

Long Beach Board Of Water Commissioners Support Proposed Consolidation With Gas Utility

■ By **ANNE ARTLEY**
 STAFF WRITER

The Long Beach Board of Water Commissioners voted to approve a proposed consolidation of the city's water and sewer utility with the gas utility at its March 29 meeting. The water and sewer utilities are currently under the purview of the Long Beach Water Department and the gas utility is run by Long Beach Gas and Oil. Three public meetings are required before the city council votes to place the measure on the November 2018 ballot. The commission estimated that the first meeting may take place in May or June.

According to the water department, Long Beach is the only California city with two separately managed municipal utilities. The city council approves the rates for the gas utility and its director is hired by, and reports to, the city manager. The five-member board of water commissioners sets the rates for the water utility, and General Manager Chris Garner reports directly to the board.

If the measure passes in November, the water department would manage the water, sewer and gas utilities, under the purview of the water commission, renamed as the Long Beach Utilities Commission. Accord-

ing to Garner, the city manager would decide if the Long Beach Gas and Oil Department would remain a separate entity, or be absorbed into another city department.

"In a sense, the timing is right because the water and sewer utilities are operating well," Garner said at the meeting. "It's not being done out of the sense that we need to fix something. If we combine the three utilities, you have the luxury of two well-operating departments."

According to the water department, the gas and water utilities have the same customers and require similar operations, many of which are separately managed. The pipelines are located in the same streets, but each utility conducts its own street repairs, resulting in uncoordinated operations. The utilities also run different meters. Garner said a consolidation would improve efficiency, which could result in lower costs to maintain the utilities, which in turn lowers rates for residents.

"One of the problems I've seen over the past three decades . . . the water and sewer rates done in this building are [in] a complete vacuum [from] what happens in the gas department," Garner, who once ran the gas and oil department, said. "I think it would be very



Chris Garner, left, is the general manager of the Long Beach Water Department and Bob Dowell is the director of the Long Beach Gas and Oil Department. The Long Beach Board of Water Commissioners voted at its March 29 meeting to approve a proposed consolidation of the city's water and sewer utility with the gas utility. The proposal requires three public meetings and a council vote before it appears on the November 2018 ballot. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Pat Flynn)

beneficial to the residents of Long Beach if all the rates were done by one board."

If the consolidation takes place, the new Long Beach Utilities Commission will consider rate adjustments in an integrated manner, according to the city. The city manager and water commission will work together to appoint a new general manager of the department with the new utilities.

Regardless of whether or not the measure

passes, the city is also changing the name of the Gas and Oil Department to the Energy Resources Department to reflect current attitudes regarding environmentalism and abating climate change.

Long Beach Gas and Oil Department Director Robert Dowell expressed his support of the consolidation and assured that it would not result in a loss of employees.

"Both departments have very strong and experienced employees," he said. "Combining them [the utilities], we can get the best of both departments. . . . I think it's the right time to do it. It's just a little concerning for the employees right now because it's new. Change is contentious. . . . [O]n behalf of the Long Beach Gas and Oil Department, we're supportive of this."

The water commission's vice president, Gloria Cordero, commented that the consolidation could create new positions and give employees a chance to advance within the department.

"The gas department doesn't necessarily have a marketing or communications department, so if there's an opportunity for us to continue what we do and bring the gas department along, that's an excellent opportunity," she said. ■



Melissa Carpenter, owner of The Hangout on 4th Street's Retro Row, relaxes in the shop's back garden. Carpenter is taking over the space next door, formerly occupied by vintage shop In Retrospect, and will continue to lease the garden area. She plans to re-imagine her shop into a platform for different vendors who will also host workshops in the garden. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Pat Flynn)

The Hangout On 4th

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the Fourth Street Business Association, a position he is stepping down from in May.

The neighboring store, The Hangout, which features clothing, housewares and other items will take over the 4,000 square-foot space. Store owner Melissa Carpenter said she is re-imagining her shop as a platform for several different vendors. She'd also like to host regular workshops with the artisans whose products are featured. Some of these will take place in The Hangout's back garden, which has an 11-foot worktable that seats 14. The shop will continue to operate in its current smaller space until it reopens next door on June 1.

"I go after the [vendors] who are creating from their own skillset, maybe doing things handed down from family tradition," Carpenter said. "We're focusing on creating an environment for people that's giving and warm. Almost like you're going to your own house."

One of these artisans is a horticulturist transitioning out of a corporate job as a footwear designer, Carpenter said. She has already held a few workshops on succulent care and cactus propagation at The Hang-

out. In the new space, Carpenter also plans to host a quiver maker to custom-make key chains and leather wallets on the weekends. A quiver is a container for holding arrows, bows or darts traditionally made out of leather, fur or other natural materials.

Carpenter described her quest to identify artisans as an "obsession," and said she is reaching out to artists all over the world. "They're all hand makers, nothing is mass-produced. . . . Everyone I bring in has a story. They may be transitioning from a corporate job, they may be a single mom, they may be learning [the craft] from their grandmother. . . . Everything is original, one-of-a-kind pieces."

Giacco plans to have a space in the shop as a book vendor. In addition, the store will include a lounge for visitors to listen to records and a buy-sell-trade section for vintage pieces. Carpenter envisions the latter designed like an old-fashioned trading post with a military tarp tent.

"Everything is hands-on," Carpenter said. "You get to feel the vinyl and smell the old book. All these things that were so important to me, I'm excited to make readily available in an environment where you can just hang out."

Carpenter is hosting a festival for the

Amgen Tour of California, a professional cycling race, in the new space on May 13. This year's event takes place in seven stages from Long Beach to Sacramento, May 13 to 19. Carpenter's celebration will feature a chopper bicycle show, local musicians, skateboard signings from local teams and a pig roast in the Hangout's back garden. "We're pulling from the core of Long Beach and interpreting the bike race as a way of celebrating movement and wheels," she said.

The event will be part of a larger 4th Street celebration for the Amgen Tour. It is the last event Giacco plans to oversee as association president before his term expires at the end of May. The nominating process for a new president begins in a couple of weeks.

"I'm very attached to 4th Street. I've always been involved with the association even before I was president," Giacco said. "I have a vested interest in seeing that area do well and continue. Everybody was sorry to see In Retrospect go, as were we. It was just time to move on. . . . We're happy that a known store is taking that space. There was talk about it being subdivided, and we're glad that it's not. I think even the name 'The Hangout' will serve it well, since it's the largest store on the street. ■

Signature Gathering Efforts Near Halfway Mark For Two Local Ballot Initiatives

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
 SENIOR WRITER

The Long Beach Coalition for Good Jobs and a Healthy Community (GJHC), an entity of the pro-union organization, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy or LAANE, and the Rent Control Now Coalition (RCN) have each nearly reached the halfway mark in signature-gathering efforts to get their respective initiatives on the November ballot.

If passed, GJHC's proposed Hotel Workplace Requirements and Restrictions ordinance would impose safety and workload-related standards on hotels with 50 rooms or more. RCN's rent control ordinance would establish rent control on all commercial rental properties, excluding rentable single-family homes, and provide other renter protections such as just-cause eviction.

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