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City proposes hundreds of layoffs to balance its budget



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson speaks at a press conference about the city budget as City Manager Tom Modica listens.

The deep cuts are in response to dwindling reserves, rising personnel costs, a clawback of federal grants and a slowdown in the local economy.

By John Donegan

More than 260 city employees could be laid off and over 200 more vacant positions could be cut in departments ranging from fire and police to homeless services in order to close a \$58 million budget gap the city faces next year, according to a budget proposal from Long Beach City Manager Tom Modica released on July 30.

The \$4 billion plan, which covers the 2026-27 fiscal year, includes some new spending, including a 12-person High Crime Focus Team and expanded real-time crime center in the Police Department, permanent funding for Fire Engine 17 near Stearns Park, money for replacing traffic signs and sprucing up medians, investments in the city's police crime lab and a \$6.5 million helicopter paid for using forfeited assets and a law enforcement grant.

But the cuts outsize the gains. Layoffs could claim 4% of the city's nearly 6,000-person workforce, with additional cuts at libraries, parks and the city's homeless services hub as Long Beach copes with rising personnel costs, soaring legal payouts, a clawback of federal grants

Layoffs page 4

Why dangerous drivers are less likely to get ticketed

Traffic enforcement has plummeted in recent years. The city — and residents — are trying to adjust.

By Jacob Sisneros

Not too long ago, Long Beach mom Stephanie Ramos decided she had to ban her two kids from riding their bikes alone. It's too dangerous, she realized, after seeing cars continually blow through a red light while turning at a busy intersection near her home, often ignoring pedestrians in the crosswalk.

Drivers seemed to realize there was little to no consequence for it, so she



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Vehicles drive along Broadway, where the speed limit is 25 mph.

recently took matters into her own hands and pulled out her phone to video them at Studebaker and Anaheim Road.

Dangerous drivers page 5



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Martin Ramirez, owner of California Food Trucks, shows the solar power and battery technology on his latest food truck.

This Long Beach warehouse is 'where food trucks are born'

For 15 years, California Food Trucks has built out vans and commercial trucks into mobile kitchens.

By Jacob Sisneros

What do Ukrainian food, soft serve and Thai fusion tacos have in common? They're all served out of trucks

built from scratch in an industrial building on Anaheim Street next to the Los Angeles River.

"This is where food trucks are born," said Martin Ramirez, owner of California Food Trucks.

Over the past 15 years, he's quietly had a hand in the success of some beloved local businesses and major corporations. He's built custom projects for the Long Beach dessert

Food trucks page 5

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The 2026 advertising deadlines for remaining editions of the Long Beach Business Journal are: Oct. 2 and Nov. 27.

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ON THE COVER

Layoffs from page 1

and a slowdown in the local economy that has stifled tax revenue.

A range of positions are set to be cut, spanning more than a dozen departments or offices, from managerial roles to rank-and-file employees. It includes fire captains and police lieutenants, analysts and clerks, crossing guards, librarians and investigators, among others. Officials have said the impact will be felt citywide, in the government's ability to analyze and respond to emerging issues.

A city spokesman noted that police and fire employees losing their jobs will be transferred to open roles elsewhere in the departments, including in a new patrol beat specific to the shoreline. Many other employees will not be as lucky.

This is the first time Long Beach has proposed layoffs for employees paid out of its general fund in nearly six years. Dozens of Health Department jobs were cut in 2024, but those positions were tied specifically to the loss of state grant funding and the conclusion of Long Beach Recovery Act pandemic aid.

The past couple of budgets relied on reserve cash to cover their shortfalls and delay layoffs — \$7.8 million in fiscal year 2025 and \$5.8 million in fiscal year 2024, the latter pulled from COVID recovery funds. But officials say that strategy was short-term and unsustainable.

The city already pulled \$27 million from four reserve accounts to close out the current fiscal year, exhausting its operating reserves and taking \$16.5 million from its \$50.1 million emergency reserve — money set aside specifically for natural disasters and unforeseen crises.

“Our responsibility today is not only to today’s budget, it’s to the long-term financial health of our city and to the thousands of employees who depend on a stable and sustainable organization.” —Mayor Rex Richardson

The moves would save \$55.9 million, allowing the city to add \$9.8 million back to reserves. It currently has only \$33.6 million in reserves.

In public safety, the city proposed shutting down Fire Engine 14, which operates out of the station near Colorado Lagoon, to save \$3.8 million, citing data showing it responds to the fewest fire calls in the city and 87% of calls received are for paramedics. Officials also proposed converting one engine from permanent staffing to cheaper overtime; in the Police Department, they suggest eliminating 17 vacant patrol officer positions, cutting \$2.68 million in police overtime, consolidating part of financial crimes into property crimes, and eliminating 18 investigator roles.

Pressed by the loss of \$11 million in county, state and federal funding, the Health Department faces heavy losses, including 79 positions cut — including eight positions within the city homelessness bureau. The reductions would affect programs and agencies that handle medical shuttle services, weekend homelessness outreach, one of the city's two mobile homeless outreach centers, workforce development and homelessness prevention.

If approved, the proposed budget would also cut more than half of its motel voucher shelter rooms (from 40 to 15) and offer rapid rehousing assistance to 45 fewer households. City leaders said the cuts are targeted to keep all municipal shelter beds open, a crucial need as Long Beach struggles to reduce local homelessness, which rose by 3.7% in the past year.

Programs and services citywide would also see reductions. Hours and days at five city libraries —



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Long Beach City Manager Tom Modica outlines a series of budget cuts as Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson waits to the side in the City Council chambers on July 30, 2026.

Bayshore, Burnett, El Dorado, Harte and Michelle Obama — would be cut to five days a week under reduced hours. Teen programming at Chavez Park, summer swim classes at Jordan and Millikan high schools, and the city's involvement with the after-school WRAP

officers, while reinstating \$400,000 for officers' overtime pay; preserve youth programs and homelessness programs; add new disease prevention and nursing positions; and continue to fund the Office of Equity position that oversees the city's deportation defense fund while also adding more money to its account. The defense fund currently has \$548,000.

Funding, he explained, could come from a line of new sources, like the \$7 million to \$8 million expected annually from the voter-approved county Measure ER, an updated cost-recovery agreement with the Port of Long Beach for fire services adding \$5.9 million and \$1.5 million saved from not holding a general election because races were already decided in the June primary.

Sparing no detail on the starkness of the economic picture, officials say it figures to get worse before it gets better. After a \$27.3 million deficit expected next year, officials are confident they will have consecutive years of meager surpluses.

Despite the headwinds, they say, Long Beach is on solid footing, with a 17.5% drop in overall crime; with paramedics responding 30 seconds faster than they did last year; with 12% more city shelter beds; thousands of new, high-paying aerospace jobs; and work underway on new streets, bridges and a very expensive pool as part of a billion-dollar infrastructure plan ahead of the 2028 Olympics.

The city also welcomed a new amphitheater and an independent baseball team in the past year, and it continues to draw \$2 billion in tourism and economic impact — outpacing San Diego, Anaheim, Phoenix, Los Angeles and San Francisco in key hotel use and visitor metrics.

By following the city's plans, Richardson said Long Beach would achieve a structural surplus by 2028 — the first in more than a decade.

“Our responsibility today is not only to today’s budget, it’s to the long-term financial health of our city and to the thousands of employees who depend on a stable and sustainable organization,” Richardson said. “Our employees deserve to be more than temporary fixes that simply postpone difficult decisions. They deserve a city with a stable financial future. That’s why I believe we have to stay the course.” ■

program are all expected to be eliminated.

An additional 25 positions would be cut by contracting out services for parking collections, school crossing guards and the city's reprographics office. To offset administrative cuts in Public Works, parking meters would be installed around City Hall, Lincoln Park, the courthouse and Ocean Boulevard, and citywide parking rates would rise from \$2 to \$3 an hour, with the revenue redirected to street light repairs, solar conversions, weed abatement and median upkeep.

Several departments would also see agencies consolidated, which officials say is part of a necessary restructuring to focus on emerging issues like traffic safety and community health.

What's next

Workers have been informed of potential layoffs. Civil service rules allow for employees with more experience to bump those with fewer years on the job, meaning workers can move within or across departments, displacing colleagues.

The plan is not finalized yet. Going forward, the City Council will deliberate the budget through a series of public meetings, town hall forums and study sessions until final approval, typically at the end of September.

The earliest potential adjustments came quickly, during Mayor Rex Richardson's proposed version of the budget that would restore several programs and reinstate 70 positions.

For example, Richardson said he wants to undo the plan for a rotating engine; keep four of the 17 eliminated police patrol positions and two Quality of Life

Food trucks *from page 1*

shop SnoCorner and Peruvian food truck Mikhuna, along with major 30- and 40-foot catering trucks for high-profile clients like Google and Monster Energy.

Ramirez, his shop manager Cody Madole and four other employees are a one-stop shop for everything a food truck needs, including plumbing, welding and electrical work to transform vans and commercial trucks into functioning mobile kitchens.

