NEWS • News

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Secession from California unneeded, San Bernardino County gets ‘fair share,’ report finds

Leaving California would leave residents worse off, county consultants say

A blue sky and palm trees are reflected in a window at the San Bernardino County Government Center in downtown San Bernardino on Friday, Oct. 7, 2022. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)



By **BEAU YARBROUGH** | byarbrough@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun

UPDATED: August 19, 2024 at 4:48 p.m.

San Bernardino County is receiving more than its “fair share” of state and federal revenue, and seceding from California is both unnecessary and unlikely, according to a consulting firm that’s been studying the issue for a year.

“Across all sources, over the past three fiscal years, the county has received 9% more state funding per person than other counties statewide,” a 33-page analysis by the Oakland-based Blue Sky Consulting Group reads in part.

In fiscal years 2019-20 and 2021-22, the county received an average of $829 per person in state and federal funding, compared to a statewide average of $763 per person, according to the firm.

In August 2023, the Board of Supervisors paid Blue Sky $192,400 to study “all options to obtain the county’s fair share of state and federal resources.”

The fair share question was attached to a threat: San Bernardino County could secede from California, either forming its own state or joining Nevada or Arizona, its neighbors to the east, if county residents were indeed getting short-changed by state and federal government.

Doing so would have serious consequences, according to a Blue Sky memo on the subject.

“Secession would trigger a wide variety of economic impacts countywide alongside fiscal impacts on the county government, local municipal governments, and school districts,” the firm’s 11-page memo reads in part. “State fiscal data shows that, on a per capita basis, the tax revenues generated in San Bernardino County are likely less than half the revenues generated statewide.”

In other words, more than half of the county’s revenue comes from the larger state of California, especially from state income tax. It would get less revenue as part of Nevada or Arizona, which are less affluent than California, or by striking out on its own.

San Bernardino County previewed the report Wednesday, Aug. 14, but released the full analysis Friday, Aug. 16, as part of the agenda for the Board of Supervisors' meeting Tuesday, Aug. 20.

Though the end result of the analysis showed a mixed bag for the county, Fourth District Supervisor Curt Hagman said the resulting document is a useful tool.

"I've always advocated for transparency on the state level," Hagman said Monday, Aug. 19. "Now, with that data, we can go to argue for formula changes" in how state funding is allocated.

Without Blue Sky's analysis, Hagman said, it's not clear whether the county would have ever received this information.

"As a former legislator, I didn't have this information, either," said Hagman, who served in the California Assembly from 2008 through 2014.

Back in 2022, Inland Empire legislators wrote an open letter rejecting the idea that they weren't working hard to bring state funding to San Bernardino County.

"It's not about us versus them," Hagman said, "it's about us, working together."

County receiving 'fair share'

Blue Sky's analysis looked at 26 different types of revenue San Bernardino County received from other government agencies. For the most part, the county came out ahead, receiving 9% more state revenue on average than the state's other 57 counties, according to the analysis. It comes in 36th out of 58 counties in transfers of funding from the state to the county level.

The county is ahead in the amount of money it received in prison realignment funding, which was meant to defray the costs of shifting California prisoners to local jails in response to overcrowding. San Bernardino County received $431 per county resident in fiscal year 2021-22 versus the statewide average of $406.

Between fiscal year 2019-20 and 2021-22, the county received an average of $106 per person in Proposition 172 funding, well ahead of the statewide average of $99 per person, meaning the county ranks 19th out of the state's 58 counties. Proposition 172 is a half-cent sales tax that funds law enforcement.

The county's public school districts, meanwhile, have received more money for facilities than the statewide average over the last 20 years, according to the analysis. During that period, the county had 6.6% of California's public school students, but received 7.3% of state funding for facilities.

But it's not all good news, of course.

The county has more judicial vacancies — 30 of them — than any other county in California. Statewide, there are 98 unfilled judgeships, meaning San Bernardino County accounts for nearly one-third of the vacancies.

The county received an average of $64 per person in Mental Health Services Act funding over fiscal years 2020-21 through 2022-23, compared to a statewide average of $68 per person in that same period.

And despite San Bernardino County having about 2.1% of the state's homeless population, according to Blue Sky's analysis, it receives 1.1% of the funding from California's Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention program. It also receives less of the state's Encampment Resolution Funds — 1.4% — than its percentage of its homeless residents.

San Bernardino County also ranks 49th out of 58 counties in the number of affordable housing units receiving federal tax credits over the past 20 years, the analysis found.

The county received $401 per user for water systems that the state classified as "at risk," compared to an average of $485 per user statewide. Across multiple measures, since 2017, the county has received less of this funding than the statewide average, sometimes dramatically so.

And despite having about 4% of the state's community college students, the county's community colleges received 3.1% of the state's capital outlay funding over the past 10 years.

The new report largely agrees with the findings of an internal analysis by San Bernardino County in fall 2022.

That analysis suggested the county was near the middle of the pack in terms of state and federal funding, per capita. At that time, county officials estimated the county received a total of $1,071 per person from the state and federal government, combined. That put it behind Los Angeles County, ranked 28th, but ahead of more wealthy counties such as Santa Barbara (52nd) and Orange (55th).

Secession costly

The threat of secession was on the table if San Bernardino County wasn't receiving its fair share. A memo drafted by Blue Sky suggests that would be a bad idea and almost impossible to pull off.

"Not since 1861, when West Virginia seceded from Virginia following the outbreak of the Civil War, has a new state been created by the partition of an existing state," the memo reads in part.

San Bernardino County seceding would require the approval of the state Legislature and U.S. Congress, probably including a filibuster-proof 60-person majority of the U.S. Senate, according to Blue Sky's memo. The legislature of any state that San Bernardino County hoped to join would also need to give its consent.

"The relative difficulty of this step in the secession process is uncertain, as there is no precedent for it," the memo reads in part. "All previous state partitions led to the creation of new states; a pre-existing state has never gained new territory as the result of another state's partition."

And if secession did happen, leaving California could mean a massive loss of revenue, as much of the state's finances come from income tax on wealthy Silicon Valley-area residents.

According to the St. Louis Federal Reserve, in 2022, San Bernardino County had an average residential income of $49,270. In comparison, Bay Area counties had double or even triple that residential income, including $171,177 in Marin County, $155,819 in San Francisco County, $175,070 in San Mateo County and $144,399 in Santa Clara County.

San Bernardino County also has lower property values than many other parts of the state, which would likely lead to a shortfall in property tax revenues in an independent county, Blue Sky noted in its report.

“While a new state of San Bernardino could decide for itself what taxes to impose, the economic and state fiscal metrics presented … show that if the county enacted a tax system identical to California’s — i.e., the same taxes imposed at the same tax rates — the revenues generated would be much lower per person than the current system in California,” the firm’s memo reads in part.

Services for San Bernardino County residents would probably also go downhill, according to Blue Sky.

“Though secession could generate some benefits for San Bernardino County, a secession faces significant political challenges, and if accomplished, would likely result in a significant reduction in the level of government services currently enjoyed by county residents,” the memo reads in part.

According to the California State Library, there have been at least 220 attempts to split California into smaller parts. None have succeeded.

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How this all started

The fair share and secession questions came up in the lead-up to the 2022 general election.

Real estate developer Jeff Burum told the county Board of Supervisors in July 2022 that the Inland Empire, one of the state’s fastest-growing areas, is consistently short-changed by Sacramento. The region isn’t getting its “fair share” of resources, he said, whether it’s investment in infrastructure or state judges. The answer, he said, was to split off from California and either form a new state called Empire or to join Nevada or Arizona as part of those states.

The question went before voters in November 2022 with Measure EE, which asked: “Do the people of San Bernardino County want San Bernardino County elected representatives to study and advocate for all options to obtain the county’s fair share of State funding up to and including secession from the State of California?”

A narrow majority – 50.62% of voters – told the board to go ahead with the study.

Some have argued Measure EE was actually meant to drive voters to the polls, where they’d also have the chance to vote on Measure D, which changed the term limits and salaries for the county Board of Supervisors. Burum has previously denied the allegation.

Measure D was worded in such a way that it sounded like it was putting a salary cap and stricter term limits on the Board of Supervisors. But it actually rolled back tougher term limits approved by the voters in 2020. Measure D ended up passing with 58.22% of the vote, raising raising term limits from one to three terms and capping supervisors' compensation at 80% of the annual $225,074 base pay for San Bernardino Superior Court judges. Two years earlier, 2020's Measure K had cut supervisors' pay to $60,000 a year.

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to receive the report at its meeting at 10 a.m. Tuesday in the County Government Center, 385 N. Arrowhead Ave., San Bernardino.



Campaign signs around San Bernardino County promote 2022's Measure EE, which asks about secession from California, using the slogan "Fairness for All!." Measure D reset county supervisors' pay and compensation to levels higher than were set in a ballot measure passed in 2020. (File photo by David Allen, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

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More on San Bernardino County's "fair share," possible secession

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- San Bernardino County supervisors urged to secede from California
- What voters need to know about San Bernardino County's secession measure
- What to know about San Bernardino County's latest term-limits measure
- Opinion: San Bernardino County successfully tricks voters with Measure D
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- San Bernardino County to release report central to secession talk
- San Bernardino County is mostly getting its fair share of funds, report says

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OPINION > **COMMENTARY** • Opinion

What is the right ‘size’ or price for citizen engagement in San Bernardino County?



Christopher Wilhite, assistant assessor for San Bernardino County, was appointed by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors to serve as supervisor for two years at their Dec. 6, 2022 meeting. (Courtesy of San Bernardino County)

By **J RAY KENNEDY**
UPDATED: August 19, 2024 at 6:18 p.m.

