Thirteen Health Departments Achieve National Accreditation Through the Public Health Accreditation Board

PRNewswire  FOLLOW
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ALEXANDRIA, Va., March 28, 2019 /PRNewswire-PRWeb/ -- Every day, communities around the nation trust and rely on health departments to keep them safe from diseases and injuries, promote good health, and protect them from hazards. To uphold that trust, more and more health departments are seeking and obtaining national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). National accreditation assures people and communities that their health department has the capacity to provide the highest quality of services. This week, 13 health departments achieved national initial accreditation through PHAB, bringing the benefits of accreditation to nearly 80 percent of the U.S. population.

PHAB, the nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that administers the national public health accreditation program, aims to improve and protect the health of the public by advancing and ultimately transforming the quality and performance of the nation's state, Tribal, local, and territorial public health departments. To receive national accreditation through PHAB, a health department must undergo a rigorous, multi-faceted, peer-reviewed assessment process to ensure it meets or exceeds a set of public health quality standards and measures.

Included in this week's accreditation decisions are nine local health departments, three state health departments, and one Tribal health department. Marking yet another major milestone for PHAB's national accreditation program, four health departments this week became the first to successfully achieve national reaccreditation through PHAB, thereby extending their accreditation status for another five years.

"We are so proud of these 17 health departments for wanting to be the best organizations they can be," said PHAB President and CEO Kaye Bender, PhD, RN, FAAN. "And we are extremely excited to be at a point in the accreditation program where some of the first health departments to achieve initial accreditation through PHAB are now achieving reaccreditation. In doing so, they are ensuring their communities that the value of accreditation is long-term -- not a one-time recognition -- and that continual improvement is the hallmark of a 21st century organization."

The four health departments to successfully achieve national reaccreditation through PHAB are Franklin County Health Department in Frankfort, Kentucky; Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department in Florence, Kentucky; Washington State Department of Health in Olympia, Washington; and West Allis Health Department
in West Allis, Wisconsin. The four were among the first to achieve national initial accreditation through PHAB in 2013.

"The West Allis Health Department is excited to be one of the first four health departments to complete this new milestone in the public health accreditation process," said West Allis Health Commissioner Sally Nusslock. "We have been an early adopter and promoter of public health accreditation and look forward to continuing this journey with PHAB. The PHAB Accreditation Standards and Measures have provided us with a framework to assess, build and showcase our work to our residents and peers. Accreditation has been an awesome way to show our officials and residents we are meeting high quality public health practice standards and are providing services that are responsive to the needs in our community."

PHAB’s national accreditation program, which launched in 2011 with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has become the national standard for public health in the United States. The credential has now been achieved by 36 state health departments, 217 local health departments, three Tribal health departments, and one statewide integrated local public health department system. Among the local health departments to achieve initial accreditation this week is the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health in San Bernardino, California. For both the department and the community, pride in the achievement runs deep.

"As a public health department, we strive to create a healthier community by strengthening our partnerships, stimulating quality and performance improvement opportunities, improving accountability and transparency with all our stakeholders, and celebrating and supporting our amazingly diverse workforce," Director Trudy Raymundo said. "Achieving national accreditation confirms our ongoing promise to all of these efforts. But our accreditation journey should never stop at that point. Our commitment to the community to strive for constant improvement should never be one more thing we do – it should simply be who we are."

On the other side of the country this week, that same pride and ongoing promise resonated through the halls of the newly accredited Pennsylvania Department of Health in Harrisburg, where Secretary of Health Rachel Levine, MD, is unceasingly committed to working toward a healthy Pennsylvania.

"This is a very important milestone in our continued efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, prevent injury and disease, and to assure the safe delivery of quality health care to Pennsylvanians," Dr. Levine said. "Each day, we are working to address health issues in a wide range of areas, including ensuring Pennsylvania has healthy moms and healthy kids, protecting seniors in nursing homes, and addressing the opioid crisis. We are committed to working toward a healthy Pennsylvania. Public health is an ever-changing landscape, with potential threats including Ebola, pandemic influenza and the misinformation regarding vaccinations. We are committed to preparing for each of these concerns and also being aware of new potential issues that could affect the health of Pennsylvanians each day."

National initial accreditation was awarded March 21, 2019 to:

- Albany County Department of Health, Albany, New York
- Allen County Public Health, Lima, Ohio
- Cabell-Huntington Health Department, Huntington, West Virginia
National reaccreditation was awarded March 21, 2019 to:

- Franklin County Health Department, Frankfort, Kentucky
- Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department, Florence, Kentucky
- Washington State Department of Health, Olympia, Washington
- West Allis Health Department, West Allis, Wisconsin

For more information, contact Teddi Nicolaus at (703) 778-4549, ext. 118, or email tnicolaus(at)phaboard.org. Learn more about PHAB and accreditation at http://www.phaboard.org.

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About the Public Health Accreditation Board

The Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) was created to serve as the national public health accrediting body and is jointly funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The development of national public health accreditation has involved, and is supported by, public health leaders and practitioners from the national, tribal, state, local, and territorial levels. Learn more about PHAB or sign up for the PHAB e-newsletter by visiting http://www.phaboard.org.

SOURCE Public Health Accreditation Board
MORONGO BASIN — San Bernardino County's residents are healthier for the third year in a row, but still fall below average for the state, according to a national ranking released March 19.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, develops and distributes county health rankings each year. The goal is to build awareness of factors influencing health and empower community leaders working to improve health.

San Bernardino County ranked 38 out of 58 California counties this year.
The county ranked 41st in 2018 and 46th in 2017, so it’s improved eight places over the three-year period ending in 2019.

“This improvement is the result of the collective efforts of our staff and our partners,” county health officer Dr. Maxwell Ohikhuare said in a released statement.

He credited initiatives like Community Vital Signs, which brings together groups invested in residents’ health.

The Morongo Basin has plenty of outdoor exercise options along with the endless hiking and fitness opportunities within Joshua Tree National Park. The park provides more than 270 miles of trails alone.

“Healthy Parks, Healthy People” is a national initiative established by the National Park System to partner with local groups to promote how parks can help a person's physical, mental and social well-being.

The Morongo Basin Healthcare District partnered with Joshua Tree National Park as part of this initiative. The program engages doctors to “prescribe” outdoor activities to their patients, including hikes and walks in Joshua Tree National Park.

The provider can provide a hiking guide and discuss with the patient which trails would work best.

The “prescription” authorizes free entry to the park for the patient for 90 days.

A healthy community promotes a positive physical, social and economic environment, according to the county’s Public Health Department. It includes good schools, walkable communities, public transportation, open spaces, adequate housing and access to health care.
Bill aims to deter removal of artifacts from Nevada land, parks

Posted by Tim Evans on March 28, 2019 at 1:00 am

Ice age fossils, which were relocated from the San Bernardino County Museum, sit on a truck at the Las Vegas Natural History Museum before being transferred to a climate-controlled secure facility. Jan. 28, 2018. (Andrea Cornejo Las Vegas Review-Journal)

CARSON CITY — Commercial fossil hunters and others who remove historic or culturally significant artifacts from state lands without a permit could see tougher penalties under a measure that seeks to conform state law with its federal counterpart.

is sponsored by Assemblywoman Daniele Monroe-Moreno, D-North Las Vegas, and seven other lawmakers. The bill, presented before the Assembly Judiciary Committee on Thursday, would assess penalties that take into account the value of items involved.

Current law classifies first and subsequent offenses as misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors, respectively, regardless of an item’s value. Under the proposed change, a first offense involving an object worth less than $500 would be classified an E felony punishable by up to two years in prison, a $5,000 fine or both.

At the top end, a repeat offense involving an object worth more than $500 could rate a B felony, drawing up to 10 years in prison.

In testimony, supporters stressed that the measure was aimed at people who make a living selling such artifacts, not at the errant student who picks up what looks like a pretty rock. Backers nonetheless said they would consider scaling back their proposed penalties.

Supporters of a new to Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument turned out to back the bill, as did representatives of Native American communities seeking to keep historical artifacts from going to collectors.

“The cultural value of an item is often far more than the commercial value,” said Michon Eben of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony.

Prehistoric artifacts, such as the tusk of a woolly mammoth, can sell for thousands of dollars each.

Supporters said a has proven an effective deterrent in national parks and other protected federal lands, safeguarding artifacts without overly penalizing the merely curious who pick up something unwittingly.

Bill Dentzer at or. Follow on Twitter.
CLAWA Approves Service to Proposed Blue Jay Resort

BY HEIDI FRON, Reporter | Posted: Thursday, March 28, 2019 9:00 am

The Board of Directors of the Crestline-Lake Arrowhead Water Agency (CLAWA) held a special meeting on March 18 at its board room on Crest Forest Drive in Crestline. One of three items on the agenda was to address a request for a Will Serve Letter from Rock Ridge Resources, Inc.

A Will Serve Letter is a formal quote of water and sewer connection fees, issued by a water agency outlining the conditions of water and sewer service to a particular parcel.

Rock Ridge owns assessor parcel number (APN) 0335-331-07. Previously the location of a mobile home park, the parcel is along State Highway 189 in Blue Jay, near the intersection at North Bay Road. It is adjacent to the Union 76 gas station and convenience store located at 27243 Highway 189 in Blue Jay, which is also owned by the Rock Ridge corporation.

Rock Ridge proposes to build a “Blue Jay Village Resort” on the site. A central feature would be a four-story hotel with 46 rooms and facilities to accommodate 150 guests for weddings and other special events. A membership gym is slated to include an indoor racquetball court for use by the public as well as hotel guests.

A brewery (pub) and deli on site would be complemented by a separate malt and coffee shop. A 330-seat amphitheater at the proposed resort would host concerts, weddings, group functions and more.

An informational board at the site states that if the project is not approved, Rock Ridge will restore the property with 65 new mobile trailer homes.

Once the company meets county requirements for permits, a conditional use permit, environmental studies and more, CLAWA will be able to send the Will Serve Letter to the applicant (Rock Ridge) upon completion of requirements.

Bruce Risher, president of CLAWA, said one condition that must be met is for the property owner to provide a second, smaller water tank for the property.

Rock Ridge Resources, Inc. is a petroleum company that provides capital and receivable financing for the management, expansion and development of proven reserves and natural resources.

In addition, the company’s portfolio includes management and development of real estate holdings, substance abuse recovery services, and marketing and recruitment services supporting substance abuse treatment facilities. Through its subsidiary, Serenity Lodge on Meadow Brook Road in Lake Arrowhead,
Rock Ridge holds a California State Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation License, and provides treatment to men, 18-years and older.

CLAWA is a state contractor that sells imported water wholesale to approximately 25 retail water purveyors for domestic use and fire protection purposes. This water supply benefits the permanent population along with the many additional people who visit within CLAWA’s boundary seasonally or during weekends.

*Heidi Fron can be reached at hfron@mountain-news.com.*
Crestline Cityhood Finds Majority Support From Chamber Businesses

By Christian Shepherd, Reporter | Posted: Thursday, March 21, 2019 9:00 am

An email survey of local Lake Gregory businesses owners conducted by Incorporate Lake Gregory resulted in 57.14 percent of participants stating they were in favor of the incorporation of the Crestline and Lake Gregory communities.

Incorporating is the process of creating a city. The areas affected by incorporation would be removed from the control of the County of San Bernardino and would be controlled by locally elected officials.

Incorporate Lake Gregory is a committee formed by local business owners and community leaders that is leading the incorporation movement. The findings of the survey were announced at a Crestline/Lake Gregory Chamber of Commerce meeting on Tuesday which was attended by more than 15 community members and business owners.

“We did do a survey of the current chamber members to get a feel of where our chamber members stand, and what questions or concerns they might have,” said Louis Boehle, president of the Crestline/Lake Gregory Chamber of Commerce, at that meeting. “We do have a majority in favor.”

According to a document distributed by at the chamber meeting, 18.37 percent of the participating business owners are against incorporation, while 24.5 percent are not sure and need more information. There were 47 responses from a total of 242 emails sent out.

During the meeting, Mike Johnstone, member of Incorporate Lake Arrowhead and owner of VP Goodwin and Son’s Market, said Kathleen Rollings-McDonald, a consultant brought on by Incorporate Lake Gregory who previously worked for the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), was almost done with the preliminary financial feasibility study.

“In a couple weeks, we will be in a position to go down to LAFCO and present our initial application,” Johnstone said. “At that point, that is when they begin to dig into the nuts and bolts.”

