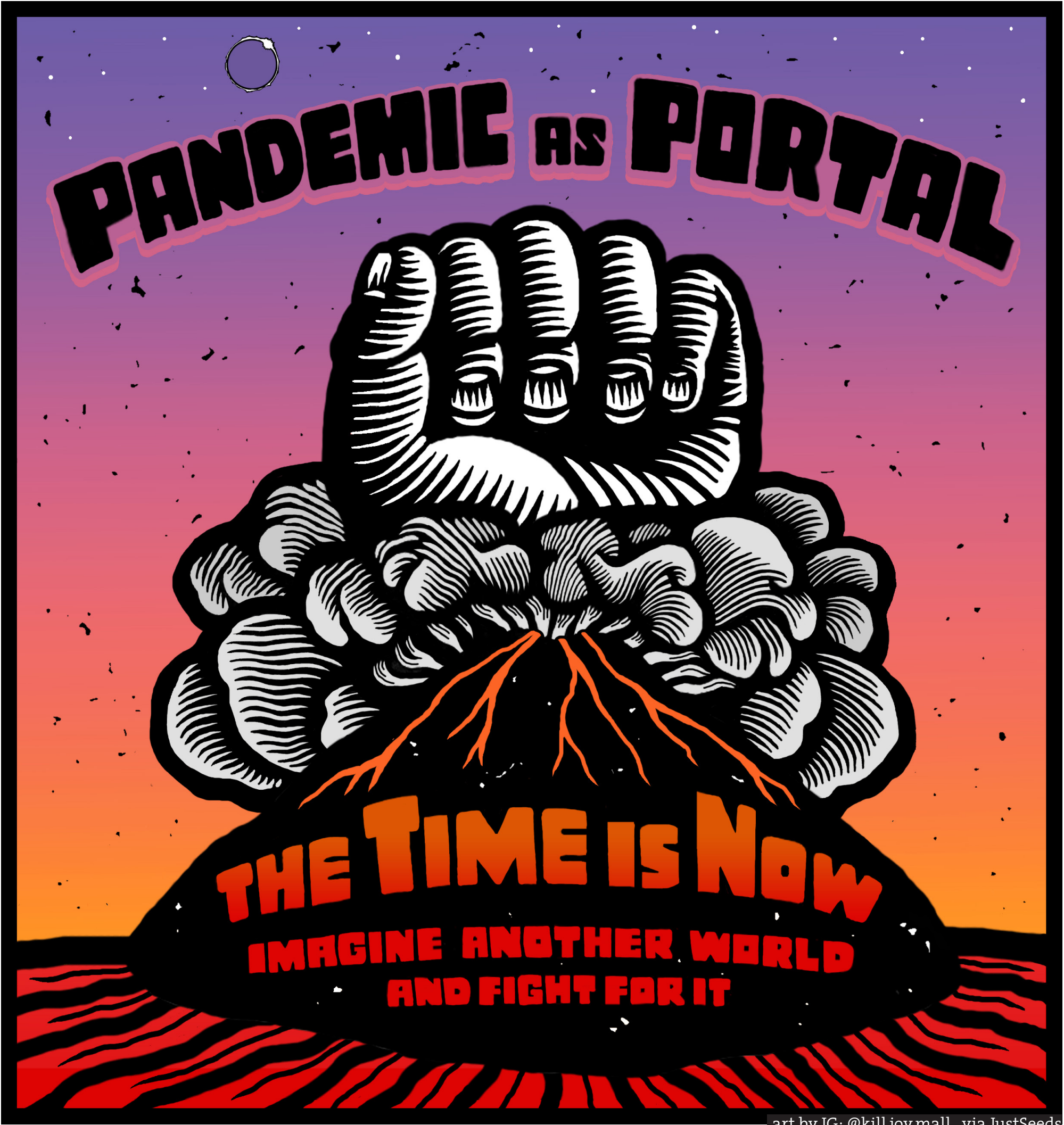


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# PROGRESSIVES AHEAD POST- ELECTION

Keegan Medrano

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose (The more things change, the more they stay the same")

" - Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr

Slick and glossy election pamphlets and mailers were curled and crinkled into closed door gates, pinning the hopes of a ghoulish group of corporate executives, real estate developers and other moneyed interests. Less than a month before the November 3 election, over \$5 million streamed into the city pooling at a new political action committee (PAC), "Neighbors for a Better San Francisco". This money bought them thousands of colorful campaign mailers joining others as the unwanted, tethered plastic bouquets left at the doorstep of the city's housed residents.