The county has issued a press statement claiming to have “right-sized” the use of videoconferencing sites for public participation in Board of Supervisors meetings. But what is the right “size” for this citizen engagement?

According to the statement, it’s Zero – unless and until some unnamed person or office decides otherwise. On what basis would that decision be made? Would the county’s citizens ever have any say in this?

The county statement cites an expenditure of about $31,000 in 2022 and $37,000 in 2023. With approximately 2.2 million residents in the county, that works out to less than 2 cents a person per year.

The county should be spending MORE to promote citizen engagement, not less.

And it recently did: less than six months ago, the county proudly announced that those wishing to address the Board “can type out an e-form in either English or Spanish using new kiosks located at the San Bernardino County Government Center and the Joshua Tree and High Desert government centers.” Now what?

The public is invited to submit written comments by e-mail, an online web form, or US Mail – but those comments are only accessible for public review in the office of the Clerk of the Board in San Bernardino. This isn’t an effective way to encourage citizen engagement.

Going back through Board of Supervisors agendas, it appears remote participation has been offered from both Hesperia and Joshua Tree since the May 7, 2013 meeting; prior to that, there was a remote site in Victorville. (When the Victorville site was dropped, there was a notice in the meeting agenda stating “Alternate location to address the Board – Please note that the Board of Supervisors’ videoconferencing site is no longer available at the Transitional Assistance Department building in Victorville”. No such notice was published in relation to the recent change.)

A number of questions remain unanswered regarding this change:

1. Who made the decision? A review of recent meeting videos and agendas found no mention of this change.
2. How and when was the change communicated to the public?

This change comes just over a year after the Board of Supervisors eliminated the Morongo Basin MAC (Municipal Advisory Committee), the body responsible under state law for advising our county supervisor on issues arising in the unincorporated communities of the Basin. Several MACs exist elsewhere in the county, but ours was taken away three months after Supervisor Rowe stated on the “Up Close” show in February 2023 on Z107.7FM that any action was at least six months away.

Shutting down the remote sites should not have been an administrative decision; if it was to be done, it should have been done by the Board of Supervisors after having been publicly noticed and discussed in open session. The county’s vision statement includes being “a model community which is governed in an open and ethical manner,” yet the direction of these changes leaves me questioning the county’s commitment to open government.

In closing, the county’s statement asserts that “the only space available for videoconferencing at the Bob Burke Joshua Tree Government Center has been an employee break room”, but if Supervisor Rowe is chairing a meeting in San Bernardino, why can’t her office in the Government Center be used as the space for videoconferencing?

J. Ray Kennedy is a resident of Morongo Valley.

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DAILY PRESS

LOCAL

San Bernardino County Registrar mistakenly qualifies 5 candidates for fall election



Rene Ray De La Cruz
Victorville Daily Press

Published 2:06 a.m. PT Aug. 20, 2024 | **Updated 2:06 a.m. PT Aug. 20, 2024**

A clerical error led to several people running for office while believing they were qualified for the fall ballot, the San Bernardino County Registrar of Voters announced.

The county registrar reevaluated petition signatures and found that eight candidates were affected by the error. Those candidates are from Apple Valley, Hesperia, Highland, Rialto, Ontario, Rancho Cucamonga and Twentynine Palms.

After the candidate filing period closed on Aug. 9, the Registrar of Voters discovered the clerical error that affected the evaluation of petition signatures submitted by those running for office, county officials reported.

The registrar conducted additional audits to confirm the errors made on the qualifications of the five candidates. The registrar's office will add the audits to the candidate signature filing and review process in the future, officials said.

Five of the eight candidates failed to meet their nomination requirements and did not qualify for the ballot, according to county officials.

Apple Valley election: Council votes to place 1-cent sales tax on ballot amid budget shortfalls

The registrar notified the city clerks of the error on Aug. 10, and the five candidates have until Aug. 29 to legally challenge the error and request relief from the courts.

Three of the eight candidates had the opportunity to obtain additional signatures due to the extension of the candidate filing period through 5 p.m. Wednesday. These deadlines were

extended because the incumbents in those contests had not filed candidacy papers.

The five candidates may file a legal challenge to request relief from the courts. Any legal challenges must be resolved by Aug. 29, after which no changes can be made to the ballot, the county stated.

These findings were promptly addressed by performing subsequent audits to confirm the findings. In the future, these additional audits will be added to our candidate filing processes and our petition signature review processes.

County officials said the mission of the register of voters is to conduct the county's elections in a fair, accessible, secure, transparent, and efficient manner, upholding the highest level of election standards and accuracy, while always providing excellent customer service to the diverse population it serves.

For more information, visit https://elections.sbcounty.gov.

CALIFORNIA

Nearly $1 billion in funds left unspent by centers for disabled Californians

Fernando Gomez, co-founder of Integrated Community Collaborative, combs his son Oscar Antonio's hair at home in Los Angeles. Gomez is alarmed by the amount of money that regional centers have returned to the state. (Jason Armond / Los Angeles Times)

By Emily Alpert Reyes
Staff Writer

Aug. 20, 2024 3 AM PT

Nearly $1 billion allocated for regional agencies that purchase supportive services for Californians with developmental disabilities went unspent in a recent year and was

ultimately returned to the state, even as some disabled people and their families said they needed more help.

California provides assistance to people with autism and other developmental disabilities through a system of nonprofits called regional centers, which are contracted with the California Department of Developmental Services. Twenty-one of them exist across the state, each serving a distinct area. More than 400,000 California children and adults are served through the regional centers annually.

The system has been criticized for persistent gaps in spending on services for Californians of different races and in different regions. Families have complained it can be difficult to navigate.

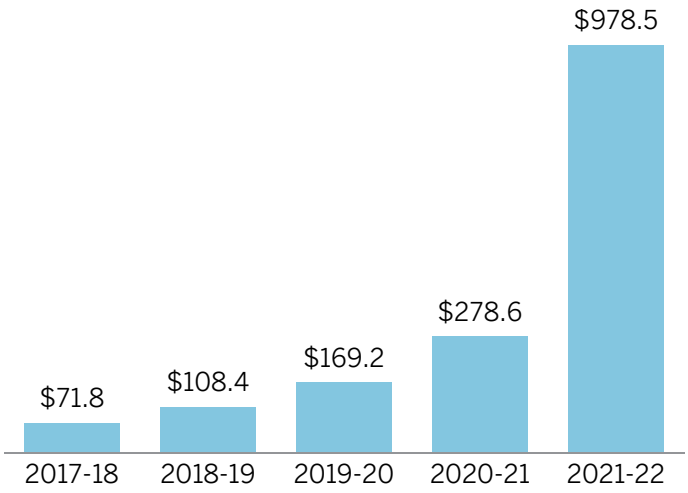
Even after Californians get the green light from regional centers for services, that assistance may not ultimately be provided if staffing agencies or other service providers cannot find workers to do the job. In recent years, regional centers have spent roughly two-thirds of the amount they have authorized for supportive services, according to an analysis of state data provided by the Assn. of Regional Center Agencies.

If the money meant for purchasing supportive services goes unspent at the regional centers, the funds that were allocated are eventually "reverted" to the state. That sum increased more than ninefold in three years, soaring to more than $978 million in the budget year that ended in summer 2022, from $108 million in 2018-19.

Money unspent by regional centers

Hundreds of millions of dollars allocated for regional centers that coordinate services for Californians with developmental disabilities has gone unspent.

In millions



California Department of Developmental Services

LOS ANGELES TIMES

In total, nearly $8.9 billion was allocated to regional centers to purchase services in 2021-22. So for every $10 allocated to regional centers for services, more than $1 was ultimately reverted in 2021-22, according to a Times analysis of figures provided by the state. The 11% reversion rate was more than three times the percentage that had been reverted in the previous year.

That same year, 30% of families of children receiving regional center services who responded to a survey said they were only "sometimes" or "seldom" satisfied with the support and services they received.

"It's astonishing to see how much money is being sent back to the state when there are so many people with developmental disabilities who are not getting services at all," said Judy Mark, president of the advocacy group Disability Voices United.

Regional center leaders pointed to several issues, including companies that provide needed services struggling to find and retain staff. Larry Landauer, executive director of the Regional Center of Orange County, said that as wages have risen elsewhere, state rates for workers who assist people with disabilities haven't kept up.

"It was not us holding back the money," Landauer said. "It was the agencies not being able to get the staff."

Amy Westling, executive director of the Assn. of Regional Center Agencies, said that California "had record low unemployment, which always makes competition for staff challenging."

In addition, she said that when the state budgeted for regional centers for 2021-22, it was anticipating the possible effects of a COVID surge that could necessitate more spending on one-on-one services. Earlier in the pandemic, when schools were providing virtual instruction and group services were suspended, Westling said "the regional centers were paying for a lot of personal assistants" and other daily care.

Money was included in the budget in case that was needed again in 2021-22, but "in hindsight that isn't what happened," she said. Spending on services did go up that year — to $7.9 billion, from roughly $7.6 billion, among all the regional centers — but did not increase as much as budgeted.

Such explanations failed to satisfy Fernando Gomez, co-founder of Integrated Community Collaborative, which helps families of people with developmental disabilities navigate the system. Gomez said even the lower amounts returned in earlier years were galling.

"Can you imagine what that money could do? The amount of individuals whose lives would change?" he asked.

Advocates said there is no shortage of unmet need. A report released two years ago by Public Counsel, a public interest law firm, found that at some regional centers, more than 40% of children and teens were not getting any services purchased through the agencies.