The application that will be submitted is a request for LAFCO to do an in-depth financial feasibility study, following the initial study that is submitted. A petition signed by Lake Gregory community residents is a required part of the application to LAFCO. Incorporate Lake Gregory will have six months to collect signatures from 25 percent of the registered voters within the affected territory.
This petition is not asking residents to sign that they would like to create a city, rather a signature stating that they would like LAFCO to do the in-depth financial feasibility study.

“I think that is important,” said Christin Daniels, director of Crestline/Lake Gregory Chamber of Commerce. “You are asking people to sign something, what is it that they are signing? They are not signing ‘make us a city,’ they are signing ‘do the study’ so we can find out if it is feasible. Then it will be voted on in the polls.”

LAFCO will then use their finding to make a determination of whether cityhood is financially possible.

Johnstone added the study could take LAFCO up to eight months to complete and that Incorporate Lake Gregory is hoping to have the issue of Crestline cityhood on the ballot in 2020.

The cityhood application will cost a total of $70,000. Johnstone said Incorporate Lake Gregory has already raised a total of roughly $10,000.

Incorporate Lake Gregory also spoke on whether addresses would be different after an attendee said she knew many people in the Twin Peaks area would not be happy with their addresses being changed to Crestline or Lake Gregory.

Bill Mellinger, pastor at Crestline First Baptist, said the addresses would not be changed and gave the example of Alta Loma and Rancho Cucamonga.

Alta Loma was one of the three unincorporated areas that became Rancho Cucamonga in 1977, more than 40 years ago.

“Twin Peaks will remain Twin Peaks. Any area that has that kind of identity continues to get that. The beauty is you also get the benefits of cityhood,” Mellinger said.

Incorporate Lake Gregory will be presenting the finding of their preliminary feasibility study on Saturday, March 30 at 1 p.m. There will be a second identical meeting on Wednesday, April 3 at 7 p.m. in order to accommodate all schedules.

Johnstone said that so far the findings of the preliminary financial feasibility study are positive.

*Christian Shepherd can be reached at cshepherd@mountain-news.com.*
HELP FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING KIDS

BY PRECINCT REPORTER NEWS / MARCH 28, 2019 / 52 / 0
By Dianne Anderson

Admittedly, many of the folks that step through the doors of Westside Kinship Support Services come carrying a lot of heavy emotional baggage, but they walk away with a much lighter load.
Most of the clients Dr. Clyde Stewart sees are grandparents in crisis taking on more responsibility within the family, and overwhelmed with many stressors.

It is taxing them in their golden years.

“That's not an idea or a hypothesis, that is the truth,” said Stewart, pastor at the Westside Christian Center in San Bernardino. “The majority of the caregivers are grandparents. Some have six and eight grandkids.”

At the center, his program serves about 100 families, with about 40 grandparents coming out weekly to meet up with their support group. The center is located at Westside Kinship Support Services at 224 E 16th Street, between Sierra Way and Waterman Ave.

He said the foundation of their program addresses a family dynamic that can be passed down through generations. Some grandparents have raised their grandkids, and are now raising their great grandkids.

One issue may involve adult kids that have been, or should have been, in therapy because of their own abandonment issues, which then gets passed on to the kids.

Poverty, drugs and incarceration – often in that order – are at the root of the crisis. In recent decades, many parents have been caught up in clogged pipelines to prison, leaving the kids behind.

“They grow up with some emotional damage that shows up later on in their lives,” he said. “They're devastated by mom and dad gone, and being raised by grandma, grandpa or auntie or uncle or siblings.”

Dealing with the ambivalence is one way that the center steps in to help.

Grandparents always love the grandkids, but they may be resentful of having to do that gig all over again in their 60's and 70s. They are grappling with triggers and signals, and responsibility.

“We have speakers come in to do sessions with them, how to deal with stress and anger, and how to let go of the anger toward the kids with having to raise them,” he said.

The center’s kinship services receive support, and referrals from San Bernardino County.

Typically, social workers will pick up at-risk kids, and try placing them with close relatives, or whoever else is willing to take them, but he said sometimes even the social workers are unaware of available kinship services.

Grandparents may often step in to help the family because no one can, and are risking their housing situation in the process.
“Some seniors have had to move out of their senior facility or apartment even if they had the room for it because they don’t allow children there,” he said.

He wants local families to know the Kinship Center is there for them. They can access a number of programs to save money, including free food, and guidance on how to raise the new additions to the family.

At his church, he also distributes food bags weekly, and offers referrals to other support services in the community. For struggling grandparents, he said they work with safety net partners, including the Christian Center, Catholic Charities and the Children’s Fund to help with rental assistance.

Each month, the program also tries to give kin care relatives a break away from the daily grind.

“We take them to breakfast every third Tuesday of the month, so they can have respite time. They get away from the kids for two or three hours, and have a moment,” he said.

They take all the grandmothers, and aunts out for lunch on Mother’s Day. The same goes for Father’s Day for grandfathers, and the uncles. At other times, they take the kids out to the movies, which grandparents simply can’t afford.

“We do fun stuff. One time we took a trip to the beach. Some of the caregivers, the adults, had never been to the beach,” he said.

Stewart said that he and his wife started the kinship program, following a firsthand experience of raising his nephew as his sister then dealt with substance abuse. This June marks ten years that they have been providing support services to caregivers raising relative children.

Between the support groups, training, referrals, they also have twice weekly meetings at the church, where kinship givers can get a meal so they don’t have to cook that day for the family.

While there, the program covers timely topics and resources. Most of their providers are grandparents with younger children, who can test their nerves. A lot has changed in the decades since they’ve first raised their own children.

“We help them navigate the school system. Some kids have special needs,” he said.

Not long ago, they welcomed one new family, and aunt and uncle, that is raising six nieces and nephews.
Often, he said kinship care-giving relatives show up a little shell shocked, and confused.

"The support group will share their experience of when they first got their kids, how they dealt with it, what feelings and roller coaster they were on. The support group is a big deal here, it gives you hope," he said.

For more information, call (909) 889-5757 or see https://www.westsidechristian.center/kinship
Prosecutors decline to file charges in fatal Joshua Tree dog mauling

San Bernardino County prosecutors will not file any charges against the owners of four dogs that fatally mauled a 70-year-old woman two months ago in Joshua Tree.

Lana Bergman died after the pit bulls, which belonged to a family staying near the residence, mauled her in 59000 block of Sunflower Drive on Jan. 16, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

Ron Webster, a supervising deputy district attorney with the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office, said there was insufficient evidence to move forward with a criminal case.

Bergman's family disagreed with the decision.

Harriet Sagalow, the victim's sister, said she hoped charges would have been filed. She said Bergman left a voicemail before she died to say the dog's owners needed to leave.

"It's very frustrating," Sagalow said.

The dog's owners were identified as Stephanie Johnston and Daniel Nelson, Webster said.
Prosecutors decline to file charges in fatal Joshua Tree dog mauling

The San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department said Lana Bergman died after the pit bulls mauled her on Jan. 16, 2019, in Joshua Tree. (Photo: San Bernardino County Sheriff)

More: Joshua Tree woman fatally mauled by four pit bulls living at her home (https://story/news/2019/01/17/joshua-tree-woman-fatally-mauled-pit-bulls-living-her-house/2607176002/)

More: ‘She was lifeless:’ Woman mauled in Anza by 3 pit bulls dies of injuries weeks later, family says (https://story/news/crime_courts/2019/02/18/angela-johnson-woman-mauled-anza-december-three-pit-bulls-dies/2910215002/)


The sheriff’s department said multiple tips were received alleging the dogs’ owners were potentially wanted in Oregon. After an investigation, the tips were not found to be accurate.

After the mauling, the San Bernardino County Children and Family Services went to the site and ultimately determined the couple’s children were healthy and were allowed to remain with them, according to the sheriff’s department.

DIG DEEPER
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Prosecutors decline to file charges in fatal Joshua Tree dog mauling
REACH opens air medical transport base at SCLA

By Rene Ray De La Cruz
Staff Writer

Posted Mar 26, 2019 at 5:53 PM
Updated Mar 26, 2019 at 5:53 PM

VICTORVILLE — REACH Air Medical Services recently announced the opening of its newest emergency air medical transport base in the High Desert.

Located at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville, the new base will work closely with American Medical Response of San Bernardino County and will operate in partnership with the County Fire.

The new air ambulance base, the company's second at SCLA, will provide emergency transport services 24-hours a day, seven days a week, with the central location expected to result in faster response times for emergency and trauma patients in the county and the surrounding regions, the company said.

“We are incredibly pleased to open this base and to be serving the residents of our community,” said Sean Russell, president of REACH. “REACH is proud to now be working alongside AMR of San Bernardino County and to continue working closely with the San Bernardino County Fire Department, as well as increasing our overall support to local EMS and healthcare systems.”

The Victorville base is staffed by a flight crew that includes trained and experienced pilots, clinicians, and aircraft maintenance technicians. The Airbus H-135 helicopter that operates from the base is medically-configured with the latest avionics and safety features, the company said.

The aircraft is also one of the only instrument flight-rule capable helicopters in the region, which means it can provide service during inclement weather when other aircraft may be grounded.
Headquartered in Sacramento, REACH operates throughout Southern California with additional air medical bases located in Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial Counties. The proximity of these bases allows for additional air transport coverage in the community when an asset is already in service on another call.

REACH is a participating provider in the AirMedCare Network, the nation's largest air medical transport membership program. When transported by REACH, AMCN members incur no out of pocket expenses for a medically necessary flight. Membership is $85 a year for an entire household or $65 a year for seniors. In addition to covering members when flown by REACH, membership extends to all AMCN's providers in 320 locations across 38 states.

REACH also provides service to communities throughout California, Oregon, Nevada, Montana, Texas, Colorado, and Hawaii. REACH employs hundreds of trained nurses, paramedics, pilots and aircraft maintenance technicians to provide service to patients using their fleet of medically equipped helicopters, airplanes, and ground ambulances.

REACH is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems, which is the gold standard for patient care and safety in the medical transport industry. For more information, visit www.REACHAir.com

*Reporter Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com, Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz*
SEVERAL U.S. airlines said the upgrades to the 737 Max announced by Boeing appeared to be adequate. Above, Southwest 737 Max jetliners in Victorville.
SR-18 Paving and Guardrail Project Update

Posted: Thursday, March 28, 2019 9:00 am

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is close to completing the State Route 18 (SR 18) paving and guardrail project. Work will continue until mid-April to finish the final details and clean up from recent storm activity.

The contractor will continue working with lane closures between Waterman Canyon and SR 138 Monday through Friday, 6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. One lane may be closed in each direction for up to a two-mile section.

Caltrans thanks the community for their patience and support during the project.

Caltrans will be enacting lane closures from Monday through Friday during regular business hours in order to repair damage and disturbances to the road between Waterman Canyon and SR 138 as show above.
LOCAL NEWS

Want to offer input on access to Redlands train stations? Walking tours set

Construction equipment sits near the Santa Fe Depot in Redlands on Aug. 9, 2018. The historic depot is poised to become the new downtown Redlands train station for a 9-mile passenger rail line that is to run between Redlands and San Bernardino. (File photo by Jennifer Iyer, Staff)

By JENNIFER IYER | jiyer@scng.com | Red	acts

/03/27/want-to-offer-input-on-access-to-redlands-train-stations-walking-tours-set/?utm_medium=social&utm
Designers of the three proposed Redlands train stations are offering walking tours of the properties this week.

The San Bernardino County Transportation Authority’s consultant Alta Planning + Design is seeking input from the public on bicycle and pedestrian connections to the stations.

Tours of the downtown station begin at 4 and 5 p.m. Friday, March 29, in the City Hall parking lot, 35 Cajon. St. Tours of the area proposed for the New York Street Station begin at 11 a.m. and noon Saturday outside Orangewood High School, 515 Texas St. The University Station tours begin at 3 and 4 p.m. Saturday at the Sylvan Park picnic area.

Reservations can be made by emailing RedladsRailAudits@gmail.com.

Designers also have a booth at Market Night, held Thursdays in downtown, and at the farmers market which is held Saturdays at 100 E. Redlands Blvd.
Barstow’s new sign lights the desert

By Christine Toppenberg For the Daily Press

BARSTOW — The owners of the Outlets at Barstow, city officials, and other invited guests celebrated the completion of the LED freeway marquee on Interstate 15 Tuesday with champagne, hors d’oeuvres, and fireworks — displayed, appropriately, on the sign’s enormous screen.