It's a niche manufacturing business that caters to enterprising chefs and restaurateurs who are testing a concept or hitting the road for music festivals, farmers markets or a meal break at offices.

The food truck industry has grown as the costs to start a brick-and-mortar restaurant have steadily increased. In a business that's notorious for having razor-thin profit margins, a truck is a safer bet — and one you can also resell if things don't work out, Ramirez said.

Ramirez, who grew up in Bellflower, found his way to food truck manufacturing through his stepmother. In the late 2000s, she discovered how lucrative the business could be when she bought a truck to start selling tacos in Miami. Before she sold her first taco, she decided to list the truck on Craigslist to test the resale market. Within a few days, a buyer offered her double what she had paid for it, Ramirez said.

After some coaxing from family, Ramirez realized he was perfectly equipped to create mobile kitchens from scratch.

He had spent more than a decade remodeling homes as a general contractor and also had experience in metal fabrication from a job building race cars. Food truck manufacturing was like a blend of the two, Ramirez said.

For years after he started building trucks, Ramirez and his cousin also ran a taco truck called LA Tacos and Co.

He's no longer involved in that business but runs a pizza truck with Avalou's Italian Pizza founder and Long Beach resident Louis Lombardi, who is famous for acting in HBO's "The Sopranos."

The two met through a mutual friend, Lombardi said. Ramirez loved the pizza and offered to build a truck to make the pop-up concept mobile.

"We hit it off, and we've been great buddies since," Lombardi said.

Recently, the pair started selling pizzas for delivery through UberEats from the truck parked outside Ramirez's California Food Trucks business.



Martin Ramirez, owner of California Food Trucks, stands inside his latest food truck.

Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Working in food truck businesses has given Ramirez firsthand knowledge of how to efficiently lay out a mobile kitchen and set up new food vendors for success before they even pick up a knife.

Ashley Monconduit, owner of SnoCorner near Long Beach Poly High School, ordered a custom food cart from Ramirez in 2024. Her brick-and-mortar business specializes in New Orleans-style shaved ice, called Snoballs, but Monconduit was looking for a cart to serve beignets and soft serve at corporate events and birthday parties.

Ramirez made the cart "based entirely on what was in my head" and even made the soft serve machine removable, Monconduit said. That's been a big help for events where she serves only beignets because the soft serve machine accounts for a significant portion of the cart's weight.

Ramirez also tries to stay ahead of the curve on innovations in the food truck industry. He now steers clients away from using generators in favor of solar-powered batteries. Ramirez knows from experience that if you use a generator, "it will break down at the worst time."

With most of the batteries he installs, he can troubleshoot problems from his desk no matter where a truck is. But he still makes his fair share of on-site



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Martin Ramirez, who owns California Food Trucks, at his workspace in Long Beach

repairs for drivers who accidentally sheared off a side mirror or rooftop exhaust fan in their scramble to make it to an event.

Not all the repairs are a drag: He's built out several trucks for clients in Hawaii. Ramirez, an avid surfer, makes a point to visit those trucks whenever his schedule allows. ■



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Pedestrians cross Shoreline Drive at Pine Avenue while cars wait at a red light.

Dangerous drivers *from page 1*

"I look crazy," Ramos said, but drivers who saw her filming started being more careful.

Just the threat of being caught seemed to be a deterrent. It's a threat, Ramos and other neighbors across the city say, that has dwindled in recent years. And the data show they're right.

Long Beach police are writing far fewer tickets to drivers who run red lights than they used to, according to an analysis of thousands of citations the Long Beach Business Journal obtained through public records requests.

Long Beach does not have a means to track exactly how many drivers run red lights in the city, but it's clear that traffic enforcement plummeted during the pandemic and never recovered. LBPD officers last year, for instance, wrote 627 red light tickets, less than half of the 1,559 such citations in 2019.

Over the same time frame, officers also handed out fewer speeding tickets.

(Long Beach isn't alone in its slipping traffic enforcement. Signal Hill police, for example, gave out 1,328 red light citations in 2019 — less than 300 off Long Beach's total despite being a fraction of the size — but that number dipped to 316 citations last year.)

Long Beach police say they don't have as much time to crack down on bad drivers as they used to. Their ranks have thinned from more than 800 officers down to the high 600s, and they've been focused on dealing with shootings and other violent crimes.

The emphasis on combating gun crime has paid off, said Deputy Chief Mike Solomita, driving down the number of killings and shootings, but

Red lights page 17

REAL ESTATE

The Pike sells for \$50 million

New owner plans \$20 million in improvements before Olympics.

By John Donegan

The Pike at Rainbow Harbor, an expansive outdoor shopping center in the heart of the city's downtown shoreline, has sold for \$50 million, with plans advancing for a multimillion-dollar makeover ahead of the 2028 Olympics.

The mall, built in 2003 on the former grounds of a seaside amusement park at a cost of \$130 million, is one of the largest outdoor shopping centers in the region, with more than 40 shops and restaurants and a 14-screen theater on 18 acres of city-owned property, interspersed with a courtyard, 2,200-car parking structure and a pedestrian bridge over Shoreline Drive.

The 394,616-square-foot open-air mall attracts about 7 million visitors annually and averages a 91% occupancy rate, according to the buyer. It has several prominent retailers, including a Nike Factory Store, H&M, Levi's, P.F. Chang's, Gladstones, California Pizza Kitchen and Starbucks, among others.

A deal for the property was first announced in May, following a targeted sale process to a small group of potential buyers; closing of the sale is expected by the end of September.

Its new ownership is a venture led by Newport Beach real estate company Redwood West and Panattoni, which recently bought the 1.2 million-square-foot Victoria Gardens in Rancho Cucamonga for \$530 million.

Colby Cyburt, a managing partner of Redwood West, said the Pike is a "one-of-a-kind piece of waterfront property" that should be better geared toward Long Beach locals.

"Currently, we do not feel that the Pike has



Courtesy Redwood West

An aerial view of The Pike Outlets from Rainbow Harbor

adequately embraced local residents and we are embarking to change this through adding service offerings as well as a market," Cyburt said.

As part of the sale, Cyburt said the companies will spend another \$20 million on improvements to make it "Olympic Ready," including "revamping the main center courtyard, adding inviting gathering spaces that will include the ability to add events and live music, enhanced landscaping, new FF&E, directories, signage, and targeted Olympic activations specifically."

When it was built, the mall was envisioned as a centerpiece of a coastline revival plan meant to lure visitors back to downtown Long Beach at a time when it struggled to cope with the closure of the Naval shipyard and the loss of about 50,000 jobs.

The mall was intended as a junction for tourists and locals alike, with shops amenable to everyone's budget.

It's also an easy stop for the many visitors to other downtown attractions like the Queen Mary, Aquarium of the Pacific and newly built amphitheater.

"Our primary focus is to provide a local offering to the residents of Long Beach," Cyburt said. "The offering will continue to cater to convention goers, aquarium visitors, cruise ship travelers, and folks who travel from outside of the City of Long Beach to enjoy the waterfront, however we would like to also bring an offering that will serve as an amenity to those who live, work (and) stay in the Downtown Long Beach area."

The seller of the mall, SITE Centers, owns properties in Chicago; Chapel Hill, N.C.; Portland and Florida. This was its only California property. The sale price was disclosed in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing by SITE Centers. ■



Courtesy CBRE

The Mosaic shopping center is made up of six buildings in downtown Long Beach.

Downtown's Mosaic shopping center sells for \$30 million

It's the latest development around the former City Place mall.

By John Donegan

The Mosaic shopping center, a six-building retail mall spanning multiple city blocks in downtown Long Beach, has sold for \$30 million, the deal's brokers announced.

The buyer, identified only as Mosaic Promenade Holdings LLC, purchased the 148,405-square-foot complex in late June following a yearlong sale process that drew 14 offers from private investors.

The deal includes six parcels that total 4.8 acres at 50 East 4th Street, 145 East 4th Street, 300 and 325 The Promenade North, and 480 and 590 Pine

Avenue that have recently been home to Ross Dress for Less, Studio One Eleven/RDC, Ammatoli, Pacific Dental, Panda Express, Wingstop, GNC, GameStop and a U.S. Army recruiting office. A May 22 assessment by the Los Angeles County Assessor's office valued the six properties at a combined \$28.6 million, including \$8.9 million attributed to improvements.

It's the first time the buildings have changed hands since the previous ownership group, a triad made up of Monument Square Investment Group, Turnbridge Equities and Waterford Property Co., bought them as part of a \$73.7 million deal in 2005. The buildings were constructed between 2002 and 2004 as part of the original City Place Long Beach mall.

CBRE, which represented the previous owners as its leasing agent,

Mosaic page 8

Port buys 13-story office tower, hoping to lease out office space

It's part of a city effort to revitalize a downtown core facing some of the highest commercial vacancies in recent history.

By John Donegan

In a first-of-a-kind effort to draw maritime companies to downtown Long Beach, the city seaport has purchased the 13-story Oceangate office tower for \$36 million to establish a permanent operational center that will lease space to its trade partners.