While the money was new, the messaging was very much the same. Tents; the polyester proxy for San Francisco's unhoused.

At the declaration of a shelter-in-place (SIP) order and as the COVID-19 pandemic began to take root in San Francisco and across the country, London Breed's administration was praised for its swift response in mainstream media and press, but its piecemeal approach to street homelessness and those living in the city's 2,000-bed shelter system undermined the Mayor's newfound stardom. Shelters were decompressed by 75% after a devastating outbreak at MSC-South, hotel rooms for the unhoused were

legislated for but ultimately, Breed decided to open only 35% of those rooms, opting instead for mats, a steel chair and taped rectangles in the massive congregate setting of Moscone Center West. That plan was quickly dropped after a chorus of critiques and outrage when this paper broke the story. The pandemic may have changed the approach, but the outcomes stayed the same. Amidst the chaos and embarrassments, organizers at the Coalition on Homelessness, housed allies, members of the Democratic Socialists of America and others began raising and collecting money for tents to provide a moment of safety to the over 6,000 San Franciscans who remained on this city's streets during a pandemic, extreme weather and days upon days of dense, dangerous smoke.

The rebuke was immediate and hostile. Peering down from their condos or scrolling through one of the many anti-homeless and anti-tent Facebook groups or Twitter accounts, tents became the focus of vitriol and hundreds of news articles and Change.org petitions.

Homelessness and unhoused San Franciscans have been a political wedge in this city for nearly 40 years. Even in years without an election, the blame for their existence, for the policy failures, for the wasted money is bandied around City Hall, news media, social media and everywhere in between. It was unsurprising then that homelessness continues on page 7...

# 2020: A YEAR IN REVIEW

TJ Johnston

Briefly in 2020, it wasn't always "all COVID, all the time."

That was for about two and a half months into the new year.

The first year into a new decade almost seems like eons ago, but early 2020, at one point, is where homelessness in San Francisco and the U.S. might have turned a corner — starting as early as December 2019.

Then, the Martin v. Boise case in Idaho was upheld when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the city of Boise's appeal of the U.S. 9th Circuit's decision on the city's urban camping ban. The federal appeals court found that enforcing anti-homeless ordinances without providing services amounted to cruel and unusual punishment, making the law unconstitutional.

In January, the director of San Francisco Public Works, the City agency that has been at the forefront of encampment evictions and the improper seizure of residents' prop-

erty, was arrested by federal investigators in connection with a wide-ranging bribery scandal. The ensuing complaint also alleged that Mohammed Nuru, who has since resigned, sought to fix City contracts for homeless bathroom trailers to benefit his co-indictee.

Meanwhile, Mayor London Breed's administration started receiving demands to decriminalize homelessness on two separate fronts — homeless advocates and the City's police commission. The newly formed Solutions Not Sweeps coalition sent Breed a list of demands, including abolishing the confiscation of homeless people's property and towing the vehicles of people living in them, as well as leading with services rather than enforcement. The SNS coalition also rallied in front of City Hall while performing a mock sweep of people into jail as a bit of street theater.

Inside the more staid surroundings of a City Hall meeting room, the police commission also took action. On January 15, the

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## COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The STREET SHEET is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition's work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: they bring their agendas to us.

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## STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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panel — composed of political appointees — unanimously approved a resolution calling for a work group to drop the City's default strategy of enforcement in favor of a more service-oriented approach.

Just when San Francisco was making headway, everything changed in March.

By then, the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, hit the North American continent. The first community transmission within San Francisco city limits was reported. California declared a state of emergency, and San Francisco along with five Bay Area counties issued a shelter-in-place order. Soon, a statewide stay-at-home order followed. But such dictates mean nothing to people with a home in which to stay. Exempted from these orders, unsheltered people remained on the streets.