At 105 feet tall and with 2,574 square-foot of display space, the marquee is the largest such sign in California, Outlets officials said.

“We are thrilled with this exciting addition to the property,” said Jennifer Rodriguez, general manager of Outlets at Barstow. “It’s the perfect way to increase our visibility to millions of I-15 travelers every year.”

On hand at Tuesday’s event at dusk were Barstow Mayor Julie Hackbarth-McIntyre, Shannon Dunkle of Assemblyman Jay Obernolte’s office, and Steven L. Craig, CEO of Craig Realty Group, which owns and manages the Outlets at Barstow, on whose property the LED sign is located.

The company also owns and operates The Citadel outlets in Los Angeles and Cabazon Outlets near Palm Springs.

Outlets at Barstow released these numbers related to the sign:

- The screen is made up of 2,417,120 light-emitting diode bulbs, with a brightness of 12,000 nits, a measure of the intensity of light. A typical television screen has a brightness of about 400 nits.

- The “World Famous” logo at the top of the sign is 27.5 feet tall, and the lettering of the word “Outlets” is nine feet tall.
• Footings supporting the sign’s pylons consist of 173 cubic yards of concrete, imbedded 34 feet in the ground.

Craig introduced members of the team that designed and built the sign, including Kelly Crawford of Crawford Construction, Alex Birner of Multi-Media LED, Damon Van Oostendorp of Jetty Electric and Cynthia Lima of Superior Electrical Advertising.

Groups of guests were taken on tours up 160 steps through the interior of the sign’s tower. Emerging outside at the tower’s top, guests were treated to spectacular 360-degree views of the surrounding commercial center and the Mojave Desert.

Pico Pistolero and the Snake Pit of Scoundrels, a group outfitted in impeccable Wild West or Roaring 20’s-themed attire, were also on hand to entertain about 100 invitation-only guests.
Just three people weigh in on Apple Valley’s by-district election switch

By Matthew Cabe
Staff Writer
Posted Mar 27, 2019 at 6:21 PM
Updated Mar 27, 2019 at 6:21 PM

Public turnout was less than expected Tuesday for first in a series of hearings.

APPLE VALLEY — Town residents were largely absent from the first hearing meant to solicit draft-map ideas from the public for the town’s upcoming switch to by-district elections.

The hearing was held Tuesday during the Town Council's regular meeting. Three speakers commented, but only two addressed how a final map, which will determine district boundaries in future Apple Valley elections, should be drawn.

Roger La Plante, a 2018 Town Council candidate, said the process should consider the boundaries already determined for the five districts governed by Apple Valley Unified School District’s trustees.

“I know the boundaries for the school districts are not all within the town boundaries, but we can adjust that,” La Plante said. “I just think it would be a good idea to simplify things.”

Former Town Council candidate Tom Piper — who ran unsuccessfully in 2012, 2014 and 2016 — suggested a map he drew several years ago “would work quite well.”

“(I) took one of the maps from the town, used this chamber as sort of a hub, and ran five spokes out to the perimeter of the town and divided up into five different districts,” Piper said. “When it’s time every 10 years to adjust, alls you gotta do is move the spokes a little bit.”
Apple Valley’s leaders have until Aug. 14 to switch from at-large to by-district elections in order to avoid what has been described as a costly lawsuit.

Tuesday’s hearing was the first in a mandatory series of four that will to be held in the next few months. Town Attorney Thomas Rice said the purpose is to take ideas on district composition.

The topography and geography of Apple Valley may be considered in those ideas, Rice said. Cohesiveness, contiguity, integrity, and compactness of territory may also be addressed, as well as homeowners associations, historic communities, school districts and downtown areas.

A demographic expert will draw possible maps following a second hearing, scheduled for 6:30 p.m. April 9 inside Council Chambers. The maps are expected to be released May 3 for review.

Town Manager Doug Robertson told the Daily Press on Wednesday that if the remaining hearings end like Tuesday’s, the demographer will use “whatever input he receives.”

“If there is no public input, he will use voting data and the factors highlighted by the town attorney,” Robertson said. “Ultimately, the maps are drawn based on Council direction and adherence to applicable laws.”

Two more hearings will take place after draft maps are released. The town has also scheduled two informal workshops — one in April, one in May — for additional insight from residents.

The cost of the by-district switch is estimated at $60,000, a figure that includes more than $30,000 paid to attorney Kevin Shenkman, who threatened legal action in a Dec. 21 letter if Apple Valley didn’t voluntarily change its at-large system.

Shenkman said that system results in “racially polarized voting” in Apple Valley, which he alleged dilutes the ability of minorities, Latinos namely, to elect their choice of candidates.

Ironically, federal law prohibits districts from being drawn “with race as the predominate factor,” according to town documents.
The Council adopted a resolution that initiated the transition on Feb. 15, but did so reluctantly. At the time, Mayor Pro Tem Scott Nassif said research found that voting here was not racially polarized.

During Tuesday's meeting, Mayor Larry Cusack said “it’s sad that we have to go through this” when he discussed the transition, which will limit candidates to run for office only within the district in which they reside.

Cusack said that’s “not always a good thing” because it could result in the election of Council members who “just represent their district” and not the entire town.

“You want continuity with your Council to move on with projects, and if you get someone who doesn’t like it — or two or three people — then some projects might not happen,” Cusack said.

Cusack and Town Council member Kari Leon said they hoped more residents would attend upcoming hearings and workshops on the issue.

“It’s new to everybody here,” Leon said of by-district elections, “so I do look forward to more comment.”

The Council is expected to adopt an ordinance that will usher district-based elections into Apple Valley during its July 23 meeting, documents show.

Matthew Cabe can be reached at MCabe@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-951-6254. Follow him on Twitter @DP_MatthewCabe.
An 18-year-old man was found on the ground with a fatal gunshot wound just after midnight Wednesday morning, and Ontario police were searching for the shooter.

Police were called to the area of Rosewood Court and Del Norte Avenue around 12:15 a.m. Paramedics took the teenager to the hospital, where he later died.

Witnesses reported seeing a vehicle leaving the area around the time of the shooting, but a description of that vehicle was not immediately available.

The motive for the shooting was not clear and
Man found fatally shot on Ontario sidewalk – Daily Bulletin

Felon convicted of second-degree murder in 2016 stabbing in Woodcrest area of Riverside County

Moreno Valley woman, son sentenced to 25 years to life for killing the woman’s husband in 2014

Riverside gang member convicted of first-degree murder in shotgun killing of rival

Woman shot to death in Chino feared ex-boyfriend, sister says

1 woman dead, 1 man hospitalized after shooting in Chino Big Lots parking lot

Tags: homicide

Late Wife’s True Identity Leaves Husband Floored

By Upbeat News

Man thought he married the perfect woman, but after tragedy struck her true identity was revealed.
ONTARIO, Calif. (KABC) -- Ontario police are investigating the shooting death of a Chaffey High School student.

The victim's family members have identified him as 18-year-old Antonio Morales.

The grandfather of Morales' girlfriend tells Eyewitness News his granddaughter, grandson and a few other friends were over his house enjoying spring break when the guys decided to walk to a nearby store.

"They were hanging out, just kids, and they'd gone and bought a pizza and came back and decided they were going to go to the liquor store.
and get sodas and stuff," said Tom Halford.

The shooting happened just after midnight on Wednesday near the intersection of Rosewood Court and Del Norte Avenue. Evidence of the shooting can be seen on a nearby block wall.

Halford, who lives nearby, said he heard the shots. "They left here and it wasn’t a couple minutes later it was seven or eight gunshots," he said.

Morales was hit in the chest according to Halford. His friends escaped harm by running for cover.

"They ran that way... the last slug hit the electrical cabinet over there and they didn’t get them, they crawled up underneath the truck."

Morales' older brother stopped by the scene. He said his brother was not a bad kid or involved in a gang.

According to Ontario police, witnesses reported seeing a vehicle leaving the scene. So far, investigators have not released a vehicle description or a possible motive for the shooting.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Ontario Police Detective Sadeghian at (909) 408-1827 or (909) 986-6711. Information can also be reported anonymously by calling WE-TIP at 1-800-78-CRIME.

Report a Typo

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NEWS

Walmart stops in Inland Empire in search of shelf-ready products

Manufacturers must apply online before April 30

Walmart’s Scott Gutche, Sr., Senior Director of US Manufacturing & Sourcing, delivers a talk aimed at Inland Empire entrepreneurs during Walmart’s Pre-Open Call Summit at DoubleTree Hotel in Ontario, Ca., March 27, 2019. The summit is for entrepreneurs who have shelf-ready products that are made, sourced or grown in the U.S. that they would like to sell at Walmart stores and on Walmart.com. (John Valenzuela/Contributing Photographer)

By BEAU YARBROUGH | byarbrough@scng.com | Inland Valley Daily Bulletin
Inland Empire business owners who would like to see their wares on the shelves of the world’s largest retailer: Walmart is listening.

The company is accepting applications from entrepreneurs to be distributed by Walmart during the company’s sixth annual Open Call for products.

On Wednesday, March 27, Scott Gutche, Walmart’s senior director of U.S. Sourcing and Manufacturing, spoke to Inland Empire business owners about what the process involves.

“When you think about America and the (Walmart) shopper, it’s the same group,” demographically speaking, Gutche said at the Ontario Double Tree. In part, that’s because 90 percent of United States households live within 10 miles of a Walmart, according to the company.

And although the company’s image is tied up with its “everyday low prices” strategy, Gutche said manufacturers can turn a profit selling through the company.

“For the lion’s share of products, it’s more about value than cost,” he said.

Walmart customers have expressed a desire for American-made products, Gutche said. The company also sees selling American-made products as a smart business decision, as it speeds up the supply chain dramatically and creates jobs in Walmart’s markets, meaning customers can purchase more from Walmart.

But first, manufacturers have to get their products onto Walmart’s shelves, whether it’s a handful of stores or thousands of them, along with Walmart.com and Sam’s Clubs.

It’s a multi-step process to get distributed by Walmart. Businesses first must fill out an online application at Walmart-Jump.com by April 30. Those moving onto the next round will be asked to come meet with Walmart buyers on June 19 at the company’s headquarters in Bentonville, Ark.

“Open Call is the day of the year where we lock down all 245 Walmart buyers to have them see your products,” Gutche said. “This is the day where you get your shot to talk to a Walmart buyer.”

There will be 500 meetings at Walmart corporate headquarters in Arkansas on June 19.
"We can't take everyone, because there's thousands of applications, but if you're one of the ones selected, boy, it's exciting," Gutche said.

That said, applicants need to be ready to have their products on shelves more or less immediately, including having a Federal Tax ID Number, a minimum of $2 million in liability insurance, meeting the Federal Trade Commission's criteria for a product being listed as having the U.S as its country of origin and more.

"We don't buy ideas — we buy finished products," Gutche said.

The Open Call program seems like a good deal for Inland Empire businesses, according to Paul Granillo, CEO and President of the Inland Empire Economic Partnership.

"The IE has a strong manufacturing sector," Granillo said. "They don't do these everywhere. They're very selective. So the fact that they've come to the Inland Empire — and we had a full room — gives us hope that some of these companies are going to get to the Walmart shelves."

Tags: business, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories Sun

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Couple Adopts Newborn The Father Has Already Seen

By Upbeat News

upbeat

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Beau Yarborough
Median-Priced Homes Not Affordable For Average Wage Earners In 71 Percent Of U.S. Housing Markets

Home Prices Less Affordable Than Historic Average in 49 Percent of Local Markets; 65 Percent of Markets Less Affordable Than a Year Ago

IRVINE, Calif., March 28, 2019 /PRNewswire/ -- ATTOM Data Solutions, curator of the nation's premier property database and first property data provider of Data-as-a-Service (DaaS), today released its Q1 2019 U.S. Home Affordability Report, which shows that median home prices in the first quarter of 2019 were not affordable for average wage earners in 335 of 473 U.S. counties analyzed in the report (71 percent).

The report determined affordability for average wage earners by calculating the amount of income needed to make monthly house payments — including mortgage, property taxes and insurance — on a median-priced home, assuming a 3 percent down payment and a 28 percent maximum "front-end" debt-to-income ratio. That required income was then compared to annualized average weekly wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (see full methodology below).

The 335 counties where a median-priced home in the first quarter was not affordable for average wage earners included Los Angeles County, California; Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona; San Diego County, California; Orange County, California; and Miami-Dade County, Florida.
The 138 counties (29 percent of the 473 counties analyzed in the report) where a median-priced home in the first quarter was still affordable for average wage earners included Cook County (Chicago), Illinois; Harris County (Houston), Texas; Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan; Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania; and Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio.