Last year, an independent state commission issued a report calling it a "system in distress." Among its findings: The vast differences in how different centers assess people

for services and decide what is offered “means the level of care can vary significantly for different individuals — even if they have similar needs.”

Mark of Disability Voices United said “the bottom line is that people with developmental disabilities aren’t getting the services they are entitled to. We are tired of excuses.”

Amount of allocated money unspent for 2021-22

Search in table

Regional center	Amount reverted	▼ Percent reverted
Westside	$38 million	11.0%
Alta California	$65 million	10.7%
Tri-Counties	$38 million	9.9%
Harbor	$26 million	9.1%
Valley Mountain	$27 million	9.1%
Central Valley	$37 million	8.7%
Lanterman	$22 million	7.3%
East Bay	$43 million	7.2%
North L.A.	$46 million	6.9%
Inland	$46 million	6.5%

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California Department of Developmental Services

LOS ANGELES TIMES

At the South Central Los Angeles Regional Center, which serves areas including South L.A and Compton, the unused money — $122 million — amounted to more than one-fifth of what the center had been allocated by the state for purchasing services in 2021-22. That was the highest percentage among regional centers statewide.

Leaders at the South Central Los Angeles Regional Center said they had ramped up spending earlier in the pandemic as families scrambled to handle remote learning. A Public Counsel report credited the South L.A. center with more than doubling its

spending on services for children and teens in 2020-21 — an increase that accounted for most of the statewide narrowing that year of spending gaps for Latino children, it found.

When budget allocations were planned for 2021-22, “the state was prepping to expect the worst” again, projecting off previous spending, said Cherylle Mallinson, director of community services.

Instead, as schools reopened, families no longer needed the same kind of assistance, center officials said. Jesse Rocha, its director of adult services, also emphasized that an unusually high percentage of its clients — more than two-thirds — are school-age youth, compared with the population at other regional centers.

“The same needs were no longer there. … It’s all based on the unique, individual needs that every family or individual presents,” said Cesar Garcia, its director of clinical services. For example, officials pointed out that SCLARC spending on one category of services, respite care, fell from $109 million to $52 million.

A widely used survey showed that same year, 33% of families of children with disabilities who were surveyed at the South L.A. center said they needed additional services.

South L.A. regional center officials disputed that those findings were an accurate reflection of its performance, saying only a fraction of its clients had responded to the survey and that as its population has rapidly grown, some clients might be so new that services had not yet been initiated.

At the regional center serving Orange County, the amount of unspent money ballooned in two years — to nearly $65 million, from $3 million. That was roughly 12% of what it was allocated in 2021-22, slightly higher than the average rate at which funds were left unspent by regional centers.

Landauer said that even now, “we’re still struggling with our day programs to get enough people hired.” Such programs provide adults with disabilities a range of daily activities for skill building and community integration.

Pay increases have been slowly phased in by the state over time, with another boost expected in January. Landauer said he hoped that “finally the field will be a little bit leveled” with competing employers.

California has ramped up funding for its regional centers over time, increasing their budget allocation for purchasing services from roughly $6 billion to over $11 billion from 2018 to 2024. Spending has been driven by a growing caseload and more use of supportive services, according to the Legislative Analyst’s Office.

This summer, the agencies ended the budget year with more than $1.4 billion unspent. That number is not final: State officials said claims for supportive services provided during that year can still be submitted before unspent money is eventually reverted to state coffers, up to two years after the end of the budget year.

Carla Castañeda, chief deputy director of operations at the Department of Developmental Services, said the state tries to do “frequent monitoring” of spending, but there can be lags in getting that information, and “unfortunately during the pandemic there were even longer lags.” In addition, Castañeda said there can be restrictions on their ability to reroute funds, especially for newer services.

With time, Castañeda said, “we do think it will trend back to a much smaller” share of unspent funds. For instance, she said, recent increases in service coordinators at regional centers could better connect people with needed supports, and California has also restored other services such as summer camp.

Westling said there is no incentive to leave money for supportive services unspent, since the regional centers cannot transfer the unused funds to their day-to-day operations.

Nor would regional centers be penalized if they overspent their budgets, she said, as long as the spending was consistent with the rules.

Disabled people are legally entitled to such services in California, so "if the system is running short of resources, then the obligation shifts to the administration to seek additional resources from the legislature," Westling said. "It really is designed to ensure that we have the resources necessary to meet people's needs."

But to attorney Valerie Vanaman, who represents people with disabilities and their families, leaving hundreds of millions of dollars unspent is a symptom of a system "that is falling apart."

Vanaman said the pandemic led to regional centers losing experienced professionals and that working remotely had harmed the kind of collaboration needed to make sure people get the services they need.

"What you're seeing is that where services should have been put together, where the money would have been spent, there was no internal structure to make it happen," Vanaman said.

Areva Martin, chief executive of the nonprofit Special Needs Network Inc., said she understood the unusual circumstances facing regional centers amid COVID. "Even taking into account those things," she said, "I think it speaks to a level of bureaucracy that makes regional centers very difficult to navigate."

"It is disheartening to meet families who don't have adequate services, who don't have adequate resources, and then to hear about a billion dollars being returned," Martin said.

POLITICO

CALIFORNIA

A new California rallying cry: ‘Fund the Police Forever’

San Bernardino County jumps into the public safety debate with a belated rejoinder to calls for defunding law enforcement.

San Bernardino is the geographically largest county in the country, encompassing both the conservative exurbs east of Los Angeles and wide stretches of desert up to the Arizona border. | Robyn Beck/AFP via Getty Images

By **WILL MCCARTHY**
08/19/2024 07:27 PM EDT

The local government of a largely rural, desert county just east of Los Angeles is asking voters to reject “Defund the Police” in favor of “Fund the Police Forever.”

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors has approved a charter amendment to “protect the community from potential defunding of law enforcement services” and establish a minimum level of funding for officers in the sprawling unincorporated areas of the county.

Advertisement

The measure, Proposition L, will appear on the Inland Empire county’s November ballot alongside Proposition 36, which has reignited a statewide debate over crime and law enforcement.

“We don’t ever want future boards of supervisors to be able to take public safety away in our very rural and remote areas of the county,” said Supervisor Dawn Rowe, a nonpartisan with Republican ties who represents the most unincorporated regions in the county.

In an interview, Rowe tied the local measure to statewide policy debates and specifically mentioned Proposition 47, a 2014 statewide initiative that classified some non-violent property crimes as misdemeanors, as a burden on the county. Rowe said the measure has driven up misdemeanors in her county.

Unlike San Francisco and San Jose, where local leaders have criticized the 2014 criminal-justice initiative as insufficiently punitive, San Bernardino’s unincorporated areas are unlikely to face any large-scale retail-theft problem.

The remote stretches of desert and mountain are usually so far-flung that they lack any consumer products to steal. (Violent crime and property crime have both fallen in unincorporated areas according to the most recent publicly available data, although rates vary significantly across the county.)

San Bernardino, which leans red, is the geographically largest county in the country, encompassing both the conservative exurbs east of Los Angeles along with the Mojave National Preserve and wide stretches of desert up to the Arizona border.

That size contributes to the real geographic and economic challenges that the county faces in policing. For years, San Bernardino County lost officers to higher paying jobs in neighboring Los Angeles and Orange counties and has often been left understaffed. Meanwhile, the sheer size of the county means officers are responsible for patrolling vast areas. (One station, in Needles,

covers 5,131 square miles — roughly the size of Connecticut.) More recently, the county has upped officer salaries and, although there are still vacancies, come to something of a staffing equilibrium.

“Defund the Police” became a civil rights activist call to action following George Floyd’s murder and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. Although the movement has largely vanished from practical policy discussions in recent years, it still hangs over the political discourse. At least locally, the charter amendment pulls that debate back into the spotlight.

Rowe acknowledges there is little debate within San Bernardino about maintaining the current police presence, although in nearby Los Angeles, Mayor Karen Bass recently took flack from progressives for raising the LAPD’s pay. At present, there is no campaign building either in support of or in opposition to the charter amendment. There have been no recent pushes to cut funding for law enforcement, but Rowe said past calls for such action across the state is proof enough of the threat.

“We’ve had a lot of conversations in the municipalities around us about defunding the police,” Rowe said. “That’s not something we’re interested in. We want to say we favor public safety.”

"OPERATION CONSEQUENCES" NETS FIREARMS AND NARCOTICS, RESULTS IN FELONY ARRESTS IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

By Gabriela Martinez

Published on August 19, 2024



Between August 10 and August 16, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department intensively worked to curb local criminal activity in what has been titled "Operation Consequences." The operation, a component of a broader county-wide crime suppression initiative funded by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, aims to target violent crime and dismantle gang activity.

Multiple law enforcement agencies, including the Sheriff's Gangs/Narcotics Division and the United States Marshals Pacific Southwest Regional Fugitive Task Force, deployed personnel to execute this surge in

enforcement efforts, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff-Coroner Department.

During the one-week spree of activity, investigators conducted searches at several locales throughout Hesperia, Rancho Cucamonga, Fontana, San Bernardino, and Chino, leading to the seizure of seven firearms, among them three ghost guns, and an undisclosed amount of illegal narcotics.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff-Coroner Department reported that the operation also resulted in four felony arrests.

Such targeted efforts, as stated by Sheriff-Coroner Shannon D. Dicus, are consistent with the community's demands for improved quality of life and safer neighborhoods.

Authorized funds by the county have been put to use for the express goal of increasing law enforcement services. This financial influx, as per the department, will enhance ongoing operations over the subsequent months. "Operation Consequences will focus on conducting targeted crime suppression operations in the High Desert and the Sheriff's jurisdiction surrounding the city of San Bernardino," the Sheriff's office shared in a recent statement.