The deal is the marquee move of Anchor LB, a development strategy pitched by Mayor Rex Richardson during his State of the City in January to encourage companies that conduct business in the seaport — logistics firms, supply chain tech startups and customs brokers — to move their headquarters into prime office space downtown.

"The companies that power Long Beach should have a presence in the heart of Long Beach," Richardson said in a news release.

Once open, the 226,748-square-foot tower at 100 Oceangate will house trade facilities, administrative space and Port U, the Port's internal training initiative, while offering leased office space to companies linked to global supply chains.

It's currently about 70% occupied, with some already in the maritime business, as well as a City National Bank, an urgent care center and



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

The downtown building at 100 Oceangate has been bought by the Port of Long Beach.

Crunch Fitness. Escrow on the property is expected to close at the end of August, Port CEO Noel Hacegaba said.

Hacegaba emphasized the building's location — across the street from the Port headquarters and a short drive from the harbor. It's also a great time to buy, he said.

The purchase comes as downtown Long Beach struggles with a record commercial vacancy rate of 35.3% — higher than Irvine, El Segundo and downtown Los Angeles — that has steadily worsened since 2024. Experts tie it to shifts toward remote work, rising interest rates, and frustrations with the local homeless population that has hit ground-floor retail and small businesses.

"We've never had a vacancy that high before," said Sheva Hosseinzadeh, a downtown real estate agent with Coldwell Banker, who said her firm struggles to rent out its downtown stock, some of which has remained vacant for six months to a year.

It's a problem that wasn't nearly as severe even three to four years ago, she added.

One of her downtown clients, she said, was able to rent out his space after dropping its monthly price to \$1.75 per square foot, well below the average downtown rate of \$2.72 per square foot and the regional rate of \$3.50 per square foot.

The Oceangate tower, built in 1972 and sold in 2016 for \$46.5 million, is a

reflection of the market's downturn: valued at \$54.3 million last year, the Los Angeles County assessor reduced its assessed value to \$24.9 million this year.

Hosseinzadeh said the Port's strategy of leasing to its existing business network makes practical sense, but one building cannot single-handedly solve the area's broader commercial challenges.

"For somebody that is looking for space, why would you not go to an office so you're going to be with other individuals that you're probably already communicating with or working with in the business?" Hosseinzadeh said. "But that's just one building."

Port officials have made it clear they intend to stick with the building for the long term.

"We're not looking to flip this," Hacegaba said, adding the Port is currently putting together an incentives package to offer tenants. "Our priority is to lease out the vacant office space as quickly as possible. So we will use every tool at our disposal to make that happen."

Their target will be customers of the seaport near and far, including firms in Asia and Europe that might be interested in relocating their North American headquarters. It all plays into the Port's goal of doubling its output by 2050, announced by Hacegaba in January during the annual state of the Port.

"If their cargo crosses our docks, we want to make sure they know that they have the opportunity to call Long Beach their home as well," he said. ■

Long Beach starts offering rental subsidies to older adults

By Jacob Sisneros

Long Beach is hoping to help keep older residents from falling into homelessness with a new program that offers them limited rental subsidies of \$400 to \$500 a month.

The money, available through the Older Adult Shallow Subsidy program, is meant to temporarily reduce the burden of rent while people pursue long-term solutions, like affordable housing.

The program is for households that include at least one older adult, defined as anyone age 62 or older, or age 55 or older with a disability.

To qualify, applicants must:

- live in non-subsidized rental housing in Long Beach
- be experiencing severe rent burden (spending 70% or more of income on rent)
- demonstrate the ability to pay rent consistently with shallow subsidy assistance
- have a household income at or below 50% of the Area Median Income (That's \$58,300 for a household of one, up to \$110,000 for a household of eight.)

Eligible renters may receive up to \$12,000 over two years, with additional support available in extenuating circumstances.

If deemed eligible, participants will also receive light-touch case management, which



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

A man looks over the courtyard from one of the housing buildings at Cabrillo Century Villages in Long Beach.

includes quarterly check-ins and connection to supportive services.

How to apply

Applications are available in English, Spanish, Khmer and Tagalog at longbeach.gov/olderadultrent. They will remain open until all subsidy slots are filled. You can also apply in person Monday through Thursday at the Multi-Service Center or Mondays

and Wednesdays at the Long Beach Senior Center.

The program will prioritize households whose existing rental assistance or housing subsidy has expired or is scheduled to expire within the next 60 days. Those include households that received vouchers, were in the rapid rehousing program, homelessness prevention program or other rental assistance programs where financial support is ending.

Subsidies page 8

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Mosaic from page 6

said the sellers had already completed some exterior improvements and operational upgrades ahead of the sale, though the cost and timing of that work were not disclosed.

In a release, CBRE said the sale reflects an appetite for the downtown's retail spaces, referencing the recent \$50 million deal for The Pike shopping center. At the time of sale, the Mosaic buildings were 78% occupied.

"Mosaic's scale, location and pricing attracted strong interest from private capital investors seeking urban retail opportunities in coastal Southern California," John Read, a CBRE senior vice president, said in a statement.

The deal is the latest development around the former City Place mall, which has over the years slowly been split up, torn down and set for rebuild in different, mixed-use projects.

Subsidies from page 7

Other factors that could lead to an application being prioritized include urgency of eviction risk, disabling conditions, fixed-income status and prior experiences of homelessness.

The program is funded with \$1.8 million from a mix of state funding secured by Sen. Lena Gonzalez, the Los Angeles County Measure A sales tax and state grant funding.

Why older adults?

Even as Long Beach has increased spending on homelessness outreach and housing services, it hasn't been able to keep pace with the number of people falling into homelessness.

This year, 12.4% of people tallied in the annual homeless count reported they were newly homeless, up from 10.9% last year.

This year's count also found an increase in the number of residents over 55 who were experiencing homelessness (1,096 this year compared to 1,023 last year).

"Older adults living on fixed in-

In February, developers broke ground on a \$150 million project to build an eight-story, 272-unit apartment complex at 450 Promenade North. JPI, a Dallas-based investment group leading the project, said it plans to eventually build 900 apartments (including 16 affordable units) and 50 storefronts there in a three-phase plan.

Across the street, at the site of the former Walmart shopping center, the sellers of the Mosaic retail portfolio have been approved to build a 628-unit apartment tower with about 16,000 square feet of ground-floor retail. The sellers of the Mosaic retail portfolio are retaining that parcel for future development, according to the CBRE spokesperson Kimberley Hoidal, with no construction timeline yet announced. ■

comes are increasingly vulnerable to housing instability as rents continue to rise across the region," Mayor Rex Richardson said in a statement.

Other options for rental subsidies

The program is part of Upstream LB, a three-pronged city initiative announced last year aimed at preventing housing instability.

In April, the city launched its first Renter Aid Program to provide short-term rental assistance for about 250 households.

Thus far, city officials say the Renter Aid program has received more than 3,500 applications and about 50 households have been enrolled.

A separate program targeting Long Beach residents ages 18-25 who are at high risk of homelessness was originally scheduled to launch in July but hasn't yet started. It aims to help about 50 people in its first year with a budget of \$750,000. ■

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LONG BEACH POST

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Homelessness rises in Long Beach for 2nd year in a row

The city reported a 3.7% increase despite investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in shelter beds and programs.

By John Donegan

Despite hundreds of millions of dollars spent to curb homelessness, the number of people without a home in Long Beach rose for the second year in a row — with a larger spike for people who are “chronically homeless” and typically most difficult to keep in permanent housing, officials announced last month.

It’s a reversal of fortune for a city that two years ago declared it had “turned the tide” on homelessness. Since then, Long Beach has seen at least 10% more people living on the streets and in shelters, and homelessness has increased in six of the last seven years — even with successes in expanding its shelter system and moving people into permanent housing.

The report relies on a “Point in Time” measurement, a local census of people in shelters and living outside, and those reporting chronic problems in finding shelter.

Conducted by hundreds of volunteers during three days in January, the count found 3,729 people were living in interim housing, a car, van, RV, tent or makeshift shelter in Long Beach — a 3.7% bump compared with 3,595 people counted the previous year and more than double the number of those reported in 2019.

Public health officials and academic experts say the increase reflects a sharp rise in rents, the conclusion of some pandemic-era programs and the abrupt end or delay of millions in health department funding.

But efforts to house people, which include hundreds of millions of dollars spent on shelter, permanent housing and outreach, have struggled to stem the number of street encampments, as reflected in the report and interviews with outreach workers and shelter operators.

There are some bright spots: More unhoused people are living in shelters or interim housing than last year, about 30.6% versus last year’s 27.5%. That comes as Long Beach has increased the beds in its shelter system by 12%, bringing it to a total 1,521 shelter beds locally. The city also reported that 1,702 people were moved into permanent housing in 2025. And homelessness among veterans has continued to drop — down 29% since 2022.

