

WILDFIRE RECOVERY

Building self-certification program OK'd

Process allows architects, engineers to approve their plans, bypassing bureaucratic system

By David Wilson
DAWILSON@SCNG.COM

Los Angeles County launched another program in the continuing push to streamline the rebuilding process for survivors of the Eaton and Palisades fires.

On Tuesday the county launched a building plan self-certification pilot program, eliminating the need for a full plan check review for those that sign up. Under the program, California licensed architects and engineers can self-certify that their building plans comply with the Los

Angeles County Building Code. “This is a moment to reshape government so that it works better for our community members who have already been through so much,” Supervisor Lindsey Horvath said in a statement. “Chair (Kathryn) Barger and I are whole-heartedly committed to standing with our communities through every step of the recovery and rebuilding journey.”

Architects and engineers must register online to participate in the program. A list of those registered to self-certify will be available on the

county website and only those who register in advance will be able to self-certify plans.

“Your architect still has to go and obtain approvals from regional planning, fire and if applicable the department of public health for a septic system,” Luis Ramirez, a deputy director with public works said. “So it really applies to the building plan review component.”

In addition to being licensed in California, Ramirez said, to be eligible for the program architects and engineers must be in good standing with the state for

the past five years and must have done work within L.A. County for three years.

“We want to make sure that your design professionals are familiar with the L.A. County Building Code and with the process for obtaining a permit through L.A. County,” Ramirez said.

Eligible projects under the program include the replacement of single-family homes, accessory dwelling units and appurtenant structures that were damaged by the fires or located in unincorporated areas of L.A. County.

According to the county, a minimum of 20% of self-certified plans will be subject to random audits.

As of Tuesday, according to a county dashboard, the department of public works has received 543 rebuild applications combined across both fire areas. Of that total, 326 have cleared zoning review and 157 have the building plan reviews in process.

In the Eaton fire area 11 building permits have been issued and one has been issued in the Palisades area. Construction has yet to be completed on any property.

Commencement 2025

Grad time, L.A. style



Cal State L.A. students graduate during their commencement ceremony at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on Wednesday. The college had more than 5,500 students graduate in multiple commencement ceremonies.

PHOTOS BY SARAH REINGEWIRTZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Series of ceremonies from Monday to Wednesday touted the achievement of the university's students

From staff reports

A week's worth of Cal State Los Angeles commencement ceremonies culminated on Wednesday with the university's College of Arts and Letters graduates final look at undergraduate life.

More than 5,500 students were expected to participate in Cal State L.A.'s nine college-based commencement ceremonies from Monday to Wednesday, at the Shrine Auditorium. It was the first time the ceremonies had been held there.

Those colleges within the university ranged from business and economics to engineering.

Graduating students were automatically assigned to a ceremony based on their college, department, and major.

As part of the celebration, Ken Jeong — who as the university notes has excelled as a “medical doctor, actor,

See **GRADUATES** on Page A7



Nearly 450 students graduate Sunday during a ceremony at Pomona College.

COURTESY OF POMONA COLLEGE

Nearly 450 say goodbye Sunday as family and friends watch ceremony at Pomona College

From staff reports

Nearly 450 Pomona College graduates are embarking on their next steps.

They got a send-off Sunday in a ceremony in the Marston Quad on the Claremont campus. More than 3,000 guests watched the festivities, a college news release states.

Graduates heard from four commencement speakers, including Dr. W. Benton Boone, a physician and researcher; Louise Bryson, a documentary film writer and producer;

Halim Dhanidina, a retired judge; and David W. Oxtoby, a former Pomona College president. Each received an honorary degree.

Students who spoke included Shark Mutulili, the senior class president and Pomona College's latest Rhodes Scholar, and Fares Marzouk, the senior class speaker.

On Saturday, graduates took the traditional class photo on the steps of Carnegie Hall, the release states.

The college is one of the seven Claremont Colleges.

LOS ANGELES

Disaster recovery centers in wildfire areas moving

By David Wilson
DAWILSON@SCNG.COM

Two disaster recovery centers that have provided resources for Los Angeles County wildfire victims will be closing this month and moving their services to new locations.

The Altadena Disaster Recovery Center, near Woodbury Road and Lincoln Avenue, and the UCLA Research Park West, near Pico and Westwood boulevards, will be closing at 4 p.m. May 31.

Federal Emergency Management Agency and U.S. Small Business Administration services will be transitioning to new locations beginning June 2.

