

Long-awaited foundation work begins in The Pit

By MARY SCHLEY

EFFORTS TO shore up the land supporting an apartment complex at Lincoln and Fifth began this week, when Ausonio Construction, on behalf of the nonprofit Carmel



PHOTO/MARY SCHLEY

After years of nothing happening in The Pit, construction workers this week began efforts to shore up the sagging apartment complex next to it.

Foundation, got to work preparing the site at Dolores and Fifth that’s come to be known as The Pit.

One apartment at the foundation’s senior housing complex, Haseltine Court, has been uninhabitable ever since work on a subsequently abandoned project behind it caused damage that left the unit unsafe and forced its tenant out, according to executive director Kim Stemler. An ongoing battle with an insurance company has stuck the nonprofit with the bill, at least for now.

Long time coming

The 16,000-square-foot property bordered by the apartment building to the west and the Carmel Art Association to the south earned “The Pit” moniker after its former owner, Leidig/Draper Properties, undertook major excavation to build a parking garage as part of a large mixed-use project but then ran out of money. Activity stopped there in March 2019, and later that year, foundation and art association representatives reported the digging had damaged their buildings.

While the Lincoln Street complex, which houses low-income seniors, suffered cracking and settling — with some sections dropping about 6 inches — the art association reported cracks in its gallery floors and ceilings. At the time, Leidig/

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District, agency heads are raking in the dough

State releases latest report on salaries

By KELLY NIX

THE PAYCHECKS and benefits of local government agency management and employees have climbed significantly in the past decade — with two top officials making nearly \$500,000 per year — according to newly released data by the California Controller.

On Sept. 2, Controller Malia M. Cohen published 2024 payroll data for special districts, which include agencies such as Monterey-Salinas Transit, Monterey One Water, Carmel Area Wastewater District, some fire departments and numerous others. The districts self-report the data to the state.

“The Government Compensation in California website is a critical accountability tool that helps taxpayers, policymakers and local leaders track spending, evaluate

priorities and ensure that public resources are being used responsibly,” Cohen said when she released the data.

\$500K sewer GM

Many of the CEOs, general managers and chiefs of local districts receive generous salaries and benefits, and many of their employees are also well compensated. Of course, boards of directors are responsible for deciding how taxpayers’ dollars are spent, including how much the heads of their agencies should earn in salary and benefits.

Special districts are governmental entities created by residents of a community to deliver specialized services.

Several local special district heads were paid \$100,000

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Reps on opposite sides of child sex abuse bill

STATE SEN. John Laird pulled a centerpiece of his legislative agenda this week, thanks in no small part to an unlikely opponent, Assemblymember Dawn Addis.

Both Democratic lawmakers represent the Monterey Peninsula in Sacramento, but in an unusual turn of events, the two found themselves at odds over legislation Laird co-authored this session. His bill, SB 577, was an attempt

Capitol Access

By CAITLIN CONRAD

to stem the tide of sex abuse claims school districts and counties are facing across California by making it harder for victims to file lawsuits.

‘Access to justice’

“I am disappointed that SB 577 will not be advancing this year. I had hoped to protect survivors’ access to justice while providing some fiscal relief to local governments,” said Laird on Wednesday.

His legislation would have rolled back protections in a bill Addis authored in 2024 — hence her determination to

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Pastor mum as council kicks project back to planning commission

By MARY SCHLEY

AS EXPECTED, the Carmel City Council on Monday voted 3-0 to send Patrice Pastor’s plans for a mixed-use complex on Dolores south of Seventh back to the planning commission for a redo, demanding that plans be changed to include more parking and move the landscaping to ground level.

Pastor’s managing director of Esperanza Carmel, Chris Mitchell, said Thursday that neither he nor Pastor wanted to comment on the decision. Last week, they reiterated their disappointment with the planning process, which for this project has gone on for six years and included five redesigns, and their belief that they’re being singled out for mistreatment by decision-makers.

After getting unanimous approval from the planning commission in April, the project was appealed to the council by 11 residents on multiple grounds, and while the council agreed with the opponents regarding parking and planting, it rejected their claims that the project needs an EIR, has too much floor area, and would negatively impact the architecturally significant former bank complex next door.

After a six-year process, council says parking and landscaping must be changed

Dozens of supporters

Last month, after Mayor Dale Byrne and councilman Bob Delves recused themselves due to what the city attorney said were potential conflicts of interest, the remainder of the council spent more than six hours considering and debating those issues. This week’s meeting ran a little over half that time.

Dozens of supporters of Pastor and his various Esperanza Carmel projects, including the redo of the Colonial Terrace Inn as the Carmel Beach Hotel, his purchase and preservation of the Frank Lloyd Wright house on Scenic, the minor updates he’s made to other commercial buildings, and his recently approved plans for renovating and upgrading two historic buildings and an apartment complex on Lincoln Street, sent letters and spoke at the hearing. Several extolled his community contributions in general and pleaded with him to not give up on Carmel.

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Caregiver nabbed in rape case faced prior accusations

By KELLY NIX

A MALE certified nursing assistant charged last month with sexually assaulting three patients at a Pacific Grove senior facility last year had been accused of a half-dozen other assaults of other elderly women going back two decades. Each time, though, he denied wrongdoing, the cases were closed, and he wasn’t criminally charged.

Held on \$2.7M bail

Paul Nkoy Lumbi Jr., 60, was arrested Aug. 12 and charged with felony forcible rape, lewd acts on a dependent adult and other charges that police say stem from his former employment at Forest Hill Manor in Pacific Grove. All three alleged victims were 82 years old. Lumbi has pleaded not guilty to the crimes, and he’s being held in Monterey County Jail on \$2.7 million bail.

A court document filed last week by California Attorney General Rob Bonta, who is prosecuting Lumbi, indicates that beginning in 2005, Lumbi faced six complaints by patients at nursing homes in Monterey and Salinas.

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WHEN WILL THIS VIEW BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC?



PHOTO/BIG SUR LAND TRUST

More than 20 years after two local parks were purchased with the public’s money, thousands of acres remain off-limits, and some hikers want to know what’s taking so long to open them. See page 12A.