View Q1 2019 U.S. Home Affordability Heat Map by County

"We are seeing a housing market in flux across the United States, with a mix of tailwinds and headwinds that are pricing many people out of the housing market, but also are creating potentially better conditions for buyers," said Todd Teta, chief product officer with ATTOM Data Solutions. "Continually rising home prices in many areas do remain a financial stretch – or simply unaffordable – for a majority of households. However, quarterly wage gains have been outpacing prices increases for more than a year and mortgage rates are falling, which have helped make homes a bit more affordable now, than they've been in a year. Affordability may improve because of the simple fact that homes are out of reach for so many home seekers, suggesting that prices need to moderate up in order to attract buyers. Of course, a few quarters do not a long-term trend make. The economy could slow. The impact of last year's tax cuts could fade, and interest rates could go back up, but the signs point to the possibility of an impending buyers' market."

49 percent of markets less affordable than historic averages

Among the 473 counties analyzed in the report, 232 (49 percent) were less affordable than their historic affordability averages in the first quarter of 2019, down from 76 percent of counties in the previous quarter but up from 42 percent of counties in the first quarter of 2018.

Counties that were less affordable than their historic affordability averages included Los Angeles County, California; Harris County (Houston), Texas; Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona; San Diego County, California; and Orange County, California.

Most affordable counties in Atlantic City, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Cleveland
Among the 473 counties analyzed in the report, 241 (51 percent) were more affordable than their historic affordability averages in the first quarter of 2019, including Cook County (Chicago), Illinois; Miami-Dade County, Florida; Santa Clara (San Jose), California; Middlesex (Boston), Massachusetts; and Suffolk County (New York), New York.

Counties with the highest affordability index were Warren County (Allentown), New Jersey (151); Mercer County (Trenton), New Jersey (147); Cumberland (Vineland), New Jersey (144); Onslow (Jacksonville), North Carolina (142); and Litchfield (Torrington), Connecticut (139).

65 percent of markets post worsening affordability compared to year ago

A total of 308 of the 473 counties analyzed in the report (65 percent) posted a year-over-year decrease in their affordability index, meaning that home prices were less affordable than a year ago, including Los Angeles County, California; Harris County, Texas; Maricopa County, Arizona; San Diego County, California; and Riverside County, California.

A total of 165 of the 473 counties analyzed in the report (35 percent) posted a year-over-year increase in the affordability index, meaning that home prices were more affordable than a year ago, including Cook County (Chicago), Illinois; Orange County, California; Miami-Dade County, Florida; Kings County (Brooklyn), New York; and Dallas County (Dallas-Fort Worth), Texas.

Highest share of income needed to buy in Brooklyn, Manhattan, San Francisco, Maui

Nationwide an average wage earner would need to spend 32.7 percent of his or her income to buy a median-priced home in the first quarter of 2019, on par with the historic average of 32.7 percent of income.

Counties where an average wage earner would need to spend the highest share of income to buy a median-priced home in Q1 2019 were Kings County (Brooklyn), New York (115.9 percent); New York County (Manhattan), New York (115.0 percent); Santa Cruz County, California (114.1 percent); Marin County, California in the San Francisco metro area (103.1 percent); and Maui County, Hawaii (100.7 percent).
Counties where an average wage earner would need to spend the lowest share of income to buy a median-priced home were Bibb County (Macon), Georgia (11.1 percent); Baltimore City, Maryland (12.4 percent); Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan (13.2 percent); Rock Island County (Quad Cities), Illinois (13.5 percent); and Montgomery County, Alabama (13.9 percent).

**Home price appreciation outpacing wage growth in 49 percent of markets**

Home price appreciation outpaced average weekly wage growth in 232 of the 473 counties analyzed in the report (49 percent), including Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona; Queens County, New York; San Bernardino County (Riverside), California; Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada; and Tarrant County (Dallas-Fort Worth), Texas.

Average weekly wage growth outpaced home price appreciation in 241 of the 473 counties analyzed in the report (51 percent), including Los Angeles County, California; Cook County (Chicago), Illinois; Harris County (Houston), Texas; San Diego County, California; and Orange County, California.

**Report Methodology**

The ATTOM Data Solutions U.S. Home Affordability Index analyzes median home prices derived from publicly recorded sales deed data collected by ATTOM Data Solutions and average wage data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 473 U.S. counties with a combined population of more than 231 million. The affordability index is based on the percentage of average wages needed to make monthly house payments on a median-priced home with a 30-year fixed rate mortgage and a 3 percent down payment, including property taxes, home insurance and mortgage insurance. Average 30-year fixed interest rates from the Freddie Mac Primary Mortgage Market Survey were used to calculate the monthly house payments.

The report determined affordability for average wage earners by calculating the amount of income needed to make monthly house payments — including mortgage, property taxes and insurance — on a median-priced home, assuming a 3 percent down payment and a 28 percent maximum "front-end" debt-to-income ratio. For instance, the nationwide median home price of $237,500 in the first quarter of 2019 would require an annual gross income of $66,336 for a buyer putting 3 percent down and not exceeding the recommended "front-end" debt-to-
An income ratio of 28 percent — meaning the buyer would not be spending more than 28 percent of his or her income on the house payment, including mortgage, property taxes and insurance. That required income is higher than the $56,823 annual income earned by an average wage earner based on the most recent average weekly wage data available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, making a median-priced home nationwide not affordable for an average wage earner.

**About ATTOM Data Solutions**

ATTOM Data Solutions provides premium property data to power products that improve transparency, innovation, efficiency and disruption in a data-driven economy. ATTOM multi-sources property tax, deed, mortgage, foreclosure, environmental risk, natural hazard, and neighborhood data for more than 155 million U.S. residential and commercial properties covering 99 percent of the nation's population. A rigorous data management process involving more than 20 steps validates, standardizes and enhances the data collected by ATTOM, assigning each property record with a persistent, unique ID — the ATTOM ID. The 9TB ATTOM Data Warehouse fuels innovation in many industries including mortgage, real estate, insurance, marketing, government and more through flexible data delivery solutions that include bulk file licenses, APIs, market trends, marketing lists, match & append and introducing the first property data deliver solution, a cloud-based data platform that streamlines data management – Data-as-a-Service (DaaS).

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Region’s home sales keep on falling

February tally is down 12% in the Southland. Prices rise slightly.

BY ANDREW KHOURI

Southern California home prices barely rose in February from a year earlier, as buyers continue to struggle with the high cost of housing, according to a report released Wednesday.

The six-county region’s median price — the point at which half the homes sold for more and half for less — increased just 1.2% to $512,500 last month, real estate firm CoreLogic said. Sales plunged nearly 12%.

The pullback comes after years of steady price increases put homeownership out of reach for many families.

A recent drop in mortgage rates is bringing people back into the market, agents and mortgage brokers said, though demand is still subdued compared with recent years.

Buyers “are just being more cautious where they are putting their dollars,” said San Fernando Valley real estate agent Deanna Medina.

Sales have now fallen for seven straight months, swelling inventory and forcing sellers to trim their asking prices.

The regional median is $24,500 below its all-time high of $537,000 reached in June.

Last month, prices dropped 1.4% compared with a year earlier in expensive Orange County. Los Angeles County recorded a gain of slightly less than 1%.

On Tuesday, further evidence of the slowdown emerged when the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller index was released. It provides a delayed look at home prices but is considered more accurate because it takes into account changes in the types and sizes of homes sold.

The index showed home prices in Los Angeles and Orange counties rose 2.9% in January from a year earlier, but that was far less than the 8.2% increase recorded in April — a high point for the last several years.

For now, in individual counties, sales are falling and the median price is barely moving.
In Los Angeles County, sales dropped 11.8% from a year earlier, while the median price rose 0.9% to $585,000.

In Orange County, sales dropped 17.1% and the median fell 1.4% to $700,000.

In Riverside County, sales dropped 8.9% and the median rose 1.7% to $381,500.

In San Bernardino County, sales dropped 13.8% and the median was unchanged at $335,000.

In Ventura County, sales dropped 12% and the median rose 1.8% to $565,000.

In San Diego County, sales dropped 8.1% and the median rose 2.6% to $549,000.

Economists generally don’t foresee a housing crash, even if some expect prices to turn slightly negative before incomes catch up.

Economic growth is predicted to slow this year, and compared with last decade, home building is subdued and lending standards are tighter — two factors that decrease the likelihood that a bubble has formed, experts say.

What happens next will depend on how willing, or able, people are to bid up home prices.

February’s tally of sales that closed escrow reflects shopping and deals that were signed during the partial government shutdown in January and late December — an event that real estate agents noticed sapped buyer confidence. Since then, the government has reopened and mortgage rates have continued to fall from their November high of 4.94%.

By last week, the average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage had fallen to 4.28%, according to Freddie Mac. The reduction is enough to save $157 on a monthly mortgage payment for a $500,000 house.

Jeff Lazerson, president of Laguna Niguel mortgage brokerage Mortgage Grader, said the drop in rates, coupled with more homes on the market, has “a landslide of loans coming in”— so much that he hired another worker. But despite the surge, buyers haven’t yet been willing to aggressively overbid.

“I haven’t seen anything come across my desk in several months where someone paid above asking price,” he said.

Derek Oie, an Inland Empire real estate agent, characterized the current market as “vanilla.” A bit hotter than a few months ago but a far cry from the days when packed open houses and multiple offers were commonplace.

“It’s just a very, very normal market,” he said.
Market slowdown lingers as February home sales drop 12%, CoreLogic reports

Housing data signal a slower homebuying season ahead despite favorable mortgage rates, CoreLogic’s Southern California housing report February shows.

FILE PHOTO

By JEFF COLLINS | JeffCollins@scng.com | Orange County Register
PUBLISHED: March 27, 2019 at 9:47 am | UPDATED: March 27, 2019 at 9:47 am

With the spring homebuying season getting into full swing and mortgage rates dropping, the local housing market is perking up, local agents say.
The question is, will a recent slowdown linger or will sales get back to the frenetic pace seen in recent years?

If a new housing report out Wednesday, March 27, is any indication, expect a slower spring this year.

Last month saw Southern California home sales fall 11.7 percent from February 2018 levels, with just 13,466 houses, condos and townhomes changing hands, real estate data firm CoreLogic reported. That's the smallest sales tally for a February in 11 years.

Over the past decade, February averaged 15,000 transactions. Home sales in the six-county region have been down 11 of the past 12 months.

With sales ebbing, prices barely budged– and even fell in Orange County for the first time since 2012.

The median price of a Southern California home – or price at the midpoint of all sales — was $512,500 last month, up just $6,000 or 1.2 percent from February 2018 median, CoreLogic reported. That's the second-smallest percentage gain since March 2012.

While activity perked up in the past several weeks — with escrows rising and agents reporting multiple offers for mid-priced homes — luxury housing tends to sit, said Colin Delaney, broker for GateHouse Properties in Costa Mesa.

“We're still seeing multiple offers in prices below $1 million,” Delaney said. “Over $1.2 million, it's a different story.”
A recent drop in mortgage rates will help some buyers afford a bigger or pricier home. Thirty-year fixed rates fell more than half a percentage point since November.

A buyer who can afford a $3,000-a-month mortgage payment can buy a $762,500 home at today’s rates, estimated Steve Thomas, author of the Reports On Housing market analysis. In November, that same buyer could only afford a home priced at $698,750 or under because of higher interest payments.

“That is an amazing increase of $63,750 in purchasing power,” Thomas wrote.

Riverside agent Christina Clark reported that she recently closed on a four-bedroom Corona Hills pool home that had sold at full price in 24 hours after getting three offers.

“With … interest rates dropping, it opened things up for people to qualify for a higher price point,” Clark said. “The market is extremely busy now. … Every agent I know has multiple deals in escrow. Buyers are out looking.”

Nonetheless, Clark said it’s still a buyer’s market.

CoreLogic Deputy Chief Economist Ralph McLaughlin agreed.

“We expect buyers to enter the peak buying season a little more confidently than at the end of 2018,” McLaughlin wrote in a recent commentary about Tuesday’s S&P Case-Shiller numbers showing home prices rising by the smallest margin in years. “Homes are sitting on the market longer, and price cuts are becoming more common.”

CoreLogic figures showed home sales fell in all six counties, with declines ranging from 8.1 percent in San Diego County to 17.1 percent in Orange County. Sales were down 8.9 percent in Riverside County, 11.8 percent in Los Angeles County, 12 percent in Ventura County and 13.8 percent in San Bernardino County.