Shelter clients with ongoing reservations saw their stays extended, but the City shut down the 1,000-plus person long waitlist

for a 90-day bed. Waitlisted people were turned away and joined some 8,000 San Franciscans with no place to rest, self-isolate or wash their hands during a public health emergency.

Other service providers found workarounds in this new time of "social distancing": GLIDE and St. Anthony's started serving meals in packages. As a safety measure, the Coalition on Homelessness reduced its operating hours and in-office complement. Its bimonthly newspaper, Street Sheet, stopped printing and ran exclusively online until July. With the dwindling income of vendors from paper sales, Street Sheet opened a GoFundMe campaign offering an economic stimulus in the form of vendor grants.

Meanwhile, mutual aid networks formed and started distributing hand sanitizers and face masks to unhoused people.

Yet, the question remained: how does one continues on page 4...



# CITY TO CLOSE DOWN SHELTER IN PLACE HOTELS: WHERE WILL RESIDENTS GO?

Quiver Watts

Earlier this month plans to shut down Shelter in Place (SIP) hotels, which are currently housing 2,400 otherwise homeless residents, leaked out of the COVID-19 Command Center (CCC). The hotel guests set to lose their shelter have been categorized as vulnerable by the City, meaning that they are over 60 years old or have an underlying health condition. Unhoused people and advocates across San Francisco have sprung into action to prevent the plan from moving forward, urging the City to keep the hotels open until all their guests have found permanent housing placements. Within a few weeks public officials said they would be pushing the timeline back, but as of now no specific alternative plan has been released.

The documents released detailed a four-phase plan that had seven SIP hotels slated to close by December 21, which could displace over 500 residents. The sites slated to be closed first are Lombard Plaza Motel, Abigail Hotel, Americana, Good Hotel, La Luna Inn, Nob Hill Hotel and Executive Hotel Vintage Court. Seven more hotels are set to close by the end of March, another six by the end of May and the final five by June 21, 2021. All placements in hotels stopped on November 15 according to internal documents shared with this paper.

As numbers of COVID-19 cases spike dramatically, plans for what will happen to the residents and where people will go is still very unclear. According to the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) hotel residents will be screened using Coordinated Entry to determine where they go from the hotels. Those who are prioritized based on the screening may be placed in permanent supportive housing. Those who are not prioritized will instead enter what's called "rapid resolution" which can mean short-term rental assistance or merely a bus ticket out of town. But according to HSH, at least 70% of hotel guests have not been processed through Coordinated Entry at all.

Tiny, an organizer with POOR Magazine in Oakland, recently helped organize a demonstration outside of Mayor London Breed's house, in part to call attention to the harm the closures of SIP hotels will do to poor and homeless people in the City.

"A hotel room can save a life, but politricksters and violent scarcity models can take our lives," said Tiny. "This move by the SF politrickster mayor is nothing

less than violence against unhoused San Francisco residents just tryin' to get some rest."

\*\*\*

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Gillette and her service dog, Shepherd, had been moving around from shelter to shelter trying to stay safe off the streets after leaving a domestic violence situation. But when lockdown started in early March, the shelter system stopped moving people into the shetlers entirely. Gillette says she missed the window to keep a long-term shelter bed by about two days, and instead was forced to brave the onset of the pandemic on the streets.

"When we left [the shelter] it seemed like a curse. I had to actually sleep outside which I had not done. And then it kinda like started to rain. And then they had a COVID outbreak at that particular shelter," she said. "If I had been across the street or whatever I would still have been exposed to it. They said they had like 70 cases."

During the first 48 hours she spent outside she slept about four hours, she was so scared and worried about people stealing her belongings or attacking her, or about being exposed to the virus. She was able to stay with her niece for a while during that time, and other times she took cover in a tent with her brother for protection. So when Homeless Outreach Team workers came by and offered her a place to stay in a SIP hotel, she jumped at the opportunity. The room she has been staying in is very nice, with its own bathroom, TV and queen-size bed, and she says the staff has been very accommodating.

Gillette found out earlier this month that the hotel she was staying in was set to close on December 21 when a volunteer handed her a flyer outside the hotel. She says that while she had always been told her stay in the hotel would be temporary, at that point none of the staff had even been informed yet when the hotel would be closing. Since then, she says there has been a housing seminar in the hotel to help connect people with housing options after the closure. When interviewed on November 18th, Gillette said she would likely know within a week what housing she would be moved into next. But as of publication, she still doesn't know where she will end up. But she is still hopeful that she will get to stay inside.