But the proportion of people newly homeless within the past year also rose slightly, to 12.4% from 10.9%, while the share of people self-reporting as chronically homeless, meaning long-term or repeated bouts of



Kate Raphael/Long Beach Business Journal

Heather Filbey-McCabe, volunteer, asks questions of a homeless couple during the annual homeless count in Long Beach, Jan. 22, 2026.

homelessness tied with mental illness or substance use, rose by double digits to 58% from 46.7%.

At the Multi-Service Center, which recently reopened after renovations, staffers say they are taking in an enormous amount of newly homeless people — more than twice the amount observed in the Point in Time count.

Last year alone, the facility saw more than 3,000 new people — 129 people on a daily basis, including at least 20 to 30 people checking in for the first time.

Meanwhile, the situation outside Long Beach has grown more favorable, or at least stayed flat. Pasadena’s homeless population dropped by four people this year while Orange County saw just over 1,000 fewer people this year than in 2024 — a 13.7% drop in their biennial report.

While it has yet to report this year’s count, Los Angeles County last year saw a 4% drop in its homeless population — the second decline in a row.

In struggling to explain the continued growth of homelessness in Long Beach, public health officials acknowledged that the reasons are not fully known, but pointed to the growing body of evidence that housing costs are an underlying cause.

The average studio rent in the LA-Long Beach area, according to the report, has more than doubled in the past decade, up from \$913 in 2015 to \$2,101 in 2026. Fifty-nine percent of renters countywide spend more than a third of their income on rent.

Homeless respondents have consistently reported that a high cost of living, followed by familial strife and mental illness, is the primary reason they’re living on the streets. Forty percent said financial and employment were their top reason, followed by family disruption and mental health.

There is also a massive demand in Long Beach for rental subsidies. In the three months of a new rental aid pro-

gram — which officials say will be able to help only 250 households a year — the city has already received more than 3,500 applications. Of those, about 50 households have been enrolled.

City officials also pointed the finger at federal cuts to the Emergency Housing Voucher program. The program, launched in 2021, provides housing for 582 households locally — particularly for those considered chronically homeless or at risk of falling back into homelessness.

But funding for the program is set to run out, far faster than expected, as rising rent costs have coincided with a Republican-led Congress unwilling to renew it.

Local housing officials say they can transition only 125 households to a different voucher program, leaving 375 households without help once the EHV program’s funding runs dry in October. EHV recipients will be given at least 60 days’ notice before their rental assistance runs out, officials added.

Federal housing aid reaches only about one in four eligible households in Long Beach. About 8,000 households in Long Beach rely on federal housing choice vouchers.

There’s also an increasing shift, officials say, of unhoused people who come from outside of Long Beach.

More than half of the people surveyed, 50.9%, said they had lost stable housing somewhere other than Long Beach, a finding city officials said reinforced the sense that homelessness in Southern California does not respect municipal boundaries.

It’s a trend seen elsewhere in the city. Jeff Levine, who runs the Long Beach Rescue Mission, said many people entering his shelters come from Orange County and downtown Los Angeles, saying the former lacks amenities and the latter is too dangerous.

The mission’s four shelters, which combine for 227 beds, routinely turn away 5 to 6 single people and 10 to 12

families a day. They most commonly see single parents with kids, which are hardest to place in the city.

“There’s nothing for them,” Levine said. “Our referral is going to be downtown Skid Road to the shelters out there. ... And the dads that show up with kids, nobody really is talking about that.”

The mission’s outreach team, which scours encampments each month, says they are noticing an uptick in tents, lean-tos and tarps along freeways, under overpasses and flanking the train tracks that run through West and North Long Beach.

It’s the kind of sequestered places far from a highway, where people have died from overdoses while waiting for paramedics, even after using Narcan multiple times. “They’re out there in the middle of nowhere,” Levine said.

He and some others argue that permissive policies around encampments are worsening the crisis.

The mission runs a strict, one-year recidivism program that requires participants to wake up early, take classes, work around the facility and do their best to stay clean. Of those who finished — less than 40% — about 87% are financially stable and housed a year later. Levine says that accountability forces many to fix their situation.

On Friday, friends, family and shelter attendees celebrated the most recent graduates — eight people who spent the past year at the facility. They range in age, height, background and story.

One came to the city after 10 years in Memphis. Another drove in with a bag of clothes from Las Vegas. One worked at a mission in Orange, and one came without any surviving family.

One graduate, Akeem Cain, will turn 40 this month. He came to the mission a year ago, homeless, 105 pounds and less than a year into the unexpected death of his mother.

Cain had already completed the program once in 2017 and thought he had repaired his life. Then the devil came around, he said, “and it tore me apart.”

“I had it — a job, everything,” Cain said. “It didn’t work out right. Years go by. I thought I was going to make it. Lost everything, relationship, family, lost my job. I lost it all.”

With six months or so left until he must move into his own place, Cain is terrified of going back out on his own. He has a job, but it’s not an ideal commute — 90 minutes on the train to downtown LA. He and his girlfriend are estranged, his daughter recently turned 11, and he still is grieving his mother.

“I’m scared, you know, I’m scared,” Cain said. “I don’t know what’s my first step to get out there in the world when I leave this place. I know they will still be here, and they will have my back, but am I gonna have my own back when I’m out there? That’s the question.” ■

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HEALTHCARE

Health providers cut ties with Long Beach LGBTQ Center

It's the latest fallout after dozens of people signed a letter demanding leadership change at the long-standing LGBTQ nonprofit.

By Kate Raphael

Long Beach's LGBTQ Center is no longer offering gender-affirming care after two key medical providers stepped away from the nonprofit, citing insufficient staffing and poor leadership that they said degraded patient care. The move forced the Center to secure new healthcare providers to serve the hundreds of locals who rely on it for treatment and limited the types of services it can provide.

Under new providers, the Center will continue offering STI screening and treatment as well as contraception, but patients who received gender-affirming care there must now seek services elsewhere at a "partner clinic," according to the Center's board of directors.

It's the latest evidence of the nonprofit's behind-the-scenes turmoil, which escalated in recent months as Center employees repeatedly raised concerns to the board of directors about lapses in healthcare, interrupted programming and poor treatment of staff and clients. Fifty current and for-

mer employees, as well as community members and former board members, recently signed a letter demanding the executive director be replaced.

The Center, one of Long Beach's longest-standing LGBTQ institutions, has been a hub for healthcare, legal services and other programming since 1977. But in July, some of its employees hit a breaking point. Jess Edmonds, the Center's nurse practitioner, who helped draft the letter, resigned, and the Center's medical director said he would only oversee screening of sexually transmitted infections, according to a letter sent to the Center's board of directors and reviewed by the Long Beach Business Journal. That same month, multiple employees of the health services team quit or took leave, further reducing key support, according to two Center employees.

The news forced the Center to work with other providers to preserve care for hundreds of patients who visit the Center, according to Edmonds.

In response, the Center added a new physician and nurse practitioner, allowing the health clinic to continue providing sexual health services, including STI care and PrEP, an HIV prevention medication, the Center's board said.

Yet gender-affirming care, a pilot program at the Center, has been paused, disrupting care for approximately 20 patients, Edmonds said.



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

The LGBTQ Center Long Beach on Fourth Street

Experts said that community-based LGBTQ health centers fill critical gaps by providing lifesaving treatment with cultural competency in a safe environment. LGBTQ people frequently face discrimination in healthcare settings, from lack of expertise to outright denial of care, said Elana Redfield, federal policy director of the UCLA Williams Institute, a research center focused on law and policy related to LGBTQ people. Especially in the context of federal

attacks on healthcare for LGBTQ people, it is "very concerning if they lose access" to a space that provides that care, she said.

Steph Gilbert, who is nonbinary, sought gender-affirming care at the Center when they were between insurance providers and looking for affordable options.

Gilbert began hormone replacement therapy at the end of 2025, under the

LGBTQ center page 12

Long Beach VA unveils new care facility

Administrators say the new Community Living Center is a model for the future of long-term veteran care.

By John Donegan

As dozens of veterans and their families looked on, officials at the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center unveiled the new Community Living Center, a sprawling residential-style facility that administrators are calling a model for the future of long-term veteran care.

The 181,350-square-foot center, roughly triple the size of the facility it replaces, houses 120 private beds spread across 10 separate residential "neighborhoods," each with its own dining area, kitchen, lounge and quiet room. The design departs sharply from the institutional hallways of a typical nursing home.

Dr. Jaza Marina, the chief of geriatric and extended care at the medical center, said during a tour in late July that the intent of the facility is to feel like a second home. Each "neighborhood" carries the names of local landmarks, like Naples, Marina and Belmont, that surround the Long Beach VA's 100-acre campus.

The \$189 million project replaces a 1960s-era nursing home that had declined with age and is planned for demolition. Initial plans for the new building were drawn up as early as 2008, though construction didn't break ground until August 2019. Residents and staff began moving in on June 29.



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Army veteran Bill Jimenez, who is a resident at the Community Living Center, takes part in the ribbon-cutting as the VA Medical Center opens a new building in Long Beach.