The new locations will be at the following:

- One Stop Rebuilding Center, 1828 Sawtelle Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025
- Altadena Community Center, 730 E. Altadena Drive, Altadena, CA 91001

The end of May also marks the deadline for the grace period of applying to the U.S. Small Business Administration

for physical damage disaster loans. The last day to apply is May 30.

For those seeking economic injury disaster loans, the deadline to apply is Oct. 8.

According to the SBA, as of Tuesday, the SBA has approved more than 10,000 loans, which comes out to more than \$2.8 billion of relief.

Up to \$500,000 is available for home loans to repair and replace real estate and up to \$100,000 to repair or replace personal property.

LOS ANGELES

Hotels may exit Olympic accord

Council's \$30 minimum wage push cited as financial burden

By Teresa Liu
TLIU@SCNG.COM

At least eight Los Angeles hotels are poised to withdraw from an agreement to provide discounted rooms for the 2028 Olympics if the city finalizes a plan to raise the minimum wage for tourism workers to \$30 an hour.

The hotels have notified LA28, the Olympics organizing committee, of their decision to pull out of the Olympic room block agreement, according to the Hotel Association of Los Angeles. More hotels may follow if the City Council approves an Olympic wage ordinance in a final vote Friday and the mayor signs it into law.

The move threatens to complicate LA28's lodging plans for Olympic officials, media and sponsors, who were expected to rely on the thousands of pre-negotiated hotel rooms across the city. Hoteliers say those rates were agreed to under different labor cost assumptions and can no longer be sustained under the new wage mandate.

“We agreed to certain rates at the hotels at that time, and it's not viable for us to be able to agree to charge the same rates that we calculated based upon a \$17 minimum wage that's now going to be almost double that,” said Mitchell Hochberg, president of real estate investment firm Lightstone Group, which operates the Moxy and AC hotels in downtown Los Angeles, one of the properties withdrawing from the agreement.

The Moxy and AC Hotels account for 380 and 347 rooms, respectively, totalling more than 17,000 room nights committed to LA28. He said fulfilling that commitment, which he signed with the committee in 2020, would likely result in a financial loss, especially when the industry continues to recover

See **HOTELS** on Page A7

POMONA

Teen driver and 2 others hurt in crash after police chase

By Ruby Gonzales
RUGONZALES@SCNG.COM

A 17-year-old unlicensed driver and his two passengers were injured after they fled from police and crashed into a construction site in Pomona, with their car landing on its roof early Wednesday, police said.

Firefighters freed the three trapped occupants and took them to a hospital, said Kaitlyn Aldana, a spokeswoman for the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

The driver, who is from Pomona, and his two passengers, a 21-year-old Pomona man and a 20-year-old Montclair man, had moderate injuries, said Aly Mejia, a spokeswoman for Pomona police. All three were conscious and alert when taken to the hospital, she added.

Police had tried to pull over the driver at Caswell and Holt avenues for a vehicle code violation shortly after 3 a.m., Mejia said. She didn't know the traffic violation.

The driver didn't stop. About 2 miles later, the crash occurred at San Antonio and Franklin avenues.

“There was a short pursuit and the driver crashed into a construction zone, flipping the vehicle,” Mejia said.

L.A. ZOO

Despite protests, elephants relocated

Animals moved from Griffith Park to Tulsa facility early Tuesday after judge declines restraining order

City News Service

Billy and Tina, a pair of Asian elephants long housed at the Los Angeles Zoo, were settling into their new home Wednesday at the Tulsa Zoo, following a day of mystery that began when the animals were quietly removed from their enclosure at the Griffith Park facility.

“Although they will be missed, we are grateful for the outpouring of support from our members, volunteers, staff, and the more than 1.5 million guests who visit the Los Angeles Zoo annually,” according to a Wednesday morning statement from the Los Angeles Zoo. “As they begin their new chapter, we know that Billy and Tina will receive the same love and expert individualized care that they have had at the Los Angeles Zoo.”

Animal advocacy groups such as Social Compassion in Legislation, among others, had been pushing zoo officials to delay the announced move of the elephants to Tulsa, insisting the animals would be better served with a transfer to a sanctuary where they would have more room to roam.

“They are now in prison, and there’s even talk that Billy is going to be used in a breeding program,” Judie Mancuso, president of Social Compassion in Legislation, a political animal advocacy group, told City News Service on Wednesday. “That’s like torture on top of torture.”

According to Mancuso, advocates brought one sanctuary proposal to Bass.