NEWS > ENVIRONMENT

‘A game changer’: How giant batteries are making California’s power grid stronger, and reducing the risk of blackouts during heat waves

The same batteries in cell phones are cranking out more electricity than nuclear power, allowing solar to be used at night

Rows of Tesla batteries in operation at PG&E’s Elkhorn battery storage facility in Moss Landing, Calif., on Thursday, Aug. 15, 2024. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)

By PAUL ROGERS | progers@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
UPDATED: August 19, 2024 at 11:27 a.m.

Four years ago this week, California's power grid was so strained by a heat wave that rolling blackouts hit hundreds of thousands of residents over two days. It nearly happened again two years ago, when state officials issued 11 "flex alerts" asking businesses and homeowners to voluntarily reduce electricity use to avoid power disruptions.

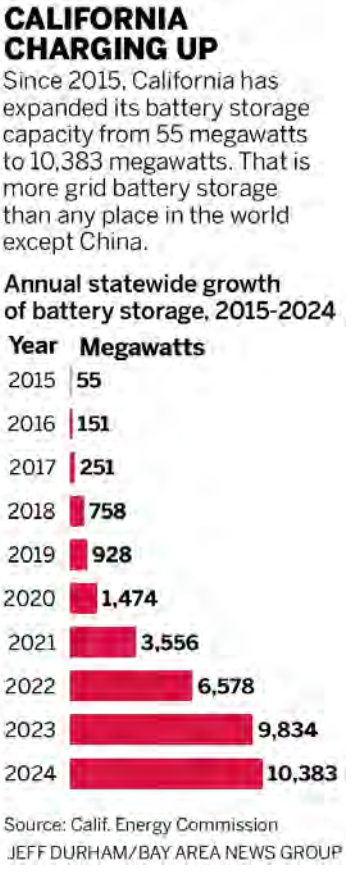
But this year when a record heat wave scorched the state over three weeks from mid-June to July — sending temperatures across the Bay Area and the Central Valley soaring over 110 degrees — there was plenty of power. No warnings. No shortages. No flex alerts.

A big part of the reason, experts say, is a boom in the construction of giant battery projects.

California's high-tech battery centers built with thousands of lithium-ion batteries similar to the batteries in cell phones and electric cars are solving the main shortcoming of the push for more renewable energy: the fact that the sun doesn't shine at night.

Battery storage has increased sevenfold in the past five years in California, from 1,474 megawatts in 2020 to 10,383 megawatts now. A megawatt is enough electricity to run 750 homes.

Before, when the sun went down every summer evening, giant solar farms stopped producing electricity, sometimes leading to power shortages statewide in the early evening. Now, the growing number of battery storage plants across the state can store that solar power during the day when it is plentiful. The battery storage plants then release it back to the power grid in the evening as the sun goes down but hot weather keeps electricity demand high because millions of Californians are running air conditioners.



“Think of it like an energy bank account,” said Elliott Mainzer, president and CEO of California Independent System Operator, an agency in Folsom that manages the state’s power grid. “In the middle of the day, you are making big deposits. At the end of the day, we withdraw from that account.”

Since 2020, companies in California have built more large-scale battery storage projects than any place in the world except China. Five years ago there were 36 such plants in the state. Today there are 175, with dozens more planned or under construction.

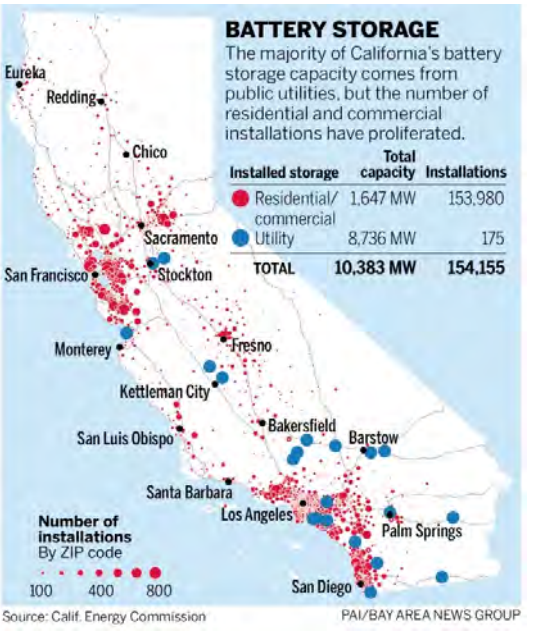
“It’s definitely been a game changer in improving reliability,” Mainzer said.

The shift has taken many people by surprise.

“These facilities are not sexy. They are not visible,” said David Hochschild, chairman of the California Energy Commission. “They are out of view. The footprint is very small. They are out of sight, but not out of mind.”

“They have been the difference maker,” he added. “They are the reason we haven’t had flex alerts. These storage facilities have provided an incredible cushion.”

Many of the largest battery plants are in the Southern California desert, near Palm Springs, Blythe and Lancaster. But two of the biggest are in Monterey County, located on the site of the old PG&E Moss Landing Power Plant.



That natural gas-fired plant, built in 1950 and famous for its two 500-foot-tall concrete smokestacks, now is home to a 750-megawatt battery storage plant owned by Vistra, a Texas company, and a 182-megawatt plant owned by PG&E. They are two of the largest such plants in the world. Vistra says its plant is the world's largest.

The PG&E plant has 256 Tesla "Megapack" units. The gleaming white steel boxes, each about the size of a shipping container and weighing 56,000 pounds, were built at Tesla's Gigafactory near Reno. Arranged in neat rows and sitting on concrete pads, they are cooled by fans that hum in the background. The battery storage plant opened in 2022, and its storage provides enough electricity for 136,000 homes.

"This is a strategic location to connect to the grid," said PG&E spokesman Paul Doherty during a visit Thursday. "All of the wires and substations are here. And there's room to expand."

Tesla opened a new battery factory in Lathrop, south of Stockton, in 2022 that can produce about 13,000 Megapacks per year.

But the technology is not without controversy.

Fires broke out at the Vistra plant on Sept. 4, 2021, and Feb 14, 2022. Investigations showed that they were caused by a malfunction in a fire sprinkler system, which released water and caused several of the units to overheat.

Then in September 2022, a fire broke out at the PG&E Elkhorn battery plant. Police closed Highway 1 for 12 hours. An investigation found it was caused by an improperly installed vent shield on one of the 256 units, which allowed rainwater to get in and short out the batteries. There were no injuries to firefighters, PG&E employees or the public.

Afterward, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law requiring battery storage plants in California to draw up emergency response plans with local fire departments and increase fire safety.

"Increasing the state's battery storage is essential to reaching our clean energy goals," said State Sen. John Laird, D-Santa Cruz, who wrote the bill. "But we also have to ensure that these facilities have safety systems in place to protect the health and well-being of workers and surrounding communities."

Last month, after two fires occurred at San Diego County battery storage facilities, San Diego County supervisors required county officials to draw up tighter rules that would restrict battery storage plants near homes, schools and other facilities. And when Vistra proposed building a large battery plant in Morro Bay, citizens there put a measure on the November ballot on whether to allow it.

Such fires are rare, said Mark Jacobson, a professor of environmental engineering at Stanford University. And by helping the state's renewable energy to keep growing, they are reducing the amount of electricity generated from natural gas, which in turn reduces soot and smog.

"There are 12,000 people a year in California who die from air pollution," Jacobson said. "Nothing is perfect, but if we want energy, this is the best way to do it."

In an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, California political leaders have increasingly mandated that big utilities like PG&E, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric produce more and more of their electricity from renewable energy.

In 2018, former Gov. Jerry Brown signed a law requiring that 100% of the state's electricity come from carbon-free power like solar, wind, geothermal, hydroelectric and nuclear by 2045. Today the state is at 61%. To make renewable energy more reliable, state regulators have required utilities to build battery storage or sign contracts with companies for it. Now the utilities are making money by buying power at cheap prices in the middle of the day when it is plentiful and selling it at a higher price in the early evening.

On some days this year battery power has become the largest source of electricity on California's power grid. On Wednesday, a record 8,320 megawatts of battery power was on the grid at 7:35 p.m., the equivalent of 16 natural-gas-fired power plants running full power, or four nuclear power plants the size of Diablo Canyon running at peak capacity.

“It’s happened so fast,” Jacobson, the Stanford professor, said. “Only a couple of years ago nobody was talking about batteries on the grid. California really demonstrated for the first time how beneficial they can be.”

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

Boiling Point: Heat, fires, floods — extreme weather has affected 99% of Americans

A firefighter walks through haze as the Park fire burns near Mineral, Calif., in early August. (Noah Berger / Associated Press)

By Ian James
Staff Writer

Aug. 20, 2024 6 AM PT

Welcome to Boiling Point. I'm Ian James, a reporter on The Times' climate team, writing the newsletter this week to fill in for my colleague Sammy Roth.

Extreme weather alerts for dangerous heat, wildfires, storms, flooding and other hazards have affected nearly everyone in the United States over the past few months.

Tracking data from the National Weather Service, the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists has found that since the beginning of May, extreme weather alerts have been issued for 99% of the country's population.

It's a striking statistic that underlines the growing risks the nation faces as climate change continues to intensify extremes — such as last month's record heat in California.

My colleague Hayley Smith spoke with scientists to unpack the significance of so many extreme weather events during the period from May to October, which some researchers are now calling the "danger season."