Marina said that administrators hope to have the facility running at full capacity by 2028; they are currently operating at 40% capacity and will incrementally phase in sections of the center.

It's part of a broader \$387 million plan to modernize the hospital campus with a new mental health facility, parking structures and athletic fields.

Once fully operational, the center will act as a skilled nursing facility, with 24-hour supervised care,

rehabilitation and hospice. Veterans are typically admitted after a hospitalization for an acute illness, or for needs such as intravenous antibiotics, complex wound care, or physical, occupational and speech therapy. The building also includes a respite program for veterans who require 24-hour supervision, but whose family caregivers need a break, as well as an acute inpatient rehabilitation unit for those expected to recover within two weeks.

Most residents stay less than 100 days, though some remain longer if they cannot be safely discharged, according to staff. How long they stay, Marina said, depends on the person.

A dedicated unit serves veterans with dementia, and the building includes a beauty salon, a gym, indoor and outdoor dining areas, and activity rooms.

The Long Beach VA, one of the largest veteran hospitals in the country, treats more than 65,000 veterans annually — mostly those living across Southern California.

Addressing the crowd Friday, Antony Palocaren, the LA deputy commander of the Army Corps of Engineers, spoke on how the building means an incredible deal more to its patients than simply a new building.

"For the veteran who comes here, this is not a project — it's a place to rest, it is a place to recover, it is a place to feel like home," Palocaren said. "May this place stand as a daily expression of our gratitude towards our veterans."

Ahead of a tour, a ceremonial ribbon was cut

VA facility page 12

LGBTQ center from page 11

supervision of Edmonds, who has expertise in gender-affirming care, and who Gilbert called “an amazing provider.” Gilbert was concerned about physical changes progressing too quickly, yet they were reassured that their care would be guided by a protocol and frequent follow-ups, they said.

But “after that first visit, it became extremely difficult for me to get an appointment at all,” they said and recalled leaving panicked voicemails at the Center. Often, no one called them back. “I felt kind of abandoned in my transition,” they said.

Once Gilbert secured different

insurance, they sought care elsewhere. Yet for others, like friends of Gilbert’s who work multiple jobs and don’t have reliable transportation, the Center’s clinic offered access to critical healthcare, Gilbert said.

For the last year, the Center’s health services team worked toward building an affordable one-stop shop for sexual health and gender-affirming care, Edmonds said — expanding healthcare for the Long Beach LGBTQ community.

For Gilbert, losing access to gender-affirming care at the Center feels like a further delegitimization of the transgender community, they said. “The

T really is last in LGBT,” they said.

“Taking away healthcare costs lives for trans people.”

Despite the recent changes, the Center’s board of directors said they are still actively building a comprehensive program meant to expand access to care and bolster clinical staffing. In a statement, the board added that by accepting most insurance and pursuing donations and grants, the Center will also generate revenue to improve its other programs. Gender-affirming care “remains an important part of our vision for comprehensive health

services,” the board wrote.

In June, the board hired an independent investigator to evaluate concerns. Once the investigation concludes, the board said it would take action based on its findings. “We take these matters seriously and are committed to a fair and thorough process,” the board wrote. ■

VA facility from page 11

by Bill Jimenez, a veteran currently living at the center and president of its resident council, who said the nurses there had given him and other veterans “the will to walk again,” and “the will to heal.”

Some veterans already living in the center’s units watched the celebration from inside their rooms, with a few venturing downstairs. Judi Ann Rivera, an Army veteran who moved into the old facility in September 2022, said she watched the new building rise from her window as she spent 18 months there.

She had arrived in poor shape, unable to dress herself as she navigated using a wheelchair. She left in 2024, less than a month after the death of her husband, also a veteran. “They were there for me, and I’m so grateful for it,” she said. “For someone who couldn’t even dress herself, I’ve come a long way.”

She keeps busy since her months of treatment and still does athletic training at the Long Beach VA center. She flies out to Tampa and Orlando for Paralympic tournaments in downhill skiing, sled hockey, curling and shuffleboard.

Among those touring the new building was Cece Yim, a volunteer with Blue Star Moms and the local chapter of the American Legion in Torrance. For her, visiting the center was for closure.

Yim explained that four generations of her family have served in the military, starting with her great-grandfather’s enlistment into the Spanish-American War, her father in World War II and later in Korea, one brother in Vietnam and another in Desert Storm; her son served in Afghanistan and is still on active duty. Her daughter-in-law, also a veteran, works at Tibor Rubin as an X-ray technician.

“Since I was born, there hasn’t been a war that I haven’t been in with my family,” she said.

Her son was treated at the old facility in 2007 after surgeries on his arm and shoulder. Her brother died there in hospice care in 2019.

Yim remembers how staff draped his body in an American flag and carried him out as veterans and employees lined the doorways in salute. A Vietnam veteran, her brother never received “a hero’s welcome,” she said, adding that he at least received a “dignified end.”

Walking through the new building, Yim said she thought of him.

“It’s a thousand times better here now,” she said, adding that she was certain her brother would have loved it. ■



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Firefighter-backed tax measure fails to qualify for November ballot



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Supporters of Block the Cuts and Build Long Beach stand with Lamont Nguyen, president of Long Beach Firefighters Local 372, during a press conference outside Long Beach Fire Station 7 as they announced the initiative's launch on Thursday, March 12, 2026.

It was unable to gather enough signatures to be put to a vote.

By John Donegan

A proposal for a local parcel tax meant to raise money for firefighters, street repairs and housing has failed to secure enough signatures to qualify for the November ballot.

Representatives with the Long Beach firefighters union, as well as affordable housing advocates with Long Beach Residents Empowered and Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, had hoped to persuade

voters to rally behind a tax that, if approved, would have been levied by the square foot on qualifying homes and industrial parcels, ultimately raising \$70 million annually to bolster the city budget.

The measure, dubbed “Block the Cuts and Build Long Beach,” needed about 28,000 signatures from registered voters to qualify for a citywide vote this November. Proponents gathered 39,56 signatures, but the Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk’s office rejected more than 14,000, meaning the proposal fell short by about 3,100, according to a letter from Long Beach City Clerk Monique De La Garza.

Signatures can be tossed out if signers were not registered inside city limits, filled out more than one entry or gave incorrect information.

Announced in March, the tax measure campaign was led by a coalition that warned the money was needed to shore up the city’s fraying network of fire stations, ambulance crews, streets and alleyways, and juice the local production of affordable homes.

In a statement, Executive Director Andre Donado of Long Beach Residents Empowered, which helped canvas for signatures, said he was “deeply disappointed” but ultimately not discouraged by the results.

“Although we did not qualify for the ballot, the needs that inspired this campaign remain,” Donado said. “Our communities still need more affordable and social housing, stronger investments in critical infrastructure, public health, and essential public services that help neighborhoods thrive. While this campaign comes to a close, our commitment to building a stronger Long Beach continues.”

The measure also had strong financial backing from the center-left California Community Foundation, Long Beach Firefighters Association and the Opportunity Beach Fund–Rex Richardson Ballot Measure Committee. Richardson’s committee contributed \$182,000 to the effort, according to campaign finance disclosures.

Even if it qualified for the ballot, getting a new tax measure passed likely would have been an uphill battle, as a high cost of living has outpaced homelessness and crime to become top of mind for Long Beach voters.

A countywide sales tax, Measure ER, passed by a narrow margin in June.

The city of Long Beach had already ruled out proposing its own tax measure after a poll found that 80% of respondents rejected the idea of an eight-cent parcel tax, even if the money was needed to cover services — street repairs, police and fire — that might otherwise be lost.

Despite summoning a formidable backing of legislators, activists and doctors, the healthcare-focused countywide sales tax, Measure ER, passed by a narrow margin in June.

This comes as the city faces a \$58 million deficit in 2027 after climbing costs combined with declining revenues have forced department administrators to draw down reserves and defer hiring. ■

Southwest announces routes from Long Beach to Portland and Seattle

By John Donegan

Southwest Airlines announced this month it will offer new nonstop flights between Long Beach Airport and both Seattle and Portland, as part of the company’s effort to grab a larger share of LA’s regional market.

Flights will run six days a week, using Boeing 737 MAX 8, 737-700 or 737-800 aircraft; each will come equipped with new seat offerings and free Wi-Fi for the company’s rewards members.

Long Beach Airport officials held a small celebration on Aug. 4 marking the first flight, scheduled at 11:25 a.m.

Company officials said in a news release that the added service is meant as an alternative to Los Angeles International Airport, known for having long waits in both the commute and check-in process.

Southwest, the dominant carrier at Long Beach, already offers nonstop flights from LGB to 18 cities, including Denver, Las Vegas and Phoenix.

Other service at the airport is operated by Delta, Alaska Airlines



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Southwest Airlines planes out on the tarmac at the Long Beach Airport

and Hawaiian Airlines.

The expansion comes as the city airport has seen a small but precipitous decline in passenger traffic — 10% less in April compared to the same month last year.

Through the first four months of the year, total passenger traffic reached nearly 1.1 million, down 7% compared to the same period a year earlier.