Philanthropist and Eco-Flix CEO David Casselman offered to pay and relocate the elephants to a sanctuary he owns in Cambodia, but Mancuso said the proposal was ignored. Advocates were prepared to bring the city two more proposals from local sanctuaries, but the next thing they knew, the elephants had shackles on them, Mancuso said.

“So then we knew. It’s coming soon,” Mancuso said of the elephants’ relocation.

The Tulsa Zoo’s Elephant Experience and Preserve was already home to five Asian elephants, and its preserve covers 17 acres, including a 36,650-square-foot elephant barn and a 10-plus-acre wooded elephant preserve. Critics insisted that the size of the enclosure is far too small to accommodate two more elephants.

“We call out the Los Angeles Zoo for its scandalous and unethical treatment of Billy and Tina — if the elephants were truly, ‘beloved,’ they’d have been sent to a sanctuary years ago,” Courtney Scott, elephant consultant for In Defense of Animals, said in a statement. “... Tulsa Zoo’s new exhibit isn’t fit for a single elephant, let alone seven. This is not conservation; it’s cruelty.”

In Defense of Animals is a national animal protection nonprofit that advocates for the rights and welfare of animals.

The Tulsa Zoo was named to In Defense of Animals’ “10 Worst Zoos for Elephants” list in 2022 for what the group called false claims that its new preserve represented a meaningful improvement for its elephants. According to the organization, the zoo’s elephant enclosure is severely cramped, unnatural and harmful to the animals’ health.

City Councilman Bob Blumenfield previously intro-



Asian elephant Billy is seen at the L.A. Zoo. JAMIE PHAM — COURTESY OF THE L.A. ZOO

duced a motion urging the zoo to delay its decision until additional options could be explored and calling on zoo officials to appear before the council prior to moving the elephants.

However, Billy and Tina disappeared from their L.A. Zoo enclosure Tuesday, prompting an outcry from activists demanding answers about their whereabouts. Neither zoo officials or representatives of Mayor Karen Bass’ office responded to inquiries Tuesday.

TMZ reported that the elephants were put into crates and loaded onto a semitruck for the transfer around 1:30 a.m. Tuesday, citing sources connected to the Los Angeles Zoo.

The zoo ultimately confirmed the move Wednesday morning, doubling-down on its insistence that the move to the Tulsa Zoo was the best choice for the elephants.

“The Zoo evaluated all available options including (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) accredited sanctuaries,” according to a zoo statement. “Mayor Bass inquired about moving the elephants to a sanctuary — the Zoo worked to ensure that all viable options had

been considered during the course of the Zoo’s comprehensive evaluation.

“The decision to move the elephants to the Tulsa Zoo was made with the health and well-being of the individual elephants as the top priority and at the recommendation of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and its Elephant Species Survival Plan which advises on the management of the entire population of elephants in AZA-accredited institutions as a single herd. The Tulsa Zoo was the top recommendation of the SSP based on space, herd dynamics, and expertise of the staff. This option also ensured that Billy and Tina would be able to remain together.”

Zoo officials announced April 22 that the elephants would be relocated to the Elephant Experience and Preserve in Tulsa, which prompted protests and a lawsuit.

Animal advocates also sent a letter to Bass, co-signed by such celebrities as Cher, Alicia Silverstone, Diane Warren and Justin Theroux.

“We are writing you in support of moving the last two Los Angeles Asian elephants to a sanctuary, not another zoo,” the letter read.

“We urge you to allow these majestic beings to retire.”

Last week, a judge declined to issue a temporary restraining order to block the relocation of the elephants.

Los Angeles Zoo CEO Denise Verret previously said she would make decisions that are for the best interest of the animals.

Billy is 40 years old and Tina is 59. Zoo officials said they have been evaluating the elephant exhibit since the deaths of two other elephants — Jewel, age 61, in 2023, and Shaunzi, age 53, in 2024 — although they said those animals were in “declining health due to issues unrelated to the zoo’s enclosure or care.”

Blumenfield and animal advocates had called for the elephants to be released to the 3,060-acre Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tennessee, home to 12 elephants, or the Performing Animal Welfare Society’s sanctuary in Northern California.

“The last 24 hours have been a sad reflection on the government of Los Angeles,” Blumenfield said in a statement Wednesday. “Just last week the Zoo director said in public that the move was not imminent, then we found

out through the news media that the elephants were taken in the middle of the night.”