Just four of the six counties had year-over-year price gains: The median home price rose 0.9 percent in Los Angeles County to $585,000, 1.7 percent in Riverside County to $381,500, 1.8 percent in Ventura County to $565,000 and 2.6 percent in San Diego County to $549,000.

San Bernardino County’s median remained unchanged from a year ago at $335,000. Orange County’s median, meanwhile, fell $10,000 or 1.4 percent to $700,000.

The price drop surprised Costa Mesa broker Delaney, who works throughout Orange County’s beach cities.
“The neighborhoods I work in haven't had price drops,” he said. But “high-end neighborhoods in Laguna Beach and Newport Beach, those prices have come down. That's probably part of the pull. The entry-level houses still are in high demand.”

Tags: Housing data, Real Estate, Top Stories Breeze, top stories ivdb, Top Stories LADN, Top Stories LBPT, Top Stories OCR, Top Stories PE, Top Stories PSN, top stories rdf, Top Stories SGVT, top stories sun, Top Stories WDN

ASHLEY HOMESTORE PARTNERSHIP WITH DODGERS DONATES SHEETS AND UPGRADES SEATS

By Ashley Furniture/Stone Ledge

The Los Angeles Dodgers face the Arizona Diamondbacks in their home opener on Thursday, March 28. And thanks to a...

Jeff Collins

For more than a decade, Jeff Collins has followed housing and real estate, covering market booms and busts and all aspects of the real estate industry. He has been tracking rents and home prices, and has explored solutions to critical problems such as Southern California's housing shortage and affordability crisis. Before joining the Orange County Register in 1990, he covered a wide range of topics for daily newspapers in Kansas, El Paso and Dallas. A Southern California native, he studied at UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine. He later earned a master's degree from the USC School of Journalism.

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https://www.ocregister.com/2019/03/27/market-slowdown-lingers-as-february-home-sales-drop-12-corelogic-reports/
OPINION

Another court’s pension punt hurts reform prospects and voting rights

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD | opinion@scng.com |
PUBLISHED: March 27, 2019 at 8:00 am | UPDATED: March 27, 2019 at 8:01 am
When billionaire investor Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway makes financial predictions, savvy people tend to listen given his long and successful financial career – not to mention his occasional prescience regarding political events. The courts and lawmakers should have been listening last month when Buffett, asked about the nation’s growing unfunded liabilities during a CNBC interview, offered some sobering reflections.

“If I were relocating into some state that had a huge unfunded pension plan I’m walking into liabilities,” he told a caller. “‘Cause I mean, who knows whether they’re gonna get it from the corporate income tax or my employees – you know, with personal income taxes or what. … And those are big numbers, really big numbers.” In other words, the state’s enormous retiree-related debt – estimated between $250 billion and $1 trillion – threatens its future economy.

As such debts are growing, however, the legal system is making it nearly impossible for the state and municipalities to rein in pension costs. Earlier this month, the California Supreme Court rightly tossed out a ridiculous pension-spiking benefit. Unfortunately, the ruling also kept in place the “California Rule,” which forbids governments from cutting back future benefits for current employees.

And recently, in refusing to review a petition from San Diego, the U.S. Supreme Court has derailed that city’s years-long effort to reduce ballooning pension costs. That’s discouraging because San Diego’s modest voter-approved reform was carefully designed to comply with, rather than challenge, existing case law. It was perhaps the last, best model for pension reform at the local level.

The case goes back to a 2012 voter initiative to switch most new city employees from guaranteed, formula-based pensions to 401-k plans with a city match. The measure, which passed overwhelmingly, also imposed caps on the pensionable pay offered to workers. Then a union-friendly state agency, the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), invalidated the election by claiming the city was required to “meet and confer” with unions before placing the reform question on the ballot.

Their argument was out of line. City councils in charter cities such as San Diego can qualify measures for the ballot or voters can collect signatures and place them on the ballot on their own. In the former case, the “meet and confer” requirement is legitimate because the city is spearheading the effort. But local citizens shouldn’t have to meet with unions before exercising their constitutional voting rights. Yet PERB determined that Proposition B was actually a city initiative because two former officials were active in the campaign in their capacity as citizens.
That's nonsense. “Exercise of First Amendment rights – whether by a public official or employer or a public employee – cannot be dependent on a public employee union’s grant of permission,” according to an amicus brief from the Pacific Legal Foundation. Unfortunately, the state Supreme Court agreed with PERB and the U.S. Supreme Court chose not to review it.

Lower courts now are tasked with deciding exactly how to resolve the specifics, but it could mean some compensation for city workers hired after Prop. B’s passage. The bigger issue reflects what Buffett predicted. California debts will grow – and more companies will have to think about remaining in a state with few options other than tax hikes to deal with the situation.

Tags: editorials

The Editorial Board
The editorial board and opinion section staff are independent of the news-gathering side of our organization. Through our staff-written editorials, we take positions on important issues affecting our readership, from pension reform to protecting our region's unique natural resources to transportation. The editorials are unsigned because, while written by one or more members of our staff, they represent the point of view of our news organization's management. In order to take informed positions, we meet frequently with government, community and business leaders on important issues affecting our cities, region and state. During elections, we meet with candidates for office and the proponents and opponents of ballot initiatives and then make recommendations to voters.
Squirrels likely caused massive sinkhole that closed Gilman Springs Road, set to reopen Thursday

Repairs to a sinkhole on Gilman Springs Road were expected to be completed in time for motorists to be able to use the road again on March 28. (Courtesy of California Highway Patrol)

By BRIAN ROKOS | brokos@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: March 27, 2019 at 1:24 pm | UPDATED: March 27, 2019 at 1:53 pm
Gilman Springs Road is expected to reopen by Thursday morning’s commute after repairs to a sinkhole that the California Highway Patrol said was most likely caused by burrowing squirrels.

The damage to an eastbound lane in the link between Moreno Valley and San Jacinto was reported about 3:30 a.m. Tuesday, just west of Bridge Street. Gilman Springs Road was closed between Highway 60 and Highway 79.

The CHP San Gorgonio Pass office said Wednesday in a Facebook post that the contractor has completed the excavation and filled the hole with concrete. The contractor planned to repave the road and paint stripes Wednesday night. The road is scheduled to be open by 5 a.m., the CHP said.

The contractor discovered that ground squirrels had burrowed from the dirt shoulder on the north side of Gilman Springs and under the road.

“With all the winter rains, water began to flow into the squirrel den and in time, out the other side of the road. Enough dirt was eventually washed away causing a cavern to be created under the eastbound lane,” according to the CHP.

“Bad squirrel.”

Tags:  Top Stories PE,  Transportation

Brian Rokos
Brian Rokos writes about public safety issues such as policing, criminal justice, scams, how law affects public safety, firefighting tactics and wildland fire danger. He has also covered the cities of San Bernardino, Corona, Norco, Lake Elsinore, Perris, Canyon Lake and Hemet. Before that he supervised reporters and worked as a copy editor. For some reason, he enjoys movies where the Earth is threatened with extinction.

Follow Brian Rokos @Brian_Rokos

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Do You Know the 5

$12-million payout in case against ex-cop

Former detective and tipster are blamed in woman’s wrongful ’98 murder conviction.

SUSAN MELLEN, center, was released in 2014 after 17 years behind bars in Richard Daly’s slaying. (Allen J. Schaben Los Angeles Times)

BY MARK PUENTE

The Los Angeles City Council agreed Wednesday to pay $12 million to Susan Mellen, who spent 17 years behind bars for a murder she didn’t commit.
After being released in 2014, Mellen and her three children sued former Los Angeles Police Det. Marcella Winn. They contended the detective had been told a witness against Mellen was “a habitual liar,” but failed to disclose that to the defense.

Through numerous legal proceedings, a three-judge panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled unanimously in August that the suit against Winn should go to trial.

A judge ruled Winn withheld the evidence and “acted with deliberate indifference or reckless disregard.”

Winn and Mellen could not be immediately reached for comment.

The LAPD declined to comment. Innocence Matters, a nonprofit legal organization that helped win Mellen’s release, did not respond to a request for comment.

In June 2015, the state of California awarded Mellen $597,200 in compensation for the 1998 conviction.

The $12-million settlement isn’t the first one involving Winn. She also was the lead detective in the prosecution of Obie Anthony, who was declared innocent after spending 17 years behind bars for a killing outside a brothel in South Los Angeles. The city of Los Angeles paid Anthony $8.3 million in compensation.

Meanwhile, the 9th Circuit said Mellen was convicted “based solely” on the testimony of June Patti, who claimed that Mellen had confessed to her that she killed Richard Daly. The body of the 30-year-old transient and father of two was found near a trash bin in San Pedro.

Patti’s sister, Laura Patti, a police officer in Torrance at the time, said she told Winn that June was a habitual liar, the court said.

Laura Patti said in a deposition that her conversation with Winn was brief, and that the detective did not ask why she believed June Patti was a liar.

“But it turned out that Laura was right about her sister,” the 9th Circuit said.
TRANSIT WATCH

Will San Diegans dig deep for buses, rail?

Two government agencies are planning to seek voter approval of tax increases.

THE SAN DIEGO Assn. of Governments and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System plan to put tax increases on the ballot. Above, the San Diego Trolley. (Hayne Palmour IV San Diego Union-Tribune)

JOSHUA EMERSON SMITH

SAN DIEGO — San Diegans will probably be asked in coming years to pay for a costly, yet world-class public transit system — complete with its own Grand Central Station, new rail
lines and commute times that rival driving.

To fund the ambitious vision, officials are gearing up to ask the region’s historically tax-averse electorate to approve not one but two new tax increases, the first of which could be before voters as soon as November 2020.

For months, leaders at the county’s premier transportation and planning agency, the San Diego Assn. of Governments, or SANDAG, have sketched out the need for tens of billions of dollars in public funding to overhaul the region’s transit system.

Now officials with the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System say they’re also serious about pursuing a tax increase to pay for bus and rail upgrades.

Political and transportation experts have said the move could be risky, potentially confusing voters and stretching thin their patience for new taxes.

“There’s only so many sales-tax measures that voters are going to support,” said Ethan Elkind, a transportation and land-use researcher at UC Berkeley’s Center for Law, Energy and the Environment. “I think that’s a legitimate concern if you have these dueling measures. It’s going to be hard to go back to voters for a second bite at the apple.”

Still, if voters believe that officials can deliver a transit system worth riding, they could be persuaded to fork over the money, said Thad Kousser, chairman of the political science department at UC San Diego.

“What voters care about is the value proposition,” he said. “If you can sell them on this being a good investment, it doesn’t matter how big that investment is.

“It’s making people who don’t think of themselves as transit riders now, envision themselves as riding.”

Asking voters to approve multiple ballot measures, each requiring the onerous two-thirds approval, does not appear to be a coordinated tactic among the two transportation agencies.

Metropolitan Transit System board Chairwoman Georgette Gomez announced last week the organization’s strong interest in placing a half-cent sales tax increase before voters in the upcoming presidential election.

Gómez, who also sits on the SANDAG board, dismissed the idea that a second measure was even on the table.

“At the moment, I don’t know that SANDAG has been exploring a measure, but I do know that MTS is,” she said. “I, we, are working very closely with SANDAG. If they are to explore a measure ... I don’t think this is competing to that, but that’s if they ever go back to the ballot, to the voters, in the future.”

But over the last three months, SANDAG’s recently hired top official, Hasan Ikhrata, has been leading the charge to radically modernize the region’s transit system — making no bones about his intent to go to the voters for public funding.
“It’s going to need more than half a cent of sales tax,” he recently said in an interview. “It’s going to be expensive.”

Ikhrata, who’s rumored to be privately concerned about putting two measures before voters, has publicly expressed support for the Metropolitan Transit System’s efforts to raise money.

“I hope they’re successful, and I’m going to support and coordinate with them,” he said. “If this is a down payment, that’s OK.”

Ikhrata — a widely lauded transportation expert who left his position as the head of the Southern California Assn. of Governments in December to lead SANDAG — has repeatedly said his goal is to develop a public transit system that’s at least as fast as driving.

His ambition has seemingly emboldened other transportation officials.

“If you really want to make transit work better, there’s really two key ingredients, make it go faster, make it go more frequently,” Metropolitan Transit System Chief Executive Paul Jablonski said recently.