Much of the decline is tied to Southwest scaling back landings at the airport earlier in the year, though data also

showed that flights remain mostly full.

While Southwest recorded a 9% decline in year-to-date enplanements, rival carriers Delta and Hawaiian posted slight gains of 2% and 3%, respectively.

The airport is currently undergoing a \$37 million renovation to modernize its concourse and 11 gates, as well as another grant for a new taxiway.

Even with ongoing infrastructure improvements, the Long Beach City Council has historically maintained

strict limits on airport growth — including previously declining proposals for international flights — to control noise levels and preserve surrounding residential areas.

The launch of the Seattle and Portland routes comes as a wider regional push by Southwest to increase its presence in California with new routes between Salt Lake City, Burbank, Ontario, San Diego, Santa Barbara and Hawaii. ■

EDUCATION

Career LBUSD employee picked as next superintendent

He is assuming the role at a critical moment, when the district is facing declining enrollment and budget deficits.

By Kate Raphael

The Long Beach Unified Board of Trustees named a new superintendent in June, choosing an internal candidate to succeed Jill Baker and eliciting a standing ovation in the boardroom.

David Zaid, the former assistant superintendent in the elementary office, began his role as LBUSD superintendent on July 1.

His appointment, unanimously approved by the school board, was the product of a monthslong search process, which began after Baker announced her retirement in January. While the school board does not hire or fire any other LBUSD employees, it is tasked with selecting and evaluating the superintendent, the only direct employee of the board, who oversees district operations.

The trustees undertook a nationwide search with the firm Leadership Associates, receiving 21 applications, according to members of the firm who presented at a recent board meeting. They solicited feedback from community members through a survey and a series of listening sessions, receiving thousands of survey responses, which informed the criteria for selecting the next candidate, they said.

“We have found somebody who has experience with our district, who has heart for our students, for the staff,” said school board president Diana Craighead. “We have chosen somebody who has displayed a vision for how we go forward,” she said.

A graduate of Poly High School, Zaid has spent more than 30 years as an educator — serving LBUSD for all of them, as a teacher and in a range of administrative roles, including in employee relations, human resources and his current role as assistant superintendent of elementary and K-8 schools.

Craighead cited his commitment to investing his career



Courtesy of the Long Beach Unified School District

David Zaid

the district is doing well, in addition to where it needs to improve, particularly with respect to supporting students who have been underserved by LBUSD, Benitez said.

Zaid is assuming the role at a critical moment, when the district is facing a \$72 million budget deficit, student enrollment that is expected to dip below 60,000, further program and staff cuts, and lagging achievement outcomes.

Yet board members and administrators attested to his ability and readiness to take on the task of leading one of the largest districts in the state. Superintendent Baker, who has worked alongside Zaid as an administrator for 20 years, spoke about his many contributions: making decisions to safely reopen schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic, helping develop the equity leadership team, building trust within the Long Beach community, shaping budget priorities and contributing to the Black Student Achievement Initiative.

Baker then passed a literal baton to Zaid, as he took the microphone.

“Today I stand before you not as someone who is new to the district but as someone who has been shaped by the district,” he said, adding that his long tenure has given him many perspectives.

Zaid pledged to listen to all community members to address the large challenges before the district. “I believe Long Beach can meet this moment,” he said, “united by the children depending on us.” ■

“solely in Long Beach” as one of the reasons he was selected for the role. The board faced some pressure to broaden its search this year, including from board member Maria Isabel López. Instead, the board chose an internal candidate, as they have historically done.

“We’re going to put you to task because you are the right person,” board member Juan Benitez said to Zaid, singling out Zaid’s awareness of what



Photo courtesy Elise Hastie

Elise Hastie works in the Andrade Rounds Lab on the campus of Cal State LA.

Young chemist wins national recognition

She says LBCC taught her to see the world in a new way.

By Kate Raphael

When a medical emergency forced a top Long Beach student to miss more than a year of high school, she found herself ineligible to apply for most four-year colleges, derailing her plans of attending a research university to study science.

“Watching my dream slip out of reach was pretty devastating,” said Elise Hastie.

Yet she enrolled in Long Beach City College, which gave her the chance to start over, she said, and in her first chemistry class, her path changed. “All of a sudden, I began to see chemistry in everything,” she said, adding that “the world made an awful lot more sense” once she understood the intermolecular forces that allowed insects to walk on ponds and caused water to boil faster at elevation.

LBCC chemistry professor Arlie Blanco noticed that Hastie possessed “an extreme passion and a curiosity that I didn’t see in very many students,” she said. Blanco encouraged Hastie to apply for a summer research program at Cal State Los Angeles, which Hastie said “changed the trajectory of my life.”

Since then, she has transferred to Cal State LA to major in chemistry and has undertaken multiple summer research programs, including at the University of Washington and the California Institute of Technology.

Now, she is being honored as a Barry Goldwater Scholar, an award of \$7,500 in recognition of her academic achievements and commitment to a career in scientific research. The merit-based scholarship and associated

Chemist page 15

With special ed aides in high demand, LBUSD launches class to help fill vacancies

By Kate Raphael

A new course at the Long Beach School for Adults aims to train special education instructional aides to work in Long Beach Unified, an effort to fill a workforce gap that some teachers say is dire.

The class began last spring after LBSA principal Nicole Lopez observed consistent vacancies for aide positions in the district. She partnered with district administrators with expertise in special education to develop a 30-hour curriculum that covers everything from academic support to behavior management to first aid. At the course’s conclusion, students can receive help from the Long Beach Unified personnel commission to apply for instructional aide jobs within Long Beach Unified.

The course could help train a workforce that is in high demand in LBUSD. Teachers in the district told the Long Beach Business Journal that the lack of aide support in the classroom was a contributing factor to a rise in severe injuries. Some teachers said they spent so much time managing behaviors that there was little time for learning.

LBUSD contracts with other agencies to supplement aide support in the classroom, but some teachers said aides don’t always arrive with enough training to safely deescalate situations. While this course is not a prerequisite for employment as an aide, it could better prepare applicants for the job — “a feather in your cap,” Lopez said.

In the class, students learn how to collaborate with teachers, monitor academic progress, manage and document behavior, use assistive

technology, support personal care and perform first aid. They also role-play scenarios they might encounter with students, an effort to help them enter classrooms with more confidence and hands-on experience that could help them succeed and stay in the role, Lopez said.

Eighteen students enrolled in the spring course, and the six-week course will be offered in the evenings during both the fall 2026 and spring 2027 terms. It’s the third course added to LBSA’s offerings that attempts to create a pipeline of workers to fill open LBUSD positions; already, LBSA prepares adults to work as campus staff assistants and custodians.

The instructional aide course expands those offerings and also serves as a “great stepping stone to get into teaching,” Lopez said. ■

Parents push to limit screen use, technology in the classroom

The move to restrict learning on screens is gaining momentum.

By Kate Raphael

A group of parents and students is asking Long Beach Unified to restrict screens and technology in classrooms, spurred by Los Angeles Unified's recent move to strictly limit devices used in instruction.

In July, Kim Tashkin, a parent of an LBUSD middle schooler, spoke before the board of education, raising concerns that screen use could be hurting students. "It is unfair to allow our kids to be used as guinea pigs," she said.

Tashkin is among several dozen Long Beach parents pushing for evidence-based tech policies in the district. They pressed the board about educational technology spending, gamified learning, surveillance and data collection, and impacts on students' critical thinking, attention and socialization. LBUSD has taken steps to limit tech in the past, adopting a policy in 2025 to curtail phones and personal devices. But some parents say it isn't enough, especially when research has not clearly shown that providing students with devices improves academic outcomes.

The Long Beach group is a chapter of a national Schools Beyond Screens movement, founded in 2025 by Los Angeles Unified parents, according to the group's website. On the heels of LAUSD's recent policy, which eliminates laptops and tablets for students in first grade and below and caps screen time for older students, Long Beach's chapter is gaining momentum, Tashkin said.

She formed the local chapter when she noticed that her daughter spent much of her class time on the computer, she said. District-issued paper workbooks remained untouched at the end of the school year, she said.

Across the country, screens have become integral to American education, even as educators and researchers debate whether they have improved students' learning. Tashkin grew alarmed as she dove into the research. Some types of digital instruction have been found to promote learning, particularly for certain subjects and age groups. But some research also shows that excessive tech use poses risks to students' development. Broader research links high overall screen exposure with poor mental health outcomes.

Tashkin's daughter Lea, who recently finished sixth grade, told the Long Beach Business Journal in an interview that she spends about two and a half hours on screens during the school day. "It feels so lonely" being in a silent classroom with headphones



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

From right: Mo Baker, Kim Tashkin and her daughter Lea wait to speak during public comment at a Long Beach Unified School District board meeting. The group is asking to limit screen time and technology in classrooms.

on, she said, and noted that she has used a laptop in school since kindergarten.

Indeed, laptops and tablets are available for the district's youngest learners. Becky Peterson, who retired this spring after more than 25 years teaching in LBSUD, said her kindergartners all had access to laptops but that she only let her students use them for about 20 to 30 minutes once a week. "I use technologies very, very sparingly," she said.

