, it says Long Beach, and you click it. And it shows you all the businesses that are registered,” she said.

For more information, visit the Long Beach Center for Economic Inclusion at lbcei.org.

City and business leaders kick off Shop Long Beach, a citywide initiative that includes an app to offer customers rewards and help support local small businesses.
A $383 million grant from the state of California will go to green infrastructure at the Port of Long Beach. From electric charging units to expanded on-dock rail capacity, we’re working to become the world’s first zero-emissions port.