To make transit competitive with driving, Ikhrata has floated such ideas as exploring a futuristic hyperloop system, constructing an underground trolley line from San Ysidro to Kearny Mesa and building a “Grand Central” station that would connect regional transit riders to San Diego International Airport.

All this is necessary, he’s argued, not only to boost the economy but also to draw new talent to the area and meet state mandates for limiting greenhouse gases from cars and trucks.

His ideas have been everything the region’s environmental and transit advocates have been yearning to hear for decades.

“I will credit Hasan in being relentless in his public outreach in conveying a big vision,” said Nicole Capretz, executive director of the Climate Action Campaign in San Diego.

One of those public transit advocates has been Gomez, who before being elected to the City Council in 2016 worked for more than a decade with the Environmental Health Coalition, representing low-income neighborhoods of color suffering from toxic air pollution.

SANDAG is expected to release an initial blueprint for modernizing the region’s transportation system by the end of the year.

At the same time, Gomez said Metropolitan Transit System will be embarking on a months-long public outreach campaign to better understand what projects voters desire and would be inclined to fund.

“We’re going to be very intentional on how we’re going to be gathering information and very transparent,” she said. “We’re going to be inclusive, transparent and we are going to
be making sure that we are held accountable to our riders.”

Her comments come less than two years after SANDAG’s previous executive director, Gary Gallegos, resigned amid scandal. After a 2016 tax increase put forth by the agency failed at the ballot, it was revealed that Gallegos had promised voters a long list of highway and transit projects the half-cent levy probably wouldn’t have covered.

Both agencies would like to distance themselves from SANDAG’s former incarnation, which had made enemies on all sides of the political spectrum.

Although Metropolitan Transit System has a relatively clean record, its efforts to raise money for an all-transit ballot measure will probably be an uphill battle. Most successful transportation tax measures include a wide variety of projects, from rail and bus expansions to highway and road improvements.

Voters serviced by L.A. County’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority have approved four half-cent sales tax measures since 1980, all of which included some funding for highway infrastructure.

Smith writes for the San Diego Union-Tribune.
Video shows deputy’s break-in attempt

Panel releases files on incidents at a woman’s home that led to his firing. He was later rehired by the sheriff.

BY MAYA LAU

The deputy crouched down in front of the woman’s sliding glass door, wedging a metal tool in its frame to pop it loose. He stopped after glancing up, startled to see the woman recording video of him from inside her apartment.

In another instance, the deputy is seen wielding a broomstick on the woman’s patio after using it to tap on her door. His hand is later seen opening a window to the woman’s darkened bathroom, while she yells at him to get out.

The video clips depicting Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Deputy Caren Carl Mandoyan are among several files from his disciplinary case that were released Wednesday by the county Civil Service Commission.

The records show that Sheriff's Department officials, and the commission’s hearing officer, determined Mandoyan repeatedly lied to internal affairs investigators by claiming he never tried to break into the woman’s home — statements that were contradicted by the video footage.

Those findings contributed to Mandoyan’s firing in 2016 under then-Sheriff Jim McDonnell.

Mandoyan “was clearly using a metallic tool he found on [the woman’s] patio and trying to wedge it around and under the sliding glass door,” hearing officer Joseph P. Scully wrote in his report recommending that Mandoyan’s termination be upheld.

“He was not honest or truthful in his [internal affairs] interview which suggests that his reputation for integrity is unwarranted. His lack of honesty alone calls into question his fitness for future service,” Scully wrote in the report, dated Jan. 4, 2018.

Mandoyan’s case has become a major issue for Sheriff Alex Villanueva since The Times revealed that Villanueva reinstated the deputy shortly after taking office. The move set off an unprecedented legal battle between the sheriff and the L.A. County Board of Supervisors, which went to court to try to block Villanueva’s reinstatement of Mandoyan.
Mandoyan volunteered on Villanueva’s campaign and served as his personal driver.

At a news conference Wednesday, Villanueva addressed the controversy over Mandoyan’s reinstatement, saying the uproar is being driven by those politically opposed to him. He said that he stands by his decision and that it had nothing to do with Mandoyan’s work on his campaign.

Records of Mandoyan’s case before the Civil Service Commission, which include more than 2,000 pages of documents, were made public under a landmark state transparency law that opens up some records of police misconduct, including confirmed cases of dishonesty by officers.

The files also show Sheriff’s Department officials cited claims made by the woman, who had also served as a deputy, that Mandoyan told her he was a member of a tattooed deputy clique known as the Reapers and threatened her by saying he “knew people in high places in the department.”

Mandoyan and the woman had been in a romantic relationship.

In an application for a temporary restraining order and in statements she made to law enforcement officials, the woman said Mandoyan grabbed her by the back of her neck and sent her harassing text messages. The Times generally does not identify people who claim to be victims of domestic violence.

Greg Smith, Mandoyan’s attorney, said his client lived with the woman and had keys to the apartment they shared. He said that in the incidents captured on video, Mandoyan was knocking on the door trying to get the woman’s attention after she went inside and locked the door behind her, leaving him without his keys, backpack and firearm, which were inside the residence.

Smith said Mandoyan never assaulted the woman and did not claim to be a Reaper.

The Times reported on the existence of the video this month.

Mandoyan was the first fired deputy brought by Villanueva before a “truth and reconciliation” panel aimed at correcting past injustices by the Sheriff’s Department.

According to a report reviewed by The Times, the panel reexamined Mandoyan’s case in December 2018 and concluded that the deputy brought “discredit to himself and the department” by repeatedly knocking on the woman’s patio door. But the panel, consisting of Chief Eliezer Vera, Undersheriff Tim Murakami and Chief Steven Gross, determined there was not enough evidence to find that Mandoyan was dishonest or that he committed domestic violence.

The sheriff has said he plans to bring other discharged deputies before the panel as well.
O.C. jails to end ICE agreement

Clearing out federal detainees will free up space for mentally ill inmates, sheriff says.

BY CINDY CARCAMO

The Orange County Sheriff’s Department will end its more than decade-long agreement with federal immigration officials to house some detainees in the county jail system, a move that further scales back its relationship with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

On Wednesday, Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes said the action was taken to free up space for better treatment of mentally ill inmates. He said the county had seen a 40% increase in mental health cases in its jails since 2015.

The ICE contract ends in 2020, and Barnes said his department had informed the federal agency that it would not be renewed. As a result, ICE detainees will no longer be housed at Sheriff’s Department jails starting Aug. 1. Barnes said it’s likely that those federal immigration detainees would be moved to facilities out of state.

In response, ICE officials suggested that the county’s action would impose new hardships on detainees and their families.

“Now, instead of being housed close to family members or local attorneys, ICE will have to depend on its national system of detention bed space to place those detainees in locations farther away, reducing the opportunities for in-person family visitation and attorney coordination,” said ICE spokeswoman Lori Haley in a written statement.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the Sheriff’s Department housed 671 ICE detainees in its jails.

It’s unclear exactly where the detainees will be moved to, but ICE’s detention options in California have become increasingly limited, according to previous statements by agents.

Barnes emphasized that he would continue to work with ICE agents “within the confines of SB 54 to ensure they are alerted to release of serious and violent offenders within our custody who have ICE detainers.” He was referring to Senate Bill 54, the so-called sanctuary state law, which limits the degree to which California law enforcement agencies may cooperate with federal immigration authorities.
In a video posted on the Sheriff’s Department’s Twitter account, Barnes insisted that his decision wasn’t political.

“I want to make clear that the decision to end the ICE agreement is not a result of the recent political rhetoric surrounding immigration,” Barnes said.

Until now, Orange County has been among the few large California counties to continue to work with ICE. Orange County long stood as an outlier in California, a state that has become increasingly friendly to immigrants — including those who are in the country without legal status.

In the mid-1990s, Barbara Coe of Huntington Beach launched Proposition 187, a ballot initiative approved by voters that sought to deny public services such as public schooling and healthcare to people in the country illegally. The measure eventually was struck down in the courts.

In 2005, Jim Gilchrist of Aliso Viejo co-founded the Minuteman Project, a civilian militia that patrolled the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona.

Since then, changing demographics — growing Latino and Asian populations — have placed whites in the county’s minority, prompting a major political shift. In 2016, Hillary Clinton became the first Democratic presidential candidate to win Orange County since the Great Depression.

When state legislators drafted Senate Bill 54, former Orange County Sheriff Sandra Hutchens vehemently spoke out in opposition.

Immigrant rights groups applauded the Sheriff’s Department’s decision to end its contract with ICE but said it was wrong for local and federal officials to suggest that all of the detainees will have to be transferred. Some are demanding that ICE release as many of the detainees as possible.

“The sheriff and ICE have a responsibility to ensure a just termination of the agreement,” said Christina Fialho, an attorney and co-executive director of Freedom for Immigrants. “A just termination would ensure access to counsel and the release of currently detained individuals so that they can continue their cases on the outside through the help of community-based alternatives to detention.”

For years, Fialho’s group advocated for the Orange County Sheriff’s Department to end its agreement with ICE, ultimately taking its fight to the state Capitol, where they co-sponsored a bill that went into effect in January 2018. Senate Bill 29 prevents California municipalities from entering into contracts with the federal government for the purpose of immigration detention.

“Once the county terminates its agreement with ICE, never again will Orange County be party to such a misguided and harmful agreement,” Fialho said.

Wednesday’s announcement is just the latest action that the Sheriff’s Department has taken to distance itself from ICE.
Orange County’s policy shift reflects a larger trend in local communities to loosen ties with federal immigration officials, “realizing there are better uses for their resources and their jails than serving as a housing center for ICE,” said Louis DeSipio, professor of political science at UC Irvine.

Only one other county in California — Yuba County — contracts with ICE for long-term adult immigration detention. Immigrant rights advocates are pressuring Yuba County to end that contract, Fialho said.

Orange County’s decision “reflects a diminished strength of the anti-immigrant sentiment among leaders in Orange County,” DeSipio said.

Senate Bill 54, which Gov. Jerry Brown signed after the Legislature passed it in 2017, prohibits state and local police agencies from notifying federal officials in many cases when immigrants in their custody who may potentially be subject to deportation are about to be released.

Wednesday’s decision dates to January 2018, when — as SB 54 took effect — the Sheriff’s Department took a step back and quit its participation in a federal-local immigration program known as 287(g), which had allowed Orange County’s deputies to act as immigration agents in its jails.

The program was emblematic of the county’s historical opposition to illegal immigration and its cozy relationship with ICE. The Sheriff’s Department was a holdout in California, becoming the only government entity in the state to participate in the program. Los Angeles County dropped out of the program in 2015.

This year, L.A. County Sheriff Alex Villanueva announced plans to put **tighter limits on his department’s ties with ICE.**

He said he was considering trimming the list of misdemeanors that could be cause for deportation and reviewing whether the Sheriff’s Department’s website should continue publishing release dates, information that ICE uses to stake out inmates and take them into federal custody.

Immigrant rights groups that supported Villanueva’s campaign have been advising him on policy and are closely watching his next moves.

But some immigrant rights supporters have criticized Villanueva, accusing him of breaking campaign promises he made to separate his department from ICE.

On Tuesday, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California sent an open letter to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors protesting the new sheriff’s policies regarding the turning over of people without legal status to ICE.

“The policies that Sheriff Villanueva has adopted so far, however, are practically business as usual and will have minimal impact,” the letter said. “In particular, replacing ICE agents with ICE contractors to handle the arrest and transfer of individuals to ICE is a difference that is cosmetic only — with the same overall result.”
Villanueva ran for office vowing not to work with ICE.
Would you pay to drive on Westside?

Charging $4 at rush hour in one area could curb traffic delays by 20%, study finds.

BY LAURA J. NELSON

Charging drivers a fee to reduce traffic jams has worked in London, Milan and Stockholm, and the idea is gaining ground in New York.

But in Southern California, elected officials have approached the question of congestion pricing with trepidation, saying that such a dramatic shift in a driving-dependent region would require detailed study of its impacts.

The region’s first such study, released Thursday by the Southern California Assn. of Governments, suggests that charging drivers to enter an area of West Los Angeles and Santa Monica just west of the 405 Freeway and north of the 10 Freeway could significantly smooth out rush-hour traffic jams and speed commute times.

A $4 fee to drive into the 4.3-square-mile area during weekday rush hour could almost immediately reduce traffic delays and miles driven there by more than 20%, the analysis found.

Such a drop in driving would correspond with a 9% increase in transit ridership, a 7% increase in biking and a 7% increase in walking inside the zone, indicating that the region doesn’t need sky-high tolls “to really effect the kind of behavior change that we’re looking for,” said Annie Nam, the SCAG manager who oversaw the study.