And while there is no requirement that she use tech, much of the curriculum guide and suggested activities rely on screens, she said. Creating her own lesson plans without screens requires more time, she added.

That choice reflects her teaching philosophy ("kindergartners needed me to be interacting with them," she said), as well as her fear that as students grow habituated to the engaging pace of screen learning, she increasingly has to compete for their attention. "I'm expected to put on a show," she said, adding, "I'm not nearly as fascinating as a screen of animated characters."

Still, Peterson said she sees the utility of more technology use as students get older, and that it would be a disservice not to prepare students for our technologically driven world.

In interviews, parents said they are not asking for a prohibition on tech. Dismantling the entire system would cause "a lot of growing pains," said Mo Baker,

one of the co-leads of Long Beach's SBS chapter.

But, parents asked for more transparency on how district money is being spent on technologies — from the devices themselves to the contracts with ed tech companies like Curriculum Associates (which makes the i-Ready reading and math assessments), ST Math (a visual program using puzzles and games) and Amira (an AI-powered tool that assesses students' reading).

One parent, Elizabeth Jackson, suggested a return to a computer lab model, rather than integrating laptops and tablets directly into the classroom. Other parents asked for clearer guidelines about how their children will be protected from potential harms.

A spokesperson for Long Beach Unified, Eric Mitchell, said the district "encourages families with questions or concerns about their child's classroom experience, including the use of instructional technology, to work directly with their child's teacher or school administrator."

Referring to the reliance on tech in schools, parent Brittany Hart Scholten said, "It's a train that's really hard to stop."

Los Angeles Unified provided a template to change course, parents said, one they're motivated to replicate in LBUSD. ■

Chemist from page 14

foundation was established by Congress in 1986 to honor Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., and to support the next generation of research leaders, according to the scholarship website.

As a first-generation college student who is paying for her education on her own, Hastie said the scholarship helps her defray costs and could give her a leg up when applying for research fellowships to support graduate research.

Currently, Hastie is synthesizing "cyclodextrin-based nanosponges" — cup-shaped molecules with a water-soluble exterior and a water-repelling

cavity, allowing them to trap molecules in their core. That's the science behind Febreze, which captures odor particles in cyclodextrins, Hastie explained.

But cyclodextrins have many more applications, including the removal of pollutants from soil and water and targeted drug delivery.

One of Hastie's Cal State LA professors who helps oversee her research said in a statement that "her thirst for knowledge and understanding has fueled her outstanding scholarly performance both in the classroom and in the laboratory."

Now a junior at Cal State LA, Hastie said she hopes to become a chemistry professor and establish her own research lab.

Blanco, Hastie's LBCC mentor, said Hastie is making contributions not only to scientific research but to the scientific community. "She's kind; she's empathetic," Blanco said, adding that the scientific community needs women in science as well as those who look out for others.

"I'm really happy to just be a part of her story," Blanco said. "I can say that I knew her before she was famous." ■

Up to the minute news.

CSULB and Taiwanese university launch dual-degree partnership

Beginning in fall 2027, the institutions will offer two programs where students can earn degrees from both universities.

By Kate Raphael

Cal State Long Beach will partner with Taiwan's Ming Chuan University to launch dual-degree graduate programs, offering a global education to students in Long Beach.

Beginning in fall 2027, the institutions will offer two programs. In one program, students can earn a master's in business administration from CSULB and a degree in international business and trade from Ming Chuan University.

The other program will allow students to earn degrees in Asian studies from CSULB and teaching Chinese as a foreign language from MCU.

"One tuition, two degrees," said Pei-Fang Hung, who oversees international education as CSULB's vice provost for academic programs.

Each dual-degree program will bring students from Taiwan and California into the same classrooms,



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Two people walk the stairs to the upper campus at Cal State Long Beach.

Hung said. The programs will start with about 15 to 20 students per cohort, Hung said, and the partnership is intended to grow.

In the business dual-degree program, for example, students can partner with the Port of Long Beach — applying their knowledge of business management, international trade and

logistics to one of the largest ports in the world.

It's the next phase of a longstanding partnership between the universities. For two decades, the institutions have facilitated study abroad programs between their campuses, said LeAnn Eyerman, a faculty member at MCU who will now direct its U.S. arm.

MCU has had a U.S. location in Michigan since 2014, but faculty members had been exploring a move to California because it's easier for Taiwanese students to access, Eyerman said. Given the existing relationship with CSULB, it made sense to bring academic programs to Long Beach, she said.

The dual-degree programs build on a conversation already underway at CSULB, Hung said. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many students were not able to travel, and CSULB faculty began brainstorming ways to help them build cultural competency at home, she said.

MCU has a presence in many countries, including Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Thailand. CSULB is hoping to attract students at those campuses by creating a path for them to finish their bachelor's degrees in Long Beach, Hung said.

While students remain the focus, the partnership also provides opportunities for faculty, Hung said. Researchers at both universities are interested in collaborating on semiconductors and artificial intelligence, Hung said. That comes as Taiwan dominates global manufacturing of semiconductors and California is a hub of AI development. ■

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Red lights *from page 5*

at the same time, traffic deaths have risen.

Last year, the number of pedestrians killed by cars (32) outpaced murders (29). And the total number of fatal crashes, 53, hit the highest point in at least a decade. The spike has left some residents feeling like they're fending for themselves on increasingly dangerous streets.

Intersections have become "a little bit of a wild west type of thing," said dog walker Jo Stanford. She said she now teaches dogs and their owners "defensive walking."

Those include making eye contact with drivers before entering a crosswalk, trying to always cross at corners with high visibility and walking with dogs trailing behind her to protect them from drivers eager to make a right turn.

"I've put a lot of safety protocols in place over the years just based on the experiences I've had," she said.

Longtime resident Troy Diack said he no longer trusts other drivers to stop since he was T-boned while pulling into an intersection in 2022. Now, whenever a light turns green, he waits a beat before hitting the gas. And when he's rolling up to a red light and it turns green, he still slows down before entering the intersection "to the annoyance of the other drivers," Diack said.

It's worth it, he said, to avoid being hit again. He said the last crash left him with three broken ribs, \$60,000 in medical bills and a lingering fear that's kept him from teaching his 6-year-old son to ride a bike.

What's being done

LBPd is pushing hard to refill its ranks. Early this year, it opened up a new police academy, and pushed through its largest recruitment class to date — 98 prospective officers. Getting them trained and deployed could give officers more time for traffic enforcement if it's deemed a priority.

In the meantime, Solomita said, current patrol officers should "understand the nuances of each one of the geographic areas that they patrol," and manage hot spots for bad crashes or traffic violations.

In addition, the department says it's been coaching drivers and pedestrians on ways to stay safe. For instance, "At nighttime, we ask, we implore, pedestrians to wear even bright colors," Solomita said.

Long Beach also plans to deploy speed cameras at 18 spots throughout the city this fall. City officials are hopeful they can slow drivers down, and the ticket revenue they bring in can pay for smaller safety improvements on neighborhood streets.

There are no immediate plans for red-light cameras, but the city's Public Works department does install other measures at intersections "to improve driver awareness and compliance," Jocelin Padilla, a spokesperson for the department, wrote in an email. Those include adjusting the timing of traffic lights to give cars more time to clear the intersection and improving lighting at intersections.

There are also plans to install left-turn lights at a handful of intersections throughout the city over the next few months, which is one of the costliest fixes the city has in its toolbox.

Pressure remains to do more. City Council members and residents have said they want a faster pace toward fewer deaths. ■

Firefighters to honor 25th anniversary of 9/11 with stair-climb

By Jacob Sisneros

Long Beach firefighters will mark the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by hosting their first-ever stair-climb fundraiser.

On Sept. 12 this year, the public is invited to join at least 100 LBFD firefighters who will climb 110 flights of stairs, a reference to the height of the World Trade Center towers in New York, where 343 firefighters and thousands of others were killed in 2001.

They will do so by climbing 22 stories at Long Beach's World Trade Center a total of five times — a grand total of 2,200 steps.

Anyone interested in participating can sign up at longbeachstairclimb.com for \$50 each. Proceeds will go to the Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the FDNY Fire Family Transport Foundation, LBFD firefighter Phil Hanlen said at a news conference.

Hanlen has had the idea for the climb since 2006, when he and LBFD Capt. Charles Hakopian both joined the department, Hakopian said.

In June, the two traveled to New York, along with two other Long Beach firefighters, to visit the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. While there, they also met with a retired New York fire captain who worked at Ground Zero for three days following the attacks, Hakopian said.

Their trip left a profound impression on them, especially because they participated in the Tunnel to Towers Foundation climb — making the 104-story trek



John Donegan/Long Beach Business Journal

Long Beach firefighter Charles Hakopian gives opening remarks at a press conference in downtown Long Beach.

up the newly built World Trade Center.