Her piece highlights a key point from Juan Declet-Barreto, an environmental and social scientist who analyzed the data: Many of the alerts have overlapped, meaning that millions of people have been facing multiple hazards at once, such as wildfire weather and extreme heat.

Firefighters carry food to residents in Savannah, Ga., following Tropical Storm Debby earlier this month. (Stephen B. Morton / Associated Press)

The Union of Concerned Scientists is featuring the data in a map that is updated daily while advocating for political leaders to hold the fossil fuel industry accountable.

Alex Hall, a UCLA climate scientist, said the weather alert data is one more indicator of worsening climate change impacts, and that the damages from major weather disasters, which have been dramatically increasing, are set to rise further in the years to come.

Hall said: “We have built our infrastructure for a different world, and in some ways we weren’t even that well adapted to the world that we had. And now we have a new climate.”

That comment reminded me about a new six-part podcast series I’ve been looking forward to checking out. The podcast, called “Not Built for This,” is being launched this

week by the team behind "99% Invisible."

The program says the series will explore "how climate change is laying bare the vulnerabilities in the American built environment and how communities across the country have been left to bootstrap their own survival."

Here's a look at more climate coverage in California and around the West.

TOP STORIES

An investigation by the Los Angeles Times and Capital & Main has found that California has sharply cut its enforcement of heat-protection laws for outdoor laborers, putting farmworkers and construction workers in danger during worsening heat waves. Investigative reporter Robert J. Lopez found that the number of state field inspections dropped by nearly 30% from 2017 to 2023, while the number of violations issued to employers fell by more than 40%. The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, known as Cal/OSHA, says it's creating a new agricultural unit that will "significantly expand enforcement."

Climate change is altering conditions for desert plants, and scientists have for years projected that rising temperatures will make large portions of the Mojave Desert unsuitable for Joshua trees to survive by the end of the century. Now, scientists have found that climate change, by driving bigger swings in precipitation and warmer winters, is causing the iconic trees to flower more frequently. Alex Wigglesworth wrote about the findings for The Times and talked with biologist Jeremy Yoder about how those changes are probably reducing the survival of delicate seedlings.

Forecasters say La Niña is likely to arrive soon and remain through the winter. As my colleagues Hayley Smith and Grace Toohey report, forecasters with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration say this could drive a return to drought conditions in California and the Southwest in the coming months.

POLITICAL CLIMATE

As Minnesota's governor, Tim Walz has approved dozens of initiatives focused on clean energy and addressing climate change. In an article last week, Hayley Smith delved into Walz's track record on climate and how he has looked to California for inspiration. His priorities in the state include slashing Minnesota's greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Lori Lodes, executive director of Climate Power, said that with Walz as Vice President Kamala Harris' running mate, they are a ticket "who will fight for our clean energy future," while Donald Trump and JD Vance would "give Big Oil a free pass to profiteer and pollute."

A 76 sign is seen over Dodger Stadium during a recent game. (Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times)

My colleague Sammy Roth has recently written columns urging the Los Angeles Dodgers to stop taking sponsorship money from Phillips 66, owner of the 76 gas station chain. Prompted by his reporting, dozens of people and groups have since called on the team's owner, Mark Walter, to end the deal. Roth joined the program L.A. Times Today

on Spectrum News 1 to talk with Lisa McRee about why some fans want the Dodgers to break ties with the oil company. Roth noted that he has now written about the sponsorship three times, and the Dodgers have declined to respond to his requests for comments.

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

A bill aimed at overhauling California's system for wildfire hazard mapping has died in the state Legislature. As Hayley Smith reports, the bill sparked heated debate over its plan to eliminate the decades-old system of ranking lands as "moderate," "high" or "very high" fire hazard severity zones. Proponents of the legislation said the plan would streamline the current system and ensure uniform fire protection standards for all buildings in designated wildfire mitigation areas. Opponents of the bill said it would make it easier to develop more housing in fire-prone areas.

My colleague Ryan Fonseca has been speaking with fire management officials to learn more about the challenges they face. Seth Mitchell, a deputy forest fire management officer with the U.S. Forest Service based in Los Padres National Forest, told Fonseca that the conditions brought about an early start to the fire season.

Fonseca also interviewed Dan Mallia, superintendent of the Redding Hotshots, about how fire suppression over the past century has left forests loaded with excess fuels. To begin to address the problem, state and federal agencies have been embracing Indigenous practices that recognize fire as a natural force that helps balance forest ecosystems. Mallia says he is a big proponent of prescribed burns, and has seen a severe fire "slow down to almost stop" when the flames reached an area that was previously burned.

WATER IN THE WEST

The Imperial Irrigation District has approved a deal with the federal government to conserve 700,000 acre-feet of Colorado River water through 2026 by temporarily shutting off water to the fields of participating farmers. Janet Wilson reported for the Desert Sun that the irrigation district's staff has installed locks on canal gates, which will cut off water deliveries for up to 60 days this year. In exchange, IID and farmers who volunteer to forgo water for their hay fields will be paid nearly $700 million. J.B. Hamby, vice chair of the IID board and California's Colorado River commissioner, said the district's efforts "provide an example for other states and regions to follow as we plan for a drier future in the Colorado River basin."

Meanwhile, MacKenzie Elmer reports for Voice of San Diego that the San Diego County Water Authority is in discussions with IID to help farmers reach their goal by selling back some of the water San Diego purchases from the Imperial Valley.

The federal government last week announced that based on current reservoir levels on the Colorado River, Arizona, Nevada and Mexico will continue to see the same level of reductions in water deliveries next year as they did in 2024. As Suman Naishadham of the Associated Press reported, Arizona will again lose 18% of its allocation. Nevada's reduction will stay at 7%, while Mexico has agreed to a 5% reduction.

CALLS FOR ACTION

In an opinion article in the L.A. Times, Reno pediatrician and author Debra Hendrickson shared her deep concerns about how climate change is threatening the health of children. "Because of their different physiology, small size, dependence on adults and still-developing organs, the youngest among us are uniquely vulnerable to the health threats posed by a warming world — by heat waves, wildfires, hurricanes, infectious diseases, air pollution and more." Calling for urgent action, she wrote: "If we squander the very narrow window of time to prevent the worst, and drive emissions up instead of down, the consequences will be devastating."

In a piece published by Yale Climate Connections, meteorologist Jeff Masters discussed intensifying extreme weather events and a likely insurance crisis in the coming years. “Although there is a major climate change hurricane approaching, we’re busy throwing a hurricane party, charging up our planetary credit card to pay for the expenses, with little regard to the approaching storm,” Masters wrote. Continuing with the hurricane analogy, he said that allowing global warming to exceed 2.5 degrees Celsius (4.5 degrees Fahrenheit) would cause “category 4-level damage to civilization — approaching the catastrophic level.”

Masters also said he is optimistic that by late this century, “we will have successfully ridden the rapids of the climate crisis, emerging into a new era of non-polluting energy with a stabilizing climate.”

“There are too many talented and dedicated people who understand the problem and are working hard on solutions for us to fail,” he said.

ONE MORE THING

For local readers in Southern California: An art exhibit starting this weekend in Los Angeles focuses on L.A.’s water challenges. Co-curator Edith de Guzman, a cooperative-extension researcher at UCLA, says the exhibit explores subjects such as local water suppliers, imported water, trust of tap water and affordability.

“I hope that people come away understanding that our relationship to and stewardship of water in L.A. is not only a critical part of our past history, but essential to determining our region’s future as well,” de Guzman said.

The exhibit also features some interactive parts, including a blind water tasting comparing bottled water brands with L.A. tap water.

The exhibit is titled "What's on Tap: LA's Water Story ... Source to Spigot." It opens Saturday at El Tranquilo Gallery on Olvera Street at El Pueblo Historical Monument. Through Sept. 29, it will be open Fridays through Sundays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

On Sunday, an opening reception will be held at 3 p.m., followed by a screening of the classic film "Chinatown" at 5 p.m. Both are free. (See this website to register.)

An announcement for the screening says the 1974 film, starring Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, still "reveals many historical aspects of LA's water story that are stranger than fiction."

This is the latest edition of Boiling Point, a newsletter about climate change and the environment in the American West. Sign up here to get in your inbox. Or open the newsletter in your web browser here.

For more climate and environment news, follow @Sammy_Roth and @ByIanJames on X.



Ian James

Ian James is a reporter who focuses on water in California and the West. Before joining the Los Angeles Times in 2021, he was an environment reporter at the Arizona Republic and the Desert Sun. He previously worked for the Associated Press as a correspondent in the Caribbean and as bureau chief in Venezuela. He is originally from California.

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CALIFORNIA

Is L.A. freaking out too much over small earthquakes? Maybe a little terror is just what we need

(Axel Koester / Los Angeles Times)

By Shelby Grad
Deputy Managing Editor

Aug. 20, 2024 6:21 AM PT

Good morning. It's **Tuesday, Aug. 20**. Here's what you need to know to start your day.

- Little earthquakes tell a big story
- Zero tolerance at UC campuses in new order banning encampments.
- Rare super blue moon will be in the skies this week.
- And here's today's e-newspaper

Even little earthquakes are a big deal these days

My first indication of last week's magnitude 4.4 earthquake came from the L.A. Times' Slack messaging system. Colleagues in Hollywood, Highland Park, Pasadena and other locations near the epicenter reported feeling the jolt several seconds before the shaking made its way to my house in Long Beach.

The newsroom sprang into action. No damage. No injuries. A minor "chandelier rattler" if there ever was one. But our five stories on the quake included the names of more than a dozen reporters and editors contributing to the coverage.

This is now our playbook. Earthquakes — even relatively small ones — are huge news in California.