The report comes a month after the Metropolitan Transportation Authority agreed to study the concept of congestion pricing across Los Angeles County.

The SCAG study assumed tolls would be assessed through the Fastrak transponders already in use across California, including on the 110 and 10 freeway toll lanes. License plate readers could be installed to identify and bill drivers who do not have transponders.

Before such a fee could be assessed, officials would need to find an agency to plan and implement the pricing strategy, change state law to allow tolling on surface streets, and conduct extensive public outreach.

But the findings are not a purely academic exercise. Darin Chidsey, SCAG’s interim executive director, said it’s “very likely” that the first place Southern California could see a
toll on surface streets would be on the traffic-choked Westside.

SCAG had initially considered studying tolling in downtown Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Hollywood, West Hollywood, Warner Center and Los Angeles International Airport, but focused on the Westside because the traffic is worst there, so congestion pricing could have the greatest effect, Chidsey said.

“This isn’t a proposal; it’s a model,” said Los Angeles City Councilman Mike Bonin, who represents part of the studied area. “As models go, this probably has as much chance of flying as a model airplane.”

To sell an ambitious idea like congestion pricing to the public, drivers would need to have access to high-quality alternatives to driving up and running before the fees were assessed, Bonin said. On the Westside, he said, those alternatives are “not in place yet.”

Toll zones would make sense sooner in downtown or around LAX once the train to the airport’s central terminal area is completed, Bonin said.

“If you are going to pick an area of the city to do this, history suggests that people on the Westside have the means and the resources and the time to object to stuff they don’t like,” Bonin said. “Absent a very different approach to this ... I think it would be a very controversial idea.”

A lack of public support, or outright opposition, could be the plan’s fatal flaw, researchers wrote in the study. Polling found that support for a congestion tax peaked at 40%, Nam said.

Under the study’s parameters, the highest number of peak-hour commuters to the tolled zone would come from wealthy communities, including Brentwood, Bel Air and Westwood.

Researchers had considered a congestion fee of $6 to $8, Nam said, but they revised it downward to $4 after resistance from focus groups. The amount, she said, is “just enough of a nudge to see sizable benefits.”

Vehicles driving in and out multiple times during the peak traffic period would be charged only once. Leaving the area would be free.

The study assumed that residents would pay 40 cents — a 90% discount — and low-income commuters could qualify for half-price tolls. The fee for low-income commuters will likely be a friction point.

“I’m very, very wary of a model that gives a 90% discount to a CEO of a billion-dollar company and gives only a 50% discount to the gardener who drives to maintain that person’s estate,” Bonin said.

Tim Drain, 31, of Koreatown said he generally supports the idea of congestion pricing in Los Angeles but would like to see an exemption for workers who use their cars to transport the tools and supplies they need on job sites.
Drain works on home improvement projects for an interior design company, and ends up in the studied area about once a week, he said, with “too much stuff to take on transit.”

“I might be able to push it some days past 9 a.m.” to avoid the congestion charge, he said. “But probably about half the time, I’m still gonna be in that window, and I’d have to pay.”

The study found that some drivers would reduce the number of trips they took, researchers said, while others would shift their travel to other times. That would result in an increase in miles driven in the early afternoon and after evening rush hour. But overall, trips would be expected to fall by nearly 8%.

Allowing three-person carpools to enter the tolled zone for free would increase the rate of carpooling by 51%, researchers found.

For those who continue to drive, time spent behind the wheel in the tolled area would drop by nearly one-fourth because there would be less congestion, the study found.

To be successful, the toll would need to be coupled with significant investments in easy, reliable alternatives to driving, researchers said. That could include protected bicycle lanes and express bus service for commuters from Torrance and Encino.

The fees would generate an annual average of $69 million in net revenue that could be spent on those projects, researchers said.

“It’s a horrible idea,” said Kathleen Black of Brentwood, who takes her children, ages 6 and 10, to Sawtelle several times a month to eat, shop, run errands and go to the doctor. Parents who run errands with children after they get out of school would be charged in the afternoon, she said.

“It’s a penalty for being a patron of an area that I’m very happy to patronize,” said Black, 45. “We love it there, but I just don’t think we would go anymore if we had to pay.”

In other cities that have tried congestion pricing, people typically oppose the system before they’ve seen it work, said Brian Taylor, director of UCLA’s Institute for Transportation Studies. But “when people see it in practice, they tend to go majority opposition to majority support.”

In 2003, officials imposed a toll to enter central London between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Over a decade, the change — fought by auto interest groups and business owners — reduced congestion by 10% and raised the equivalent of $3 billion.

Next month, London is adding a toll equivalent to about $16.50 on polluting vehicles that enter the area. The fee will be expanded to a broader swath of London in 2021.
Do you know what a charter school is? Are you sure?

The warning signs appeared soon after Denise Kawamoto accepted a job at Today’s Fresh Start Charter School in South Los Angeles.

Though she was fresh out of college, she was pretty sure it wasn’t normal for the
school to churn so quickly through teachers or to mount surveillance cameras in each classroom. Old computers were lying around, but the campus had no internet access. Pay was low and supplies scarce — she wasn’t given books for her students.

She struggled to reconcile the school’s conditions with what little she knew about its wealthy founders, Clark and Jeanette Parker of Beverly Hills.

When Kawamoto saw their late-model Mercedes-Benz outside the school, she would think: “Look at your school, then look at what you drive.”

“That didn’t sit well with us teachers,” she said.

The Parkers have cast themselves as selfless philanthropists, telling the California Board of Education that they have “devoted all of our lives to the education of other people’s children, committed many millions of our own dollars directly to that particular purpose, with no gain directly to us.”

But the couple have, in fact, made millions from their charter schools. Financial records show the Parkers’ schools have paid more than $800,000 annually to rent buildings the couple own. The charters have contracted out services to the Parkers’ nonprofits and companies and paid Clark Parker generous consulting fees, all with taxpayer money, a Times investigation found.

Presented with The Times’ findings, the Parkers did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

How the Parkers have stayed in business, surviving years of allegations of financial and academic wrongdoing, illustrates glaring flaws in the way California oversees its growing number of charter schools.

Many of the people responsible for regulating the couple’s schools, including school board members and state elected officials, had accepted thousands of dollars from the Parkers in campaign contributions.

Like other charter operators who have run into trouble, the Parkers were able to appeal to the state Board of Education when they faced the threat of being shut down; the panel is known for overturning local regulators’ decisions. A Times analysis of the state board’s decisions has found that, over the last five years, it has sided with charters over local school districts or county offices of education in about 70% of appeals.

California law also enables troubled charter operators to escape sanction or scrutiny by moving to school districts more willing to accept them. The Parkers have used this to their advantage, keeping one step ahead of the regulators.
“They’re like cats,” said Kawamoto, who began working at one of the couple’s charter schools in 2006. “They have so many lives.”

California now has more than 1,300 charter schools — more than any other state.

Twenty-seven years ago, when California became just the second state to enact a law establishing charter schools, state leaders framed the experiment as a modest one that would allow only 100 schools at first. Free-market advocates saw charters as a way to empower all students to choose from a variety of schools. Other supporters envisioned them as laboratories for testing new teaching methods and then bringing successes back to traditional public schools.

The new, privately operated schools would be government-funded and tuition-free. They would unleash creativity by liberating schools from many of the state education code’s rules. But to ensure that they lived up to their promises and spent public money properly, they would have to be vetted and overseen by governmental bodies, beginning with the school districts in which they were located.

That was sufficient check and balance for the civic-minded individuals who ran many charter schools. But as the number of charters in the state grew, the same law that allowed many founders to try new ideas with great success created opportunities for others.

The law allowed for a multitude of different bodies to serve as “authorizers,” watching over the new schools. It gave oversight power not just to the state board, but also to each of the state’s many school districts and county boards of...
education — regardless of whether they had the ability or inclination to properly police the independently run schools.

About 330 government entities have the authority to authorize and supervise charters in California. By contrast, Texas, the state with the second-largest number of charter schools, has 18, according to its state education agency. New York has two active authorizers.

Los Angeles Unified, the nation’s second-largest school district, has an entire division devoted to overseeing the charters it authorizes and is considered one of the state’s most robust monitors. But the roster of charter authorizers also includes school districts with colorful histories of corruption and financial mismanagement. Some are so small that they have fewer than a dozen employees in all, with insufficient resources to be effective watchdogs.

The system has given rise to many well-respected charter organizations across the state, including KIPP and Green Dot Public Schools, which reach students in neighborhoods desperate for better options. But it also has allowed unscrupulous entrepreneurs to profit from a fragile and fractured regulatory patchwork.

In L.A., the founder of the charter school network Celerity Educational Group recently pleaded guilty to a felony count of conspiracy to misappropriate and embezzle public funds. Federal prosecutors found that Vielka McFarlane had used her charter schools’ credit card to pay for expensive clothing, luxury hotel stays and first-class flights for her and her family. She faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

Oxford Preparatory Academy, a Chino charter, was forced to close in 2017 after an audit determined that the school’s founder had been laundering state funds through her private company. Another audit found that a charter network CEO in Livermore had misspent $67 million in tax-exempt bonds and tried to mislead auditors. When the network filed for bankruptcy and closed its four charter schools, 1,500 students were displaced.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation earlier this month requiring more
transparency and stricter conflict-of-interest rules for charter schools. Those reforms could lead to changes when they take effect next year. But they are unlikely to fix the structural issues that have allowed problem charter school operators to circumvent oversight.

“There are wildly different levels of attention being paid to these schools, and charter schools are finding ways to shop around for the weakest oversight,” said Greg Richmond, president of the National Assn. of Charter School Authorizers. “As long as California’s authorizing structure stays fragmented across more than 300 different entities, you’re going to keep having these problems.”

The Parkers live in a 7,700-square-foot home in Beverly Hills with an estimated value of about $15.3 million.

Jeanette Parker is a past president of the Beverly Hills Republican Club, author of the self-published book “Will You Marry Me? Jesus Christ Proposes to You!” and a regular contributor to L.A.’s largest black newspaper, the Los Angeles Sentinel, which publishes her columns on topics such as single motherhood and why eggs come in many colors. As superintendent of Today’s Fresh Start, she is paid an annual salary of about $285,000.

Her husband, Clark, is a businessman, a vendor of security devices and a real estate developer who, in an online biography, says he has “developed hundreds of commercial and residential properties” in Southern California. He sits on the board of the South Coast Air Quality Management District and lists among his accolades the title of honorary consul general of the Central African Republic.

The Parkers are in their 70s. Between them, they have two PhDs and a doctorate of theology from the University of Central Arizona (a two-man operation forced to stop conferring degrees in 1980, according to contemporaneous reports in the Arizona Republic), St. Charles University, and Pacific International University. Both St. Charles and Pacific International are listed in “Degree Mills: The Billion-Dollar Industry That Has Sold Over a Million Fake Diplomas,” a book about unaccredited for-profit colleges accused of selling degrees co-written by Allen Ezell, a former FBI agent who ran a task force on diploma mills.
Jeanette and Clark Parker, founders of Today's Fresh Start, pictured in 2015. The Parkers live in this 7,700 square-foot home in Beverly Hills, with an estimated value of about $15.3 million. (L.A. School Report; Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times)

In examining Today's Fresh Start, The Times interviewed 11 current and former teachers and administrators; reviewed hundreds of pages of financial and legal records; and spoke to those responsible for overseeing the organization’s schools. It found that there were plenty of reasons to be wary of the Parkers well before the couple opened their first charter school.

The couple’s first foray into education was in 1968, when they opened a collection of day-care centers in South L.A. under the name Golden Day Schools. As director, Clark Parker won lucrative state contracts to enroll children from low-income families — until 2011, when state officials cut him off, citing “serious, chronic, and systemic program violations.”

Two state audits of the day-care program accused the nonprofit of falsifying records, padding attendance figures and spending public money to pay above-market rent for properties owned by the Parkers. The organization, which the state said Clark Parker oversaw, had also used public funds to reimburse itself for parking tickets, Clark Parker’s personal property taxes and vehicle registration fees for his Rolls-Royce and Mercedes-Benz — costs that state investigators determined had nothing to do with child care.

In 2003, the Los Angeles County Office of Education approved Jeanette Parker’s petition to open a charter school.