With the Long Beach event, they're hoping to create an opportunity for people to "reflect, remember and pay tribute with every step," LBFD Chief Dennis Buchanan said at the news conference.

There will be hydration stations on several floors at Long Beach's World Trade Center, Hakopian said, along with commemorative photos honoring the 9/11 victims.

The event will also feature a moment of silence and a reception following the climb, which will have local food vendors and a beer garden, Hakopian said. Those interested can attend the reception for \$25 each.

"For firefighters, September 11 is more than just a date in history," Buchanan said. "It is a reminder of the courage, selflessness and commitment that define our profession." ■

Rocket Lab buys satellite communications firm in \$8 billion deal

The move is intended to help the Long Beach-based company compete with SpaceX.

By John Donegan

Long Beach-based Rocket Lab announced it struck an \$8 billion deal in late June to buy Iridium, a satellite communications company, in an aggressive move to strengthen the upstart rocket-and-satellite company's challenge to SpaceX in the commercial space industry.

Rocket Lab agrees to pay \$54 a share in cash and stock, a 24% premium over Iridium's last closing price. The transaction is expected to close in mid-2027, pending regulatory approval.

"This will be one of the most transformative deals in the space industry," said Peter Beck, chief executive of Rocket Lab, in a recorded presentation.

Murielle Baker, director of Rocket Lab's corporate and launch communications, said it's too early in the acquisition process to say how and whether this will bring jobs and facilities to Long Beach.

"This deal positions Rocket Lab as a vertically integrated space communications powerhouse able to

build our own satellites, launch our own rockets, and operate our own constellation across the only truly global network that guarantees 100% coverage over every ocean, desert, and airway — creating one of the strongest space companies in the world," Baker said in a statement on Monday.

It comes as a sign that the company is looking to compete with SpaceX and its Starlink network, which offers broadband internet service using a fleet of more than 10,000 satellites.

Rocket Lab, which was founded in New Zealand in 2006 and relocated its headquarters to Long Beach in 2020, has for years said it intends to be a self-sufficient satellite provider, able to design, build, launch and operate its own satellite fleet.

With 2,600 employees — 800 of whom work locally — the company has already built a network of launch vehicles, satellite manufacturing facilities and 245 satellites.

This acquisition gives them Iridium's own constellation of 66 low-Earth-orbit satellites, as well as its mobile phone service used by more than 2.55 million subscribers across government, defense, aviation and maritime markets.

Rocket Lab is second only to SpaceX in the number of missions flown by U.S.-based launch

providers, and its smaller Electron rocket is the second most purchased in the country behind SpaceX's comparable vehicle.

Since last winter, the company has received a number of contracts, including an \$805 million contract from the U.S. Space Force to develop 18 defense satellites meant to detect enemy missiles in low Earth orbit and a \$30 million contract with defense firm Anduril for hypersonic test flights in Virginia. Last week, it announced it would launch Electron rockets for several NASA missions from its New Zealand launch site in early 2027.

Though Rocket Lab has been here for years, the acquisition signals a continued expansion of defense and aerospace companies around Long Beach's airport grounds, known locally as "Space Beach." Companies including Relativity Space, Vast, JetZero, SpinLaunch and True Anomaly have all built or expanded operations in the city in recent years.

In January, Rocket Lab hosted Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth as part of a national tour of defense contractors, touring the company's engine development complex — a 144,000-square-foot warehouse once used by the now-defunct Virgin Orbit. ■

Landmark waterfront restaurant reopens

The Reef, which first debuted in 1958, is back for a second act.

By Ashley Bolter

A decade before the Queen Mary docked in Long Beach, David Tallichet opened The Reef, a tiki-themed restaurant on the nearby waterfront.

After its 1958 debut, it quickly became a destination, attracting thousands of customers a day and helping launch a chain of dozens of themed destination restaurants across the country.

But The Reef shut down at the beginning of the pandemic, and while the space opened up again for private events when allowed, the dining room has remained closed for the past six years.

Now, it's making its return. Owner John Tallichet, David's son who took over the business after David's death in 2007, said they were waiting for the right time. The opening of Long Beach's new waterfront amphitheater, practically next door, was the perfect opportunity. The Reef reopened in June, hoping to build on its already rich Long Beach legacy.

David Tallichet was famous for his empire of restaurants that included the Proud Bird next to LAX and the Castaway in Burbank, but that business started with The Reef. Early in his career, he moved around a lot as he worked in the hotel industry, but when he landed in Long Beach and started working at Hotel Lafayette, he didn't want to leave.

"He just kind of fell in love with



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

The Reef restaurant, which is between the Queen Mary and The Maya hotel in Long Beach

Long Beach, and figured, 'This is where I want to stay,'" John said.

Wanting to put down roots in Long Beach and expand beyond the hotel business, David opened The Reef in partnership with five other businessmen. One of his partners, George Millay, would go on to open SeaWorld, Magic Mountain and a waterpark called Wet 'n Wild.

Unsure if The Reef would be successful, David kept his job at Hotel Lafayette for another year. The Reef turned out to be a great success, and the first of the many themed restaurants David would open.

"We're very proud of this restaurant. Being born in Long Beach, this is

where it all began, and it's extremely important, not just to me, but my whole family," John said.

The Reef has gone through many changes in its 68 years. The original building was destroyed in a fire in 1976, but was quickly rebuilt. Several renovations have turned it into the grand, three-story space it is today. The Reef lost its tiki theme along the way, became The Sassafras for a couple of years in the '80s, and saw Long Beach expand around it.

But John said the heart of the restaurant remains the same, and his family is excited to keep doing what they do and get The Reef's name back out there.

"I think a big part of what we do

today is being part of the community. We have so many events here, we have companies have events here, we have so many weddings and quinceañeras and bar mitzvahs, and just so many things that give people a chance to come and celebrate," he said.

John said families have told him that they've had several generations get married at The Reef with a view of the ocean and The Queen Mary as their backdrop. Other couples had their first date at the restaurant and have come back to The Reef for their wedding.

Now, he hopes it will remain a special place for them and a generation of new customers. ■

The Reef is at 880 Harbor Scenic Drive.

City must rehire police officer it fought to keep off force

An appeals court also ruled he's owed years of back pay.

By Jacob Sisneros

A state appeals court ruled last month that Long Beach must rehire an officer it fired four years ago after he was accused of lying in official reports.

The unanimous decision from the three-judge panel upholds a previous ruling from a city employment panel and a lower court. It also brings an end to a roughly five-year legal saga during which the city filed two appeals in an attempt to keep former Long Beach police Officer Dedier Reyes off the force, even at a time when the department has struggled to fill vacancies.

Long Beach City Attorney Dawn McIntosh said she was "disappointed" by the court's decision but said her office does not plan to file any further appeals.

The ruling means Long Beach owes Reyes more than four years of pay he has missed since his dismissal, and the city must offer him a job with the police department that is on par with his previous position as a patrol officer. Records from Transparent California show Reyes' base salary was \$121,948 in his last full year at the LBPD.

The city fired Reyes in 2022, shortly after he was charged with one count of filing a false police report and one count of perjury for allegedly lying about his observations during a 2018 gun arrest. A jury ultimately acquitted Reyes and his less-experienced partner, Officer David Salcedo.

But the charges, the city's firing of the two officers and the criminal trial that followed, cast doubt on their credibility. As a result, prosecutors dropped dozens of cases where the two made arrests or would've needed to testify to make the case.

Reyes, who was training Salcedo, was accused of lying and perjuring himself when he wrote in a February 2018 police report that he recognized two gang members standing outside a Long Beach taqueria and then saw one go inside and leave a bag containing a gun.

Surveillance video from the taqueria made internal affairs investigators question how Reyes could have seen what was happening inside the restaurant and also showed he arrested the wrong gang member for allegedly carrying the bag with the gun.

Reyes later told internal affairs investigators that he "made a mistake in this police report," according to an interview transcript from a separate civil lawsuit.

Reyes and Salcedo continued working and weren't criminally accused for nearly four years after the incident. Then-District Attorney Jackie Lacey reviewed the case and decided it didn't mer-

it charges, but when George Gascón became the new District Attorney in 2021 — after making police reform central to his campaign — he brought charges against the officers.

After their acquittal on the criminal charges, a city employment panel ruled they must be rehired, but Long Beach sued to try to block that decision.

After reviewing all of the evidence, the three-judge appeals panel sided with Reyes. They found it plausible that he mistakenly recalled the events leading up to the 2018 arrest and noted that the city "identified no apparent motive" for him to falsify the police report, according to their ruling.

When the city fired Reyes, it noted that he had racked up 14 use-of-force reviews and 11 citizen complaints since 2010, according to court documents. But the department determined that all of those uses of force were within policy and none of the citizen complaints were determined to have merit, the court noted in its ruling.

Long Beach has, however, been sued twice over Reyes' alleged misconduct, resulting in payouts of \$550,000 and \$499,800.

Reyes will now have the option of rejoining LBPD.

Salcedo has already been rehired and assigned to work patrol, LBPD Executive Communications Officer Allison Gallagher wrote in an email last October. ■



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