I am old enough to remember it was not always this way.

The junction of the 5 and 14 freeways on Jan. 17, 1994, after the Northridge quake. (Steve Dykes / Los Angeles Times)

The L.A. Times used to be a quake denier

There was a time when anything less than a magnitude 5.0 merited only a news brief and *"Did you feel that one?"* small talk at the supermarket checkout line. But social media, major advances in seismic technology (remember how long it used to take to figure out the epicenter and magnitude?) and our growing obsession with California catastrophe changed all that. The Times now has a robot that "writes" the first take on an earthquake so we can get the news up fast.

While our readers flock to this coverage, some news traditionalists roll their eyes at how much we write about what they consider minor news. *Are you just trying to gin up web traffic? What will happen when there really is a big one?*

Seismic obsession is relatively new for L.A. newspapers.

For many decades, The Times and other news organizations downplayed the risk of big quakes in the region, fearful it would drive away tourists and residents. When San Francisco was flattened in 1906, L.A. papers insisted it could not happen here; "Earthquakes in Southern California do not occur often and do not destroy human life," The Times declared.

When Long Beach was hit by a deadly temblor in 1933, it generated banner headlines. But The Times also castigated the "East Coast" for exaggerating the scale of the devastation and the death toll under the headline "Yes, but where is all the damage?" A running theme was that rival cities like Miami were purposely planting false stories about L.A.'s quake risk to scare people away.

The one exception came when a phantom quake could cover up corruption, as Paul Haddad notes in his excellent history of early Los Angeles, "Inventing Paradise." Hoping to justify L.A.'s notorious taking of water from the Owens River hundreds of miles away, The Times suggested the river once flowed toward Los Angeles but that a massive quake caused mountains to rise up and block it.

"No geologists were quoted," Haddad noted.

When it comes to quakes, denial is dangerous

California media's approach to earthquakes began changing in the 1970s when a series of big temblors made seismology a political issue. The 1971 Sylmar quake revealed serious flaws in some very popular building techniques. A brand-new hospital made of concrete collapsed, along with many unreinforced masonry structures. The Times and other papers helped expose the weaknesses. L.A. eventually required thousands of old brick buildings to be retrofitted.

Then came three destructive quakes in a seven-year span — the Whittier Narrows in 1987, Loma Prieta in 1989 and Northridge in 1994. This sparked the biggest seismic safety campaign yet, eventually covering freeways, bridges and hospitals.

But there has not been a huge quake in the heart of our most populous urban areas since, and some seismic safety efforts have slowed in California.

The biggest seismic danger we face is denial, putting the risks out of our minds rather than working together to make our city safer. Each tremor is a chance to talk about the risk, look at how we can protect ourselves better and do some basic seismology education. An effort by The Times a decade ago helped lead L.A. to require retrofits to thousands of vulnerable buildings.

And quake denial takes many forms. In 1974, Times writer Jack Smith took his daughter-in-law from France to see the disaster flick "Earthquake!" at the Chinese Theater in Hollywood. It was a surreal experience, being in Hollywood, watching filmmakers destroy Hollywood with a killer quake, demolishing everything including the Capitol Records building just down the street.

Afterward, Smith wrote, his young daughter-in-law asked that they drive past the landmark building. "I'd just like to see if it is still there. It would make me feel better."

It was, and both of them breathed a bit easier.

But the fictionalized terror of earthquakes should not sidetrack us from the real threat. When it comes to Hollywood, The Times' own reporting shows that earthquakes are definitely alarming, but it is also within our means to make our structures better and safer.

If California's seismic history shows, fear is the ultimate motivator.

CAPITOL ALERT

Capitol Alert

California Prop. 36 leaves Democrats divided. Why members of the Black Caucus oppose it

BY **ANDREW SHEELER**
AUGUST 20, 2024 4:55 AM

Good morning and welcome to the A.M. Alert!

PROP. 36 DIVIDES DEMS

This November, one California ballot measure will pit Democrat against Democrat more than any other: **Proposition 36**.

Last week, a number of legislative Democrats, including Sens. **Melissa Hurtado**, D-Bakersfield; **Dave Min**, D-Irvine; **Josh Newman**, D-Fullerton; **Susan Rubio**, D-Baldwin Park; and **Tom Umberg**, D-Santa Ana; and Assemblymembers **Jasmeet Bains**, D-Delano; **Stephanie Nguyen**, D-Elk Grove; **Blanca Pacheco**, D-Downey; and **James Ramos**, D-San Bernardino, came out in support of the ballot measure, which would reinstate tougher criminal penalties for certain drug- and theft-related offenses.

This week, it's the "No On 36" crowd's turn.

Speaking in front of the Capitol on Monday were a number of **Legislative Black Caucus** members, including Assemblymembers **Mia Bonta**, D-Alameda; **Isaac Bryan**, D-Los Angeles; **Reggie Jones-Sawyer**, D-Los Angeles; **Ash Kalra**, D-San Jose; **Alex Lee**, D-San Jose and **Tina McKinnor**, D-Inglewood, as well as Sen. **Lola Smallwood-Cuevas**, D-Los Angeles.

In a statement, Bryan said, "We are not going back. For decades, communities have been calling for us to invest in safe solutions that address the root causes of poverty and desperation. Prop. 36 is a return to the bipartisan failures of the 1980s and 90s. We can and must do better."

He added that "every dollar we spend criminalizing poverty is a dollar we could've better spent ending it."

That echoes a sentiment made by Gov. **Gavin Newsom**, who also has criticized the ballot measure as being costly for Californians and one that will lead to overcrowding of state prisons once again.

But despite the disagreement dividing Democrats on Prop. 36, even some of that ballot measure's proponents say they don't want to return to the old way of doing things.

In a statement from the "Yes On 36" camp, San Jose Mayor **Matt Mahan**, also a Democrat, said, "I have one absolute point of agreement with the advocates gathering at the State Capitol today — the last thing we want to do is go back to the era of mass incarceration. What we seek is a new era of mass treatment."

Mahan added that "there is a certain irony that last week elected leaders championed a series of retail theft bills, almost all of which rely on incarceration as the remedy. At the core of Proposition 36 is the principle that treatment is the most

compassionate, and cost-effective response to the triple epidemics facing California — homelessness, retail thefts, and drug overdoses."

NEWSOM VETOES AIR POLLUTION MEASURE

Being Senate majority leader didn't protect Sen. **Lena Gonzalez**, D-Long Beach, from having one of her bills vetoed by Newsom.

On Monday, Newsom issued a legislative update, announcing his signature on dozens of bills and his veto of one: **SB 674**.

That bill makes a number of changes to the refinery fence-line air monitoring program intended to provide for more pollution controls for neighboring communities.

"While I share the author's desire to protect communities from air pollution, local air quality management districts are already carrying out the necessary action to do just that," Newsom wrote in his veto statement.

But it wasn't just that.

As is often the case in Sacramento, it was also about the money.

"Additionally, because this bill mandates these districts to implement highly prescriptive measures, it might be found to require state reimbursement of implementation costs at a time when we just recently closed a $44.9 billion shortfall for the 2024-25 fiscal year. There is no state funding identified or available in the state budget to support these efforts," Newsom wrote.

In a statement, Gonzalez called the veto "a devastating blow to the years of hard work and advocacy by communities affected by refinery air pollution."

"Fenceline communities urgently need improved air monitoring, and it shouldn't be this difficult to establish a system that provides them with the most basic necessities

— transparency and information about the toxic chemicals being released into their neighborhoods. I am deeply disappointed by this outcome, but we cannot walk away from this issue. Our communities demand and deserve stronger protections," Gonzalez said.

BIDEN IS COMING TO CALIFORNIA

Who doesn't love Santa Ynez in August?

Count President **Joe Biden** and First Lady **Jill Biden** as fans; the two headed that way after Biden spoke Monday night at the **Democratic National Convention** in Chicago.

According to White House sources, the Bidens will stay in the beautiful rolling hills of the posh Central Coast community until Sunday, when the president and first lady return to their Delaware abode.

The Bidens appear to be big fans of vacationing in the West. Last year, they vacationed in Lake Tahoe.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Once again, Sacramento lobbyists convinced a select powerful few to side with those who prioritize greed over the safety of our children. They should have made the courageous choice to stand with the overwhelming majority of my colleagues in the legislature who would have voted to protect our kids."

— Assemblyman Juan Alanis, R-Modesto, discussing the Senate Appropriations Committee's decision to quietly kill his bill designed to crack down on adult-oriented websites, in a statement.

Best of The Bee:

- As DNC kicks off in Chicago, Nancy Pelosi downplays rift with Joe Biden, via ***David Lightman***.
- As the Democratic National Convention begins, Palestinian supporters to gather in Sacramento, via ***Vincent Medina***.
- What you can expect at the Democratic convention in Chicago: Kamala Harris, Tim Walz and more, via ***David Lightman***.
- Newsom plans to announce Harris nomination vote at DNC Tuesday, via ***David Lightman***.
- Democratic lawmakers pull bill to establish antisemitism 'guardrails' in ethnic studies, via ***Andrew Sheeler***.

EDITORIAL

A couple of pretty bad bills in Sacramento

Sacramento is primarily a place where bad ideas flourish and become law. But, every now and then, common sense slips through. Here's a look at some legislative proposals that remain in play in the state Legislature.

Assembly Bill 2286

This proposal, introduced by Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, D-Winters, is Sacramento's latest effort to undermine autonomous vehicle technologies.

The bill requires a driver to be on board vehicles greater than 10,001 pounds and instructs the DMV to produce a report on autonomous vehicles.