"I feel pretty confident, because the people

got the information and documents to document my income, to document my person. So that feels pretty hopeful," Gillette said. "But, now, the guarantee is not there, but the hopefulness is. Because at first, I wasn't sure where I was going, and my oldest brother kept saying 'they're not going to dismiss you into the streets again'."

Gillette lost her nephew to the pandemic earlier this year, so she knows what is at stake for folks facing a return to the streets. When asked what San Francisco can do to support people in her position, she emphasized the need for housing.

"I would say that I think they really sincerely need to work with the homeless people or the people in the Shelter in Places so that they can find permanent housing, you know? Because it's really hard to have gone through this pandemic, and it's still fervent, and not have any place to go."

\*\*\*

A hotel staff worker who spoke on the condition of anonymity was less hopeful that hotel residents would be moved into permanent housing once the hotels started to close down. Out of the approximately 300 SIP hotel guests they work with, only two have currently been approved to move into permanent long-term housing. More have availed themselves of the "Homeward Bound" program that buys folks a one-way bus ticket out of town, supposedly to reunite with family. They estimate that within the whole SIP hotel system, which houses 2,400 people the City has classified as "vulnerable", only 40 people have been approved for housing. But even once someone is approved there is no guarantee how long it will take for them to get inside. Sometimes it takes a few months, sometimes it's a few years.

Coordinated Entry, the system that prioritizes people for long-term housing placements, is currently moving people up the waitlist if they are placed in SIP hotels. But even with that boost very few SIP residents are currently expected to be housed.

"The answer to where these people will go? What I see happening is that some will go into shelter spaces opening up and the rest of the folks will probably have

to go back to the streets," the worker told Street Sheet in an interview. "I absolutely don't feel like this is a safe option for folks. We are in the middle of a [COVID] surge, it is winter, and there are other diseases folks get this time of year. It is also harder on folks' immune systems to be out in the cold. Even staying dry is an issue, so I feel like it is absolutely horrible that the majority of these folks are going to be kicked back out onto the street. And when I say majority, I mean the vast majority."

When Mayor London Breed first began reluctantly placing people in the SIP hotels, it was in response to an outpouring of public pressure. But now that the attention of the public has shifted away from the hotels, the Mayor is free to move people back out to the streets and alleviate the financial burden of offering bare minimum respite in the midst of the pandemic.

"The real reason is money, they aren't even hiding that."

The first phase of "demobilizations", a euphemism for closing hotels, is scheduled for December 21st, just days before Christmas. This time of year is especially sensitive for folks living on the street, who are sometimes estranged from their families. But Bea says there are other factors that will complicate the mass exodus. The hotels closing down in Phase 1 are currently housing many folks who had been sleeping rough for a decade or more, often because the oversight and rules of mass shelters don't work for them. This could be because of mental illness or trauma that makes sleeping in a dorm with dozens of strangers feel especially threatening, or because of the harsh rules within the system. The SIP hotels mark the first time the City has ever offered folks on the street a dignified and solitary alternative to sleeping outside.

"They are the folks who, due to social factors and distrust for the system have been hard to outreach to and get help to. And these hotels have for the first

time been able to provide that," the worker said. "A lot of them have health issues that haven't been taken care of, and for a lot of them this is the first time they've gotten medical care. Those issues make them more vulnerable to getting COVID, but it's also a shame that the City provided this thing for people who have such a distrust and suspicion of government housing and the medical system, and they are now just going to retraumatize them by sending them back to the street during a pandemic." ■

They estimate that within the whole SIP hotel system, which houses 2,400 people the City has classified as "vulnerable", only 40 people have been approved for housing. But even once someone is approved there is no guarantee how long it will take for them to get inside. Sometimes it takes a few months, sometimes it's a few years.



# 2020 IN THE REAL UNHOUSED, SHELTERED

continued from page 2...

shelter in place without a place to shelter in? The pandemic left at least 30 hotels that weren't renting out rooms with 30,000 vacancies. Under the City charter, either the mayor or the county's health officer is legally empowered to commandeer these rooms — or any privately held property — in a public health emergency. Those people, respectively, are London Breed and Tomás Aragón.

