



Photographs by FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

A TIKTOK account features spider monkey Emilia, whose owner in Culiacan, Mexico, got her as a gift.

COLUMN ONE

Rich Mexicans use exotic pets to flaunt status, at a steep cost



AGUSTÍN Félix, son of a businessman who collects exotic pets, stands by a tiger in an enclosure, one of about 30 big cats at a Culiacan ranch.

By Kate Linticum
REPORTING FROM CULIACAN, MEXICO

Emilia is a 2-year-old spider monkey who wears jeans, crop tops and Armani perfume. A popular TikTok account documents her busy life: trips to the spa, gym and church, as well as elaborate birthday parties for other pet monkeys, where she might cavort with friends in an inflatable bounce house and smash her face into a carrot cake. It is illegal in Mexico to own spider monkeys, which are critically endangered and trafficked from jungles in the country's south. That hasn't stopped people in the northern city of Culiacan, home to one of the world's most powerful drug cartels and known for ostentatious displays of wealth. "So many people here have them," [See Mexico, A4]

Judge bars home improvements in Beverly Hills

The city is punished over its affordable housing plan, which critics call insufficient.

By LIAM DILLON

Projects that cross the transom of the Beverly Hills building department include the extravagant — pool grottoes and bowling alleys — as well as the more quotidian kitchen and living room upgrades. In recent months, the city approved a \$100,000 basement spa in the \$125-million mega-mansion owned by WhatsApp co-founder Jan Koum; exterior upgrades for an \$80,000-a-month rental; and a \$130,000 kitchen and bathroom remodel in a home purchased a week before for \$6.7 million. Now, any similar home improvements desired by Beverly Hills property owners are under threat. Last month, Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Curtis A. Kin blocked the city from issuing all building permits except for new residential development as a penalty for Beverly Hills' failure to approve a sufficient blueprint for affordable housing. Officials are appealing the decision and say they're continuing to process permits as normal. But the potential ramifications on home and business owners and the construction industry have left civic leaders aghast. "I'm shocked by the judgment," said Murray Fischer, a real estate attorney who has practiced in Beverly Hills for 50 years. "It would mean that the city is at a standstill." The permit moratorium would be among the most concrete consequences of

California's attempts in recent years to push cities to allow for new housing, including in wealthy communities that have long resisted it. Few if any places are more famous for their luxury than Beverly Hills, where entrepreneurs and entertainers — such as Jeff Bezos, Leonardo DiCaprio and Taylor Swift — own mansions, opulent hotels attract well-heeled visitors, and glamorous boutiques make [See Housing, A7]

NEWSOM PROPOSES CUTS IN CLIMATE SPENDING

Among areas affected are transportation, forests, sea level rise, watershed resilience.

By HAYLEY SMITH AND IAN JAMES

Investments geared toward combating climate change and transitioning away from fossil fuels are among the items on the chopping block as California Gov. Gavin Newsom seeks to close a \$37.9-billion budget deficit. The governor's proposed 2024-25 budget, unveiled last week, would see the state's multiyear climate budget reduced to \$48.3 billion — down 11% from the \$54 billion approved in 2022. Among the trims are clean transportation programs and others that address forest maintenance, watershed resilience, coastal protection and sea level rise. Newsom's administration characterized the cuts as "limited" and said they will maintain the state's momentum toward climate goals. "\$48.3 billion is a world-leading figure that exceeds [the budgets of] many nations," said Lauren Sanchez, Newsom's senior climate advisor. She was one of many administration officials who focused on what they considered wins in the proposal. They noted that the governor was able to protect 89% of the existing climate budget even in the face of major deficits, and that many programs would remain intact, or close to it. But some environmental groups were disappointed by the proposal, which would cut \$2.9 billion in climate funding; delay an additional \$1.9 billion; and shift \$1.8 billion to other funds, primarily the state's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, which receives proceeds from cap-and-trade auctions. "It's a tough economic moment for sure," said Mary [See Budget, A10]

Tackle football ban would face a veto

Newsom opposes legislation that would prevent young kids from playing sport.

By STEVE HENSON

Gov. Gavin Newsom pledged Wednesday to hold the line against a proposed law that would ban youth tackle football in California, saying in a statement to The Times that he'd veto any such legislation. Assembly Bill 734 was introduced last year by state Assemblyman Kevin McCarty (D-Sacramento) and cleared its first hurdle a week ago when a legislative committee voted 5 to 2 along party lines for the measure to be considered by the 80-

member Assembly. Originally written to prohibit children under age 12 from playing tackle football, the bill was amended in committee to ban the sport for children 5 or younger beginning in 2025. In 2027 the bill would raise the age on the ban to 9 and in 2029 it would go to 11. California's Democratic governor, however, wants no part of a bill that would dictate to parents the age they can allow their children to participate in a sport. "I will not sign legislation that bans youth tackle football," Newsom said in the statement. "I am deeply concerned about the health and safety of our young athletes, but an outright ban is not the answer. "My administration will [See Football, A7]



BRIAN VANDER BRUG Los Angeles Times

THE GROUP of tech titans who amassed land just west of Rio Vista, Calif., plans to raise a new city on a rolling expanse now dedicated to ranching and wind farms.

A land pitch by billionaires

Group behind secretive purchases in Solano County seeks to sell voters on project to build futuristic city

By JESSICA GARRISON

RIO VISTA, Calif. — The tech billionaires who for years secretly amassed land in the scrubby grasslands on the fringe of San Francisco Bay announced Wednesday that they will begin gathering signatures for a ballot initiative in Solano County that would clear the way to build a city from scratch. The group, called California Forever, envisions a community with tens of thou-

sands of new homes, along with crisp new parks, bike lanes, open space and a solar farm. The model city would be walkable, socioeconomically integrated and fueled by clean energy. But to get there, the backers will have to persuade Solano County voters to approve the sweeping endeavor. That could be a tough hurdle considering that the project for so long was shrouded in mystery and became ensnared in controversy last year amid

unfounded speculation that the land buyers were foreign agents intent on espionage. Federal, state and local approvals will also be required. The first stage of that campaign took place Wednesday, when Jan Sramek, chief executive of California Forever, took to a podium in the Veterans Hall in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta town of Rio Vista to pledge that the project would be a "great neighbor" to everyone in the [See Land, A10]

State's voters are worried, poll says
Half consider the budget deficit an "extremely serious" problem, survey finds. CALIFORNIA, B1

Judge may expel Trump from court

Ex-president has refused to keep quiet in his defamation case despite repeated warnings. NATION, A5

Coachella lineup stars SoCal acts

Homegrown rappers Doja Cat and Tyler, the Creator, plus Lana Del Rey and No Doubt, to play. CALENDAR, E1

Weather

Mostly sunny skies. L.A. Basin: 69/51. B6

Biden goes after overdraft fees

Administration takes on banks with a plan that could slash charges to as low as \$3. BUSINESS, A6



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