Over the next 16 years, Today’s Fresh Start expanded from a single campus to the three sites it currently operates in Los Angeles, Compton and Inglewood. Enrollment swelled from 282 students to 1,150 in grades K-8 last school year. The vast majority of its students are African American or Latino children from financially struggling families.

“As soon as we approved them, we started getting signs they weren’t really operating in the best interests of students and teachers,” said Darline Robles, a
USC professor of education who was superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education when it authorized Today’s Fresh Start.

In 2007, a Today’s Fresh Start teacher tipped off Robles’ staff to the possibility that the charter was tampering with the state’s standardized tests. An investigation ultimately found that something had gone wrong — students had been asked to revisit portions of the exams they had already completed. No one could say how many children had participated, or at whose direction, but it was serious enough that county officials proposed sending monitors to oversee testing.

Jeanette Parker refused, writing, “There is no state law requiring proctors.”

In response, the county widened its inquiry.

Officials learned that Today’s Fresh Start was renting buildings owned by the Parkers and paying Golden Day Schools, their state-funded child-care business, to provide food for the charters’ students. The charter network had also spent most of a $50,000 state grant to hire an unaccredited university to recommend ways to improve its charter schools. That university was founded by Jeanette Parker.

Accused by the county of self-dealing, financial conflicts of interest and wrongly administering the state tests, Jeanette Parker rejected the county’s findings. She said she already had addressed her financial interest in contracts and leases by recusing herself from voting on them, leaving those decisions to the charter network’s governing board.

That was an argument that could stand up only if the network’s board was independent. But county officials found that more than half of its members — who included the Parkers — had a financial stake in the schools.

“Thus, it appears that Jeanette Parker approves her own actions, evaluates her own performance, sets her own salary and single-handedly decides what will occur at TFSCS,” county officials wrote in a report laying out the case for revoking the charter.

In late 2007, the L.A. County Board of Education voted to close Today’s Fresh Start, citing more than 50 legal and regulatory violations.
In states such as New York or Massachusetts, where the power to authorize and oversee charter schools is concentrated in the hands of a select few regulatory bodies, that might have marked the end of the Parkers’ journey. In California, it was only the beginning.

The Parkers sued the county to try to get its decision overturned and keep their schools open. While that case was pending, they appealed to the State Board of Education, an 11-member body appointed by the governor that has the power to overrule decisions by school districts and county boards.

The board often grants appeals to charters that have been rejected elsewhere,
sometimes for serious financial and academic failings. Though it is supposed to be a standard-bearer of sorts for other authorizers, the state board has a reputation for leniency.

Charter schools approved by the state board “win by losing,” said Thomas Saenz, a civil rights attorney who sits on the L.A. County Board of Education and voted to revoke Today’s Fresh Start’s charter. “They lose in front of the school district or the county, but they win because they get the state as an overseer, and that means they get less oversight.”

In 2010, the year they made their case to the state board, the Parkers spent $15,000 on lobbyists. An NAACP representative came out to support them, as did former Lt. Gov. Mervyn Dymally, who in the course of his political career had received tens of thousands of dollars from the Parkers.

“I might have been lobbied for Today’s Fresh Start more than any other vote I cast on the state board,” said former state board member Ben Austin, who had misgivings about allowing the charter to stay open.

Austin said he was especially troubled by the charter’s academic performance. Its test scores swung wildly, from lows that landed it on a state list of “persistently lowest-achieving” schools to large increases in the span of a year. The pressure to approve the charter was intense, he said.

“I’m white. And I was getting lobbied by African American leaders to vote in a way they perceived would serve the African American community,” Austin said. “That’s a fairly uncomfortable position to be in.”

Recordings of state board meetings show there was little discussion of the L.A. County Board of Education’s findings of self-dealing, regulatory violations and testing irregularities. Problems at the Golden Day centers didn’t come up.

State Supt. of Instruction Jack O’Connell led department staff in recommending that the board keep Today’s Fresh Start open, which the board — including Austin — unanimously approved. The new school year was only weeks away and if the vote had been no, hundreds of students would have had to scramble to find a new school.

During O’Connell’s two terms in office, campaign finance records show, the Parkers had donated more than $73,000 to his various political committees. O’Connell said the money played no role in his decision.

“In the case of Fresh Start, it was one of those occasions where I agreed with the state board,” he wrote to The Times. “The charter served an overwhelming
number of low-income, minority kids that I believed would contribute to my overarching focus on closing the achievement gap.”

Austin wasn’t as confident. In retrospect, he said, “I’m not sure it was the best outcome for kids.”

Several months after the state board voted to renew Today’s Fresh Start’s charter, a teacher contacted county and state education officials.

“I would like to report on a school in Los Angeles that is run poorly and is a danger to their students,” wrote Andrew Goudy on the first of nine pages that detailed problems including cracks in classroom walls, broken air-conditioning and heating systems, and cafeteria food served spoiled or undercooked. He had, he wrote, maybe one textbook for every three students.

Goudy wrote that he’d overheard an administrator call several students a “total waste” and speak of the opportunity “to get rid of” those with disabilities.

Years later, in an interview with The Times, he said had never worked at a school that showed so little regard for students’ well-being.

“Every day, it was like, what should I do?” Goudy said. “Should I run in there and call 911? Should I just get out and work at Starbucks?”

The choice, he said, was made for him. Shortly after he sent the emails, he said, he was fired.

A state employee emailed back, promising to address his concerns. It’s unclear if anyone did. As years went by, Goudy lost hope that there would ever be consequences. He died in October 2018 at the age of 48.

In interviews, former and current Today’s Fresh Start teachers echoed his concerns. The more experienced among them said they knew the charter was receiving millions of dollars in government funding each year — an amount tied to its enrollment — but they could not see evidence of where the money went.

When Yanin Ardila was hired in 2009, she arrived to find no workbooks, notebooks or crayons for her students, she said. Half a dozen kindergartners had been plopped into her first-grade class because they didn’t have a classroom or a teacher of their own. On a few occasions, she said, she had to intervene to stop the staff from serving children bread that was past its expiration date.
In a 2014 interview with Beverly Hills Weekly, Jeanette Parker said her motives for opening Today’s Fresh Start were charitable.

“I wanted to start the charter school personally because I saw the need to educate the inner-city youth,” she told the weekly newspaper. She had grown up in Birmingham, Ala., with little money, she said. She wanted to reach students like herself.

Ardila saw it differently. “They didn’t care about students, it was just about money,” she said of the school’s leaders.

After spending a year in a cockroach-infested classroom, she said, she was moved into a nicer space. But the school remained a chaotic place. She left after three years for a job at another charter school.

Kawamoto, the former Today’s Fresh Start teacher who wasn’t given books for her students, said she was suspicious of the odd way in which she was paid. She said she was told to fill out two sets of time cards, making it seem as though she divided her time between the charter school where she worked and one of the Parkers’ day-care centers, which operated out of the same location. At the end of each month, her salary was split into two paychecks, she said. Goudy and Ardila — who had never worked for Golden Day — said they also were paid in this way.

While Today’s Fresh Start was under the county education board’s oversight, officials there tried to interest the L.A. County district attorney’s office in investigating the Parkers’ financial practices. Prosecutors began an inquiry but closed it after interviewing two teachers, according to a memo the
office provided to The Times. “There does not appear to be any fraud involved,” they wrote.

In its 2011 audit of the Parkers’ day-care operations, the state reached a different conclusion. It found that as Golden Day’s director, Clark Parker had been systematically overbilling the state Department of Education and using money meant for his day-care centers to pay the salaries of Today’s Fresh Start employees.

In court filings, Parker disputed the state’s account. He said that some of his employees had worked for both the day-care centers and the charter schools. The audit “is flawed and it should be dismissed because it is written by Biased Auditors and it is based on speculation,” he wrote in a request for an appeal.

State officials were not persuaded; they stopped funding the day-care centers.

The state Department of Education is currently suing Golden Day and Clark Parker to recover more than $19 million it says the nonprofit misspent.

State officials had decided they could no longer trust Clark Parker to run a day-care business, but they allowed his wife’s charter schools to stay open.

Staying in business required Today’s Fresh Start to keep moving from one authorizer to another.

In 2009, the Parkers persuaded the Inglewood Unified School District to let them operate a school under its oversight. With the help of a nearly $20-million facilities grant from the state, the couple built a large, boldly colored school building on a stretch of Imperial Highway known for prostitution.

Inglewood proved to be unequipped to oversee a charter school.

In 2012, with its finances in complete disarray, the district was taken over by the state Department of Education. Overwhelmed and subjected to a rotating cast of state-appointed leaders, it paid little attention to the district’s charters. Asked for copies of charter oversight and inspection reports dating back to when it first authorized Today’s Fresh Start, the district said it had none.

Oversight in Inglewood was so lax that in 2015, when the Parkers asked to have their charter renewed, district officials sat on the request, blowing a 60-day deadline. As a result, Today’s Fresh Start’s Inglewood charter was automatically renewed until 2020.

State Administrator Thelma Meléndez, who was chosen in 2017 to lead the district, said that Inglewood doesn’t
have the staff to oversee its charters as rigorously as a large district such as L.A. Unified. Like many small districts, it can’t afford to devote even one employee to the task full time. There are signs, however, that Meléndez is paying more attention than her predecessors. Earlier this month, she sent Jeanette Parker a letter expressing concern over the charter’s test scores and asking for a detailed plan for their improvement.

Inglewood gave the Parkers a secure foothold, but it was only a partial answer to their problems.

Jeanette Parker had never stopped fighting the county’s decision to revoke her charter — even though the State Board of Education had taken over the county’s supervisory duties.

In 2015, when the California Supreme Court upheld the revocation, and other regulatory changes took effect, Today's Fresh Start could no longer operate its schools in South L.A. and Compton under the state board’s oversight.

The Parkers, looking for a lifeline, turned to the two districts in which the schools were located: L.A. Unified and Compton Unified.

Officials in L.A. took a hard look at Today’s Fresh Start and saw how the Parkers’ schools had become more entangled with their financial interests.

After five years under state oversight, they were still using public money to rent buildings they owned.

Clark Parker was no longer on the board of Today’s Fresh Start — he was on the payroll. Board minutes showed that his wife’s schools had hired him to manage construction of the Inglewood school. His initial contract was for $575,000.

In a strongly worded report to the school board, L.A. Unified officials wrote that the Parkers had potentially broken California’s conflict-of-interest laws. They were also concerned about the charter’s academics. Although officials found Today’s Fresh Start’s test scores acceptable, they wrote that the charter was struggling with English learners. These students made up 30% of the charter’s population, yet over a two-year period, not a single one had been reclassified as
The couple’s lawyer argued that L.A. Unified was unfairly holding them to a stricter conflict-of-interest law that applied to district-run schools. The law that applied to charters was different.

The L.A. school board rejected Today’s Fresh Start’s petition.

If the charter schools were going to stay open, the Parkers would need to find another authorizing body.

In July 2015, Today’s Fresh Start became the first charter approved by Compton Unified, a district that had been struggling under a cloud of mismanagement and corruption for decades. Compton assumed responsibility for overseeing two of the group’s sites — one in Compton and one in South L.A.

In response to questions from The Times, district Supt. Darin Brawley said that he had visited the schools twice, most recently in 2017. But when asked for records from these visits, district officials said they had none. Nor did they have
any of the financial records, such as bank statements, annual tax filings, contracts or lease agreements, that vigilant authorizers use to monitor charter schools.

The Parkers became major donors to the political campaigns of two Compton Unified board members.

Compton school board races are often small-time affairs. With unions picking up the cost of mailers and phone banking, candidates have raised less than $10,000 and still won. The Parkers wrote large checks — over the course of the last several years, they have given more than $21,000 to Compton Unified board President Micah Ali and Vice President Satra Zurita.

Neither Ali nor Zurita responded to requests for comment.

In late 2017, as Compton was considering whether to renew Today’s Fresh Start, district staff prepared a report listing some of the charter petition’s deficiencies. They noted that Jeanette Parker had not disclosed who was on her organization’s board or whom her charter was doing business with.

“Please note that the petition is generally vague and inconsistent regarding the details of the programs outlined in the petition,” the report said.

Still, district officials recommended renewal. They had been assured, Brawley said, “that the deficiencies identified in the petition would be rectified.”

When the charter’s renewal came up in December, Compton school board members did not discuss the charter’s academic performance. They did not question the Parkers, who sat before them in the audience.

What they did was a foregone conclusion.

The board took less than a minute to vote unanimously to renew Today’s Fresh Start until June 2023.

*Zahira Torres, a former Times staff writer, contributed to this report.*