And this is where the City faltered: rather than opening rooms to unhoused San Franciscans, the City looked to various sites, such as the Moscone Center, as large-scale shelters. Repeatedly, Mayor Breed maintained that opening vacant hotel rooms was unworkable, but her reasons for this supposed infeasibility kept changing: homeless people would be unwilling to move indoors, their substance use and mental health issues would make them problem guests, the City couldn't afford lodging and support services for them all, even with reimbursement of state and federal monies.

By April, the City started getting pushback, so it contracted about 1,000 rooms, but reserved them only for people who were being tested for the coronavirus, had tested positive or were recovering from it. At that point, it filled only 123 rooms. The City also defined people at risk of contracting the virus as "vulnerables," meaning people aged 60 and above or people with existing health conditions.

In pandemic times, San Francisco's usual approach of moving its unsheltered homeless population from one place to another ran contrary to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. The CDC recommended allowing people to remain in encampments if no individual housing options are available. The federal public health agency also advised against clearing encampments, lest the inhabitants lose their connection with service providers and become even more susceptible to the virus. In such cases, the CDC suggested that tents be spaced at least 12 feet apart

from one another and have access to proper sanitation.

And as long as the City wasn't immediately offering hotel rooms to people living outdoors, the Coalition and the local Democratic Socialists of America chapter ratcheted up tent distribution so that they could at least establish their own personal space. Outreachers from the Coalition also provided tent dwellers with signs reading, "I will gladly exchange my tent for a hotel room."

However, the City had other plans. It opened a mega-shelter at Moscone Center West, across the street from its newly installed emergency center. A tipster told Street Sheet that 390 mats — not beds — were laid out with no partitions or handwashing stations available. Less than 24 hours after Street Sheet broke the story, the City scrapped its plans to congregate unhoused people at the event center. However, in an email to Street Sheet, Human Services Agency director Trent Rhorer wrote: "the City will NOT be renting to house unsheltered homeless" who are COVID-negative or not part of the vulnerable population because it wasn't "fiscally prudent."

So, the City made a choice to prioritize "vulnerables" because they were most at risk of dying from COVID if they contracted it. But shelter residents who don't fit the City's definition of "vulnerable" were also at risk, and they were in settings where sleeping quarters are less than 6 feet apart — CDC's recommendation of social distance — risk is even greater.

Ultimately, it took numerous positive cases to move homeless people into hotels. Outbreaks occurred at the Multi-Service Center South — the City's largest shelter — affecting 100 clients and staff. MSC South clients testing negative were moved into hotels, while the shelter repurposed itself as an auxiliary medical facility for positives.

Dr. Grant Colfax, director of the Department of Public Health, told The Guardian the virus would naturally spread among unhoused people. "Outbreaks like these are bound to happen," he said. "This is how coronavirus spreads. Our goal is to slow the spread down and mitigate the bad outcomes we see with the virus."

Frustrated by Mayor Breed's sluggishness in commandeering hotels, the Board of Supervisors unanimously passed an ordinance to open 7,200 hotel rooms to homeless people, with a 12-day deadline to start. But Breed refused to sign off on it, and more importantly, was not willing to disburse funds for this legislation. It's too hard, she said in an April 25 address.

"That is not the reality of what we as a city can do," she said. "Every decision

we make, everything we do is going to be based on what is reality."

The other public servant who could have fast-tracked an emergency order appeared before the supervisors at a May 12 hearing. Health Officer Tomás Aragón told them that the City hadn't reached a critical point where commandeering hotels would be necessary. He said that in consulting with the City Attorney's office, "we'd have to show we had exhausted all resources" before then.

But a City Attorney's office memo shows that the health officer has that authority to commandeer in a public health emergency. He also dodged a direct question from the Board of Supervisors — a body that appoints the Health Officer, not the mayor — as to why he hadn't issued the order. "That's all I'm prepared to say."

Some people couldn't wait for the City to lodge homeless people; St. Anthony Foundation, Hospitality House and even staff from Supervisor Dean Preston's office, with Providence Foundation, opened up their wallets to put them up in rooms.