It also, "Prohibits the DMV from issuing a deployment permit for AVs with a GVW of greater than 10,001 pounds without a human safety operator earlier than one year after the Legislative hearing and only after express authorization of the Legislature and the Governor."

Talk about red tape.

What's the point of all of this? It's simple. Labor unions fear that autonomous trucks will soon be a viable means of transporting goods around the Golden State. Accordingly, they want to throw as many unnecessary hoops in the way as possible.

The state is capable of developing regulations and ensuring such technology is safely being deployed on California roads. If there's anything California is in no short supply of, it's red tape.

This was something even Gov. Gavin Newsom recognized last year when he vetoed a very similar piece of legislation. He wrote: "Assembly Bill 316 is unnecessary for the regulation and oversight of heavy-duty autonomous vehicle technology in California, as existing law provides sufficient authority to create the appropriate regulatory framework."

Yet here the Legislature is pushing the same thing again. It should be rejected.

Senate Bill 549

This proposal, introduced by Sen. Josh Newman, D-Fullerton, would make it easier for California's Indian tribes to take California cardrooms to court.

The politics here are fairly simple.

The tribes want full control over California's lucrative gambling markets. There's a lot of money at stake, after all. On the other side are cardroom operators and local governments which benefit from the revenue generated by cardrooms.

Caught in the middle of this are California adults who just want to play some card games.

As noted by the California Gaming Association, "Cardrooms are already subject to strict regulatory oversight. Businesses and personnel must obtain licenses and approvals from the California Gambling Control Commission (Commission) and the Bureau of Gambling Control (Bureau) within the Department of Justice. Extensive regulations govern their operations."

That's more than enough oversight.

SB 549 should be set aside. California has enough actual problems to deal with. This bill will only throw local government budgets into uncertainty and make a mockery of our judicial system.

Weaponizing the legislative process so one special interest group can try to drive out perceived competition is silly on its face.

NEWS > HOUSING • Opinion Columnist

California apartment permits dip to 12-year low but new home construction rises

Single-family permits up 13% compared to 2023's second half, multifamily down 27%



By JONATHAN LANSNER | jlansner@scng.com | Orange County Register
UPDATED: August 20, 2024 at 7:57 a.m.

The "Looking Glass" ponders economic and real estate trends through two distinct lenses: the optimist's "glass half-full" and the pessimist's "glass half-empty."

Buzz: House hunters were the winners, and apartment seekers the losers, in California's housing construction game in the first half of 2024.

Source: My trusty spreadsheet looked at Census Bureau stats tracking building permits from the year's first six months, statewide and nationally, for single-family-homes (primarily for ownership) vs. multifamily projects (predominantly rentals).

Debate: Will California's lofty housing costs catch any significant breaks? A boost in homebuilders' construction plans for owners – the consumer's costly option, at least initially – is largely negated by other developers dramatically pruning apartment growth – the more affordable alternative.

Glass half-full

Homebuilders filed 62% of California's housing permits in 2024's first six months, the largest share since 2010, and just after the Great Recession decimated the economy.

Why? Developers are taking advantage of limited existing homes for sale and the extra demand from house hunters seeking the discounted mortgage rates offered by homebuilders.

The start of 2024 had 31,653 filings for California single-family housing permits – up 13% compared to 2023's second half and 14% better than the 10-year average.

Nationally, it was the best half in two years: 511,900 permits – up 10% vs. the previous six months and 19% higher than the 10-year average.

Glass half-empty

Meanwhile, apartment developers are pulling back sharply from their recent building boom.

Construction overshot demand, forcing rents to flatten and landlords to offer concessions to woo new tenants. California's rental vacancy rate hit 5.2% in 2024's second quarter, by Census Bureau math – the highest level in 10 years. Those empty units were not a good mix with higher mortgage rates that make new development unprofitable at the moment.

As a result, California multifamily permits hit a 12-year low, down 27% (19,035) from the previous six months and 26% down below the 10-year average.

Nationally, it's the worst first-half start since 2020: Permits are down 14% (236,700) from 2023's second half, the previous six months, 34% off 2022's second half – the busiest since six months since 1986 – and 9% below the 10-year average.

Bottom line

Peeking at the big picture – how many new residences are being planned, for ownership or rental – shows that this was California's worst half for all housing types since the pandemic struck in 2020.

California's 50,688 overall permits were down 7% from the previous six months and off 5% from the 10-year average.

US developers remain growth oriented, albeit quite modestly. Their 748,600 permits in the first half were up 1% from the previous six months and 8% above the 10-year average.

Or look at California's lethargic housing development this way, considering all the legislation and money thrown its way of late: The state had 6.8% of all US permits in 2024's first half vs. an average 7.7% the past 10 years.

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CALIFORNIA

‘A shock to us all’: LAPD moves to fire supervisors of troubled Mission gang unit

Los Angeles Police Department headquarters. (Myung J. Chun/Los Angeles Times)

By Libor Jany and Richard Winton

Aug. 19, 2024 1:27 PM PT

A year after Los Angeles police officers from an anti-gang unit in the San Fernando Valley were accused of illegally searching vehicles and stealing from people they pulled over, an internal department email shows three of their supervisors now face termination.

Interim Chief Dominic Choi has called for the firing of a captain, a lieutenant, and a sergeant in the LAPD's Mission Division, according to the email and multiple sources, who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about police personnel matters. At least five lower-ranking officers have been implicated in the still-unfolding scandal.

According to the email, senior Mission Division Capt. James "JT" Townsend, Lt. Mark Garza and Sgt. David Gomez were each relieved of duty and have been directed to a disciplinary hearing, known as a board of rights. Such a move typically indicates that the chief believes there is enough evidence to justify firing an officer.

As the senior captain at Mission, Townsend was responsible for most of the division's daily operations, which included oversight of the so-called Gang Enforcement Detail. The unit came under scrutiny last August when an LAPD internal investigation reportedly found misconduct by officers, including the theft of a knife with brass knuckles on the handle.

Garza was the lieutenant in charge of the gang unit, while Gomez was one of his supervisors.

The department's investigation focused on five additional officers for their alleged roles in the scandal, according to an Internal Affairs document reviewed by The Times.

The probe deemed that the allegations against the station's then-junior captain, Matt Plugge, were unfounded, according to the document. Plugge was transferred last fall to a unit responsible for investigating less serious uses of force by officers. He did not respond to a message seeking comment.

An LAPD spokesperson said the department “cannot provide further comment on any potential personnel matters related to the investigation into the Mission Gang Enforcement Detail.”

An attorney for Garza reiterated that his client followed procedure by alerting his supervisors as soon as he learned of potential wrongdoing by his officers. The department accused Garza of failing to “develop and maintain adequate oversight” while clearing the division’s captains, said the attorney, Matt McNicholas.

“The department is creating scapegoats, and I stand by the evidence will absolutely show that at the first instance of any potential issue, Garza reported this up the chain and then was told the bureau is on it, and he’s done with anything that he needed to do,” McNicholas said. “We believe this is 100% due to the fact that Garza reported the problems immediately, but the captains did nothing.”

The scandal broke into public view late last summer after The Times reported LAPD investigators had taken the rare step of searching lockers at the Mission Division station, seeking evidence amid the officers’ personal belongings. The probe is still unfolding, with the department now looking into allegations of poor management and supervision in the neighboring Foothill area, where some of the Mission officers were stationed previously.

The email reviewed by The Times was sent by a Mission Division official late last week to “eliminate any rumors or misunderstandings,” according to the subject line. The messaged referenced the investigation into the anti-gang unit and said of the

commanders facing discipline: “This news has been a shock to us all. I want to remind everyone that no matter the allegations, an employee is innocent until proven guilty.”

The message said the department “is working on filling Mission Area commanding officer position,” and that the role will be temporarily filled by another senior LAPD official.

Former Chief Michel Moore announced last August that the FBI had also opened a case, and ordered two of the officers involved to a disciplinary hearing by the Board of Rights, signaling that he wanted to fire them. The department has yet to identify the two officers.

Choi’s decision to punish the Mission supervisors comes a week after he announced the department would conduct a top-down review of its disciplinary system at the City Council’s request. Despite strong criticism of the board of rights process, he has defended the department’s system for disciplining officers as “one of the most thorough” in the country.

The chief has pushed back on arguments from the Los Angeles Police Protective League and others that a double standard exists for senior officials, with the union alleging members of the top brass tend to receive lighter punishments than junior officers for the same misconduct.

The Mission gang unit was temporarily disbanded amid the scandal, its members dispersed to other assignments or placed on administrative leave.

Prosecutors have so far charged one Mission officer, Alan Carrillo, but signaled that more charges could be forthcoming. In May, Carrillo pleaded not guilty to charges of theft and evidence tampering.

He previously worked on the Foothill gang squad, whose other officers have in recent years been accused of violent tactics against protesters and at least one out-of-policy shooting of an unarmed man, according to court records and sources familiar with the LAPD's ongoing investigation.

Carrillo is accused of stealing personal items from people during patrol stops in the Mission Division in April and June 2023, including the knife with brass knuckles. Of that allegation, his attorney, Caleb Mason, said in an interview with The Times that in that his client was being charged for essentially "taking contraband away from a suspect," who was a minor.

Prosecutors have identified as many as 350 criminal cases that are potentially compromised because they relied on the testimony of or evidence gathered by two Mission gang officers. One of them, the sources familiar with the case said, is now believed to be Carrillo.

VOICE of OC

NEWS: ORANGE

Orange Cuts $1.3 Million in Spending to Shrink Deficit; Will Officials Forgo Pay?