“I’m not only disappointed and frustrated by the move, I am equally disappointed and frustrated by the lack of transparency and unwillingness to vet this decision publicly as I requested,” he added.

The council member noted that Angelenos have cared for the elephants for 30 years and are deeply invested in their well-being. He also reiterated that advocacy groups were prepared to fund Billy and Tina’s transfer to a sanctuary.

“While it may be in the AZA’s best interest, we shouldn’t pretend that the AZA’s interest is in the same as an elephant’s or in the best interest of the city of Los Angeles,” Blumenfield said. “When you are proud of your actions and secure in the righteousness of those actions, you don’t move in the shadow of the night and you don’t hide from public scrutiny.”

Animal advocates have long called for the release of the elephants, whom they say suffer from “grave distress” and medical conditions due to the limited confines at the zoo — a claim the L.A. Zoo has denied.

“The Los Angeles Zoo works tirelessly to assure that all its animals, including the elephants receive the best care possible and any assertion to the contrary is imply false,” zoo officials said in a statement last week. “The care and wellbeing of the animals is always a top priority and decisions impacting the animals are made at discretion of the zoo director — an authority granted in the Los Angeles City Charter.”

“Activist agendas and protests are rightfully not a consideration in decisions that impact animal care,” the statement continued.

HOTELS

From Page 3

from the pandemic, ongoing impacts from the January wildfires and weaker than expected international travel.

“When you lay all this together, it’s a struggle operating hotels in Los Angeles,” he said. “And why it’s necessary to have a special minimum wage and have it at such a high level in an industry that has such heavy headwinds is something that just doesn’t make sense to us.”

In addition to the Moxy and AC Hotels, the other hotels that have submitted formal withdrawal letters to LA28 include: Los Angeles Airport Marriott, Los Angeles Airport Renaissance, Hyatt Place & Hyatt House LAX, W Los Angeles West Beverly Hills, and The Garland Hotel, according to records reviewed by this publication.

Industry leaders said Hochberg’s concerns reflect wider anxiety among hotel operators citywide.

The LA28 room block program was created to guarantee affordable lodging for Olympic stakeholders during the Games. The agreements vary by hotel, but in most cases, they reserve blocks of rooms at below-market rates for Olympic officials, sponsors, and media.

LA28 has sought to set aside around 41,000 hotel rooms for the 2028 Games, according to Jackie Filla, president and CEO of the Hotel Association of Los Angeles. While the first agreements began going out roughly a decade ago, hotels have signed on at different times, she said. This effort involved several rounds of recruitment and

it’s still ongoing.

Room rates under the agreement are based on average hotel prices from the summers of 2023, 2024 and 2025, with a modest inflation adjustment, Filla said. She noted that those summers are not expected to reflect strong revenue years for hotels, and the wage hike has fundamentally changed the math.

“It’s not losing money for one day, two days — it’s losing money essentially for an entire month,” Filla said. “The financial calculation on this has flipped upside down for a lot of hotels.”

Labor organizers say the ordinance is a necessary step to ensure hotel workers, many of whom kept the industry running through the pandemic, can share in the economic boom expected from the Olympics and other major events. They also argued that hotels choosing to exit the room block might actually boost city revenue, since higher room rates means more tax dollars.

“It sounds like they want to charge more for guests for the Olympics, which will mean more tax revenue for the city, which sounds like a good thing now, and that’s their prerogative,” said Kurt Petersen, co-president of Unite Here Local 11.

He also criticized the operators of the Moxy and AC Hotels, which are withdrawing from the room block, for opposing the ordinance after receiving public support for their development.

Under a deal approved by the City Council in 2017, the city agreed to give Lightstone a share of the room tax revenue over 25 years, which is up to \$103.3 million, to encourage hotel construction near the Los Angeles Convention

Center.

“It’s precious that the owner of the AC and Moxie Hotel is talking about city policies because that hotel received a \$100 million subsidy from the taxpayers of the city of Los Angeles,” Petersen said. “We gave them \$100 million, and now somehow they’re protesting that Angelenos would make \$30 an hour.”

Hochberg confirmed that the city offered a financial incentive in the form of Transient Occupancy Tax rebate for the Moxy and AC Hotels as part of a broader effort to encourage hotel development near the Convention Center, which he said had struggled to attract private investments due to its smaller size.

He said the goal of the incentive was to increase the supply of hotel rooms in anticipation of a future Convention Center expansion, while also creating jobs and boosting tax revenues. Hochberg said more than a dozen hotels received similar deals.