On the medical front, testing sites sprouted, mostly in outdoor locations for social distance purposes. Unidos en Salud/United in Health operated in underserved neighborhoods, such as the Mission, Sunnysdale and Bayview. Verily, a company owned by a corporate parent of Google, required people at its Tenderloin site to use a Gmail account or a smartphone to access test results, posing problems for people with little or no technology access and privacy concerns. The City ended its contract with the company seven months later.

Literally driving in their point, activists and medical students rode in socially distanced car caravans outside Moscone Center, City Hall and Alamo Square urging the City to shelter unhoused people in hotels. The students also made the same demand at an action outside Mayor Breed's house in the Lower Haight where they staged a die-in.

Two unhoused women stayed in a vacant investment property for several hours on May Day, thanks to a newly formed activist organization called House the Bay. As part of a demonstration in the Castro District, they moved into the house until police arrested them and escorted them off the premises.

In May, as tents became more prevalent in the Tenderloin, the UC Hastings College of the Law and a merchants association sued the City to "clear the streets" and end what college chancellor David Faigman deemed "dangerous and illegal conditions." It didn't matter that clearing encampments went against CDC guidelines. Throughout the litigation, 27 Tenderloin-based organizations asked UC Hastings to sign a pledge and honor the human rights of the neighborhood's unhoused residents, but the college refused.

The City and UC Hastings reached a settlement, which included the removal of 300 tents but no additional hotel placements, contrary to the City's claims. Two months later, after hours of debate and public comment, the Board of Supervisors approved the settlement on a 7-4 vote. Supervisors Aaron Peskin, Dean Preston, Hillary Ronen and Shamann Walton voted in dissent.

The deal provided an impetus for merchants, neighbor-



photo credit: Heidi Alletzhauer



# AR-VIEW: D IN PLACE

hood groups and housed residents to force the City's hand. Businesses and housed residents on Larch Street also filed suit, demanding a camp be removed near the Opera Plaza. Marina District residents raised their hackles and pressed Public Works into clearing an RV settlement on Moulton Street, while Richmond District neighbors demanded the same for an encampment by the old Alexandria movie theater.

Also, a petition circulated among Hayes Valley merchants declaring the neighborhood a "tent-free zone" to the confusion of Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association members. Shortly thereafter, an encampment on Octavia Boulevard was swept.

As a way to mitigate conditions at encampments, "safe sleeping villages" were established at Civic Center, Stanyan Street, South Van Ness Avenue and at a playground off Third Street in the Bayview District. As the City cordoned the Civic Center area with unsightly fencing, the Stanyan Street village encountered animosity from neighborhood merchants and a bungled attempt at litigation from a neighborhood association.

In a city where nearly one-third of its unhoused residents are Black, the Black Lives Matter movement carried added resonance. George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were among the latest fatalities from police violence against Black people that spurred nationwide protests and calls to "defund the police." San Francisco was no different. The City responded to this unrest — as other major metropolitan areas have — with curfews, added police presence and arrests.

The disproportionate policing of Black people, particularly unhoused ones, was the focus of a June 23 march from UC Hastings to the Tenderloin police station, where a phalanx of riot-gear police officers stood in front of the entrance and atop the station's roof.

Queenandi XSheba, a Black woman born and raised in San Francisco, addressed the officers specifically: "You cannot criminalize people because they are houseless."

Each December, a consortium of faith leaders from the San Francisco Night Ministry holds a candlelight vigil in honor of unhoused San Franciscans who died on the streets, in residential hotels or in other places where they might have been found in the past year. The ceremony includes a reading of the deceased's names, and the number of names seem to increase each year. In 2019, approximately 275 names were called.

An early comparison of homeless deaths in the beginnings 2019 and 2020 suggests the number will rise this year. In June, the Department of Public Health estimated 125 homeless people had already died, over twice the rate of deaths in the same month of the previous year. The Night Ministry also projects a higher death toll this year. Responding to a query from Street Sheet, Rev. Valerie McEntee said, as of August 31, the coroner's office already counted 200 deaths. "With that number, we believe the number will be much higher than last year by the time the coroner gives us the rest of the names and we hear from some of our other sources who also give us names we don't get through the coroner," she said.