BY HOSAM ELATTAR
20 hours ago

Why you can trust Voice of OC

The Orange City Council meeting on May 14, 2024. Credit: ERIKA TAYLOR, Voice of OC

Orange officials shrank what started out as a projected $19 million deficit down to $6.7 million.

It comes after city council members narrowly passed a ballot measure asking voters to increase sales tax in the city.

And officials are still looking to trim more off spending.

City council members voted 6-1 at their Aug. 13 meeting to slash spending on city events like concerts in the park during the summer and the city's tree lighting ceremony in December.

They also froze full-time vacant positions in the police department.

Councilman Jon Dumitru was the dissenting vote.

That same night, council members also held a discussion about forgoing their pay and health benefits at the request of Councilwoman Ana Gutierrez, but took no formal action to do so across the board.

"We have asked the community and we have asked staff to take cuts. I just felt like it was a way for us to lead by example," Gutierrez said at the meeting. "I have decided to forgo my stipend, and I've done that already, and just hoping that you all would join me as well."

Mayor Dan Slater and Council members Arianna Barrios, Kathy Tavoularis and John Gyllenhammer said the decision to forego the $600 per month council stipend should be an individual decision.

"We never want to ostracize or disenfranchise people that are not making a fair wage, and they need the stipend," Tavoularis said. "And I think that's very important that we keep that open for people as we need good people running for office in the future."

Charlene Cheng, a city spokesman, said in an email that Slater, Gutierez, Barrios and Gyllenhammer have refused to take the $600 monthly stipend.

Cheng did not answer questions regarding how much council members get in health benefits and said the inquiry will be handled as a public records request.

"Our City Attorney wants to look further into what health information we could release," she said.

Orange City Hall on March 19, 2020. Credit: JULIE LEOPO, Voice of OC

Last week's discussion came after officials cut a series of hiring freezes, delayed critical maintenance projects, like roads and parks and created new revenue streams including **upping parking enforcement** on residents.

It also comes after officials, at the end of June, narrowly voted to put a 0.5% sales tax measure on the November ballot that – if approved by voters – would sunset in 10 years and generate $20 million annually to help with budget woes.

[***Read:*** **Orange Asks Voters to Raise Taxes To Bail Out City Budget**]

Orange officials are not the only ones in OC to ask voters to consider raising the sales tax in November to help float city budgets and services like public safety.

[***Read:*** **Voters Across OC Are Considering Tax Increases This Year**]

Slashing City Events & Cutting Police Vacancies

In June, Orange City Council members directed staff back to cut spending on city events, with officials saying that local nonprofits could step in and take over the events if they wanted to keep them going.

Last week, officials formally voted to cut the spending for a series of city events except the Treats in the Streets Autumn Festival, where kids go trick-or-treating in Old Towne Plaza.

City staff said the Veteran's Day event and the Treats in the Streets were the only events not being covered by outside groups although the Community Foundation of Orange has offered to host an event in honor of veterans at the Field of Valor.

Officials directed staff to come back with an item breaking down the costs for the Autumn festival at the next council meeting.

The vote came after officials postponed a discussion in July on making $1.4 million in cuts to the budget, including cutting about $400,000 on special events spending and slashing over $1 million by freezing six police vacancies.

[***Read:*** **Will Orange Slash Over $1.4 Million More in Budget Spending to Help Shrink Deficit?**]

Tuesday's vote instead resulted in a $1.3 million cut.

"There is a reduction in the amount due to a records manager position that is under recruitment," Cheng said about the roughly $100,000 decrease in reductions. "The rest of the vacancies are fluid, and include both public safety and city hall positions."

Hosam Elattar is a Voice of OC reporter and corps member with Report for America, a GroundTruth initiative. Contact him at helattar@voiceofoc.org or on Twitter @ElattarHosam.

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COMMUNITY

Amid changing needs, OC Animal Care aims to develop a new strategic plan

BY DESTINY TORRES

DTORRES@SCNG.COM

The County of Orange is looking for an organization to oversee the development of an OC Animal Care strategic plan that would serve as a blueprint for how the shelter and its program are run.

For the past couple of years, animal advocates have pushed for OC Animal Care leaders to abandon pandemic-era policies, such as appointment-only adoption services, and revert to the strategic plan adopted in 2018 that focused on animal enrichment, better transparency practices and a streamlined adoption process.

The eventual contractor hired should have experience in developing strategic plans and a deep understanding of animal shelter practices and programming, according to the county's Request for Proposal (RFP).

Monica Schmidt, the OC Animal Care director, said much has changed since 2018, and now is a great time to revisit the shelter's strategic plan.

"Not only has it been six years, we've gone through a global pandemic. There's been an economic downturn. It's been unprecedented times for animal welfare in general, not just in Southern California," Schmidt said. "This is a great time for us to review, analyze and map out plans for our future so that we continue to grow and continue to be a really substantial and great resource for our community."

All stakeholders, including community members, will have a seat at the table, Schmidt said.

"We're really going to build into the process and look to the agency that we contract with to help establish and lead what that process looks like," Schmidt said. "But it absolutely is built into the RFP that there be plenty of opportunity for community engagement, community input along the way, as we develop the strategic plan."

The plan will consist of five priorities: animal care, enrichment and placement; stakeholder engagement and marketing; culture and organizational development; fiscal stewardship and sustainability; and new shelter on-boarding. Each priority will have a unique set of goals and success measures.

For example, in the 2018 strategic plan, one of the goals was that every animal in the shelter, big or small, receive daily enrichment, giving animals the opportunity for physical and mental exercise. Some examples set within the earlier plan included that all qualified dogs be in daily playgroups and every adoptable cat be taken out of its kennel at least three times per week.

OCAC is one of several shelters that ceased previous TNR programs because of concerns it could be argued as abandonment and put the agency at risk of lawsuits. Animal advocates, on the other hand, have argued that the TNR program is essential for animal care.

The goal, Schmidt said, is for a company to be identified through the RFP process by early next year with a strategic plan created by the fall of 2025.

“It’s important for us that we get it right, that we have ample time to allow for a lot of community engagement and stakeholder representation,” Schmidt said.

As well as the pandemic and the economy, the RFP also points to staffing shortages. Schmidt said the plan needs to look at the state of the community in order to properly assess its needs.

“Housing continues to be an issue that we face here in Orange County,” Schmidt said. “There are a substantial amount of people who rent here in Orange County and face restrictions on the pets that they can have.”

“There’s a bigger need each month at our pet food pantry, where people are in need of resources to keep their pet in the home, and they don’t have the money to buy pet food that month,” Schmidt added. “As our community continues to transition and face economic crisis, it’s also something that we feel here at the shelter.”

Schmidt said the department is now looking to fill several positions.

Michael Mavrovouniotis, a former OCAC volunteer and animal welfare advocate, said it is important that animal care experts are involved in the planning process.

“Their collective wisdom goes into the strategic plan, which becomes the blueprint for a good animal shelter,” Mavrovouniotis said. “But just like in constructing a building, the county and shelter managers should stick to the blueprint.

“Having abandoned the 2018 strategic plan, county managers have a lot of work to do if they want to win back the trust of the community,” he added.

Potential contractors have until Sep. 2 at 2 p.m. to respond to the county’s RFP.

SOCIETY

San Bernardino residents concerned over large homeless encampment at Perris Hill Park



By Rob McMillan

Monday, August 19, 2024 10:31PM

"It looks like Skid Row," said one resident. "It's bad at night ... they play their music sky high."

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (KABC) -- San Bernardino residents are growing frustrated with the number of tents and homeless encampments that have gone up at one city park.

According to one resident, a few months ago, there were only a handful of tents at Perris Hill Park. Now, there are more than 150.

"It looks like Skid Row," said one resident who lives on E. 21st Street. "It's bad at night; they play their music sky high."

That resident, who didn't want to be identified, said someone from the park even tried to break into her home recently around 9 p.m.

"He was beating on the door, shaking the door, trying to get in. I said, 'What do you want?' and he said, 'Let me in! Let me in!'"

Another resident, also choosing not to identify herself, said she's too afraid to bring her children to the park, even in the middle of the day.

"I actually would come here to the park with my kids, but now I can't bring them around because of the homeless," she said. "Even the middle of the park with the skateboarding, my son loves to go there, but now he can't go."

So why the sudden rise in the number of homeless encampments at city parks? According to a city spokesperson, a recent district court ruling that prevents the city from removing them may have exacerbated the problem.

In August 2023, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the city on behalf of several homeless people staying in city parks, alleging that city officials improperly seized and destroyed their property, and had not provided reasonable accommodations to homeless people with disabilities.

Then, in January 2024, a U.S. District Court judge granted the ACLU a preliminary injunction, ruling that they had "established a prima facie case that the city ... seized and immediately destroyed personal property that belonged to people experiencing homelessness."

The judge ruled that city officials are currently prohibited from removing any homeless encampments, unless the city "crafts and presents a lawful revised policy regarding homeless encampment cleanup operations, and if that revised policy is approved by the court."

A city spokesperson tells Eyewitness News that such a resolution is "imminent," and should be announced shortly.

But even if the city is once again permitted to remove homeless encampments, while it might be a relief to local residents, it's not going to be a permanent solution to the problem.

"The need is so great," said Pastor Paul Jones from Independent Trinity, who helped organize a food distribution operation at Perris Hill Park for low-income residents.

Jones said the sky-high cost of living is driving many people out of their homes-even people who current have jobs.

"There's a security guard who lives out here (at Perris Hill Park)," said Jones. "They have to decide what they're going to pay. Are they going to pay their rent? Are they going to pay their light bill? Or are they going to be homeless?"

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