As part of the agreement, he said the city asked Lightstone to enter into a collective bargaining agreement with the union.

Petersen also dismissed the hotel industry’s warnings of financial strain, saying similar arguments surface anytime workers push for better pay, even as the industry stands to benefit from an unprecedented stretch of major global events.

“They are Chicken Little,” he said. “They complain the sky is falling every time they have to share with their workers. It rings hollow. When the World Cup, the Super Bowl and the Olympics and Paralympics are coming to Los Angeles, they are going

to make an extraordinary amount of money. They need to share it with their workers.”

Councilmember John Lee, who voted against the Olympic Wage Ordinance, said the fallout from the hotels was one of the reasons why he opposed the measure.

“This should not be a surprise as our local business community repeatedly warned Los Angeles’ elected leaders that the extreme increase the Council approved would negatively impact the city’s tourism industry,” Lee said in a statement Wednesday.

Lee added that the City Council’s decision could have broader consequences.

“By pushing through drastic wage increases without a balanced analysis of their long-term impact, the city has now put critical hotel room block agreements for the 2028 Olympic Games at risk,” he said. “These decisions don’t happen in a vacuum — the actions of the City Council carry real consequences for our economy, our global standing, and the success of this once-in-a-generation opportunity.”

In a statement to this news organization Wednesday afternoon, LA28 said it is reviewing correspondence that hotels have received about the Olympic wage ordinance.

“We respect the key stakeholders and decision-makers in the process of workers and businesses advocating for themselves and their futures,” LA28 said. “In collaboration with the city of Los Angeles, we look forward to our partnerships with local hotels and unions, and remain confident the Games will bring positive economic impact to the region.”

Delivering the best
local news ...
All Ways

Pasadena Star-News
pasadenastarnews.com

San Gabriel Valley Tribune
sgvtribune.com

Whittier Daily News
whittierdailynews.com

OBITUARIES
and Funeral Announcements

*Celebrating
Lives & Legacies*

Visit sgvtribune.com

Irene Reyes
July 19, 1957-February 26, 2025
Pasadena, CA

Irene Reyes 67 went home with the Lord Jesus Christ peacefully with her family by her side on February 26, 2025. She was born in Glendale, California as the 2nd child of 10 children to our beloved late father Joe Reyes and deceased younger sister Sylvia Marie. She is survived by our beautiful mother Guadalupe Reyes, her four brothers Joe Jr. (sister-in-law Laura), Ruben (sister-in-law Patricia), Raul, and Jesus (sister-in-law Rebecca) along with her four sisters Ana Maria (brother-in-law Max), Lisa (brother-in-law John), Cynthia (brother-in-law David), and Monica (brother-in-law Ivan). She is also survived by many devoted nieces and nephews. Irene was a cherished daughter, devoted loving Big sister, caring for her younger siblings at a young age. That caring continued to her final years of life looking after our beloved mother. We will always be grateful to her for her loving care.

She attended St. Elizabeth School and then St. Andrews all girls High School in Pasadena. She enjoyed hanging out, watching movies, going to the beach, dancing the night away and singing her favorite tunes and Christmas Eve Dinners at Clearman’s Inn. She also enjoyed all her friends and her pet cats “Brandy” and “Buster” as well as her dogs “Monkey” and “JayO Valentino”. She touched everyone’s heart she met in different ways and she will be deeply missed by her family and friends.

“And this is the will of him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:40

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:4

Funeral celebration will be held at St. Elizabeth Church, Altadena. Thursday May 22, 2025 at 10am. Burial services to follow at Resurrection Cemetery, Montebello, California

GRADUATES

From Page 3

producer, writer, AAPI community advocate and, as substantiated only by him,

Instagram model” — gave the keynote address Tuesday. Jeong received an honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts during the commencement ceremony shared by the Rongxiang Xu College of

Health and Human Services and the College of Natural and Social Sciences.

“I am a student of the game; I am a student for life,” he said. “Never stop learning, never stop grow-

ing. It’s not about being rich and famous. It’s about staying hungry and humble. The goal is not to be the best. The goal is to be your best. And how can you be at your best? Persistence.”

Thought for the day

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, WRITER/PHILOSOPHER

“Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs. Peace has its victories, but it takes brave men and women to win them.”

MAY 25, 1803 — APRIL 27, 1882

To place an obituary or funeral notice
in the newspaper and online go to
scngobits.com or call **714-796-7983**
followed by Option 2.