Some names sure to be read this year belong to Ronnie

Goodman, Ian Carrier, Eric Michael Moren and Charles Davis.

Goodman was an artist whose work appeared in Street Sheet, galleries and at numerous actions, including June's march to the Tenderloin police station. He died in his tent in the Mission District in August. A memorial was held near the building where he camped.

Carrier's death on the corner of Hyde and Eddy streets in April would have otherwise gone unnoticed in any other year. His purported COVID connection made it noteworthy, and his parents' interview with the New York Times made it newsworthy.

Carrier had been in and out of the UC San Francisco Parnassus Hospital for about two months. He checked in on Christmas Day with a severe cough and fever, and had to be put on a respirator. His chronic kidney problems — complicated by heroin use — required multiple hospitalizations. Before his final exit from UCSF, the hospital had no place where he could be released — no respite center, no hotel. Less than a day later, he died with his discharge papers still on him.

He must have died from COVID-19 undiagnosed, his family told the Times.

Moren's death has been light on details thus far: police found his body burned to death at a South of Market alley on the morning of October 25 and were treating it as a suspicious death. Larry Ackerman, Moren's ex-husband, said Moren operated his own housecleaning business before he became homeless. A memorial was held for him in his hometown in Ohio, Ackerman told the Bay Area Reporter.

Davis, a Street Sheet vendor, died at the Hotel Tilden in the Tenderloin on October 27. When announcing Davis' death on Facebook, Rev. Victor Floyd of Calvary Presbyterian Church said he took solace in knowing that Davis was sheltered and fed in a SIP hotel during his final days. The church set up a table for Davis to sell Street Sheets after Sunday services. He also served on the Stolen Belonging production team and actively campaigned for Proposition C in the November 2018 election.

News of Prop. C shone a proverbial ray of light on a September day when wildfire smoke turned the sky orange. The California Supreme Court let stand previous rulings that validated the electoral victory of Prop. C. The courts ruled that the measure's 61% victory margin was sufficient in enacting a corporate tax that would fund homelessness, health and housing programs — a win for unhoused people and their allies.

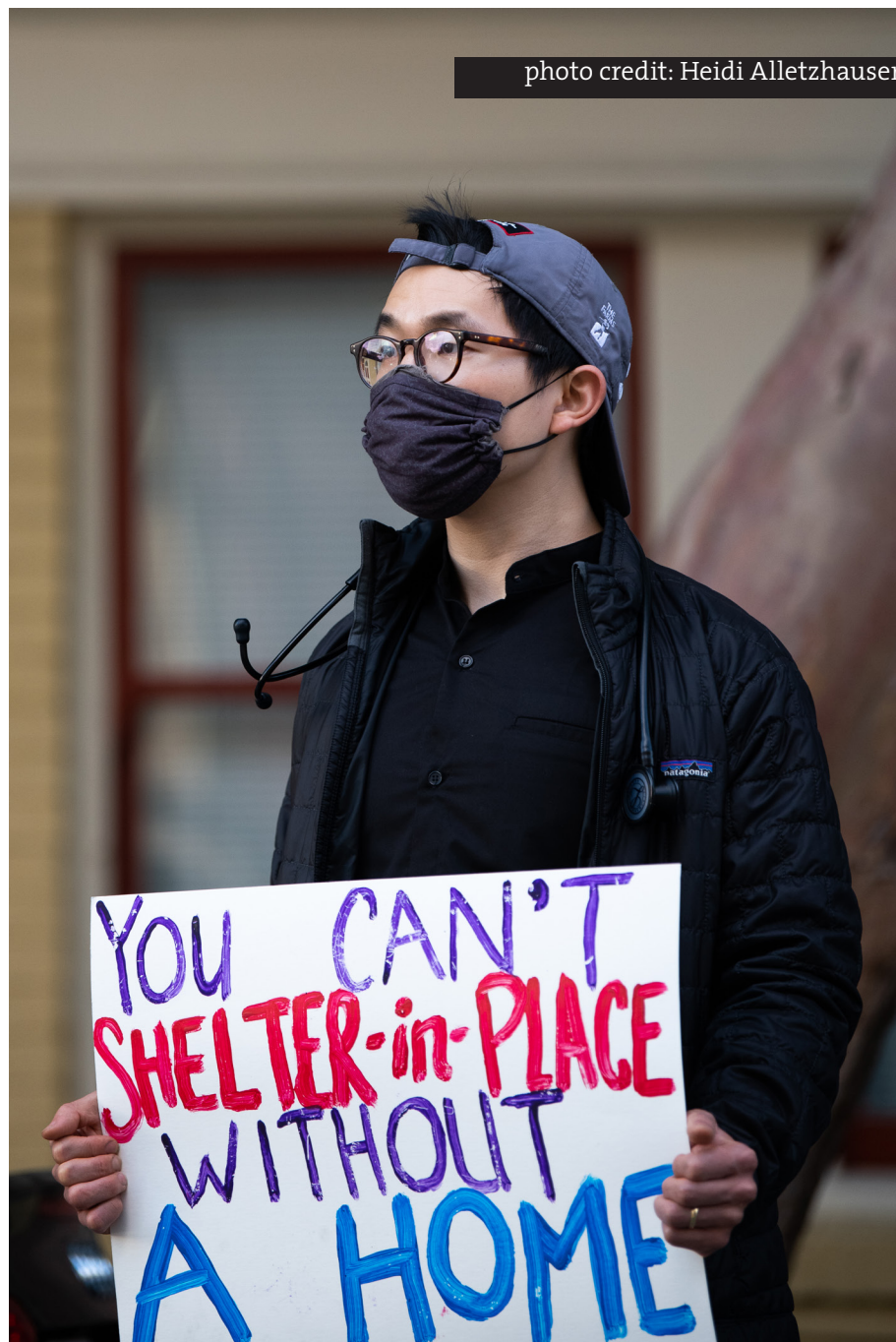
As a result, over \$492 million held in escrow for almost two years was unlocked, effectively doubling the City's homelessness budget. Just two weeks earlier, the Coalition on Homelessness offered recommendations on how to direct Prop. C dollars through a peer-based needs assessment study.

Prison abolitionists also had cause to rejoice: County Jail No. 4 at 850 Bryant St. closed. The No New Jail SF coalition, which includes the Coalition on Homelessness, pressed the Board of Supervisors into passing an ordinance calling for the jail's closure by November. No New Jails SF estimated the City saving \$25 million in jailing mostly poor people and people of color, turning 850 Bryant into a de facto mental health facility and homeless shelter. Advocates see this as a step toward decarceration and de-funding the police.

After accommodating 2,400 unhoused people in shelter-in-place hotels during the pandemic, the Homelessness Department announced in November an end to the program. The department said it would phase out the SIP program in favor of a "hotel re-housing" program, which offers no specifics as to where current hotel guests will go next. The City projects the first wave of closures to end by December 21, 2020, and continue through June 2021.

As of publication, only about 500 people are on a path toward housing, and the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing offered little specifics on where the rest of the occupants would go. In late November, the department was set to scrap its shelter grievance policy, which would leave people staying in shelters and SIP hotels with little protection if they get evicted. After advocates decried this change and scheduled a die-in outside Moscone Center, the department backtracked on the policy change and will extend the grievance process to hotel residents. ■

photo credit: Heidi Alletzhauser





# SHUT UP AND TAKE MY MONEY!

Jordan Davis

In October of 2015, I went from living at the Navigation Center to living in a building master leased by the Tenderloin Housing Clinic. As much as housing gave me the illusion of freedom, I actually felt that some freedom was taken away, as from here on out, I had to sign over my check to the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, and have them cut me a check for my income minus rent (what is called the “modified payment program” or “third-party checks”). When I was renting before, I was always dependable to pay the rent within the first few days of the month when I got my benefits. Now, I cannot have my income direct-deposited due to the Tenderloin Housing Clinic’s aversion to allowing their tenants to pay their rent by check.

As a disability rights activist, I was inspired by the film “The Power of 504,” which chronicled the takeover of the San Francisco federal building in 1977 by dis-

abled activists demanding inclusion in society. However, this troubling policy, which actually exists in some — but not all — supportive housing sites runs counter to everything these activists fought for.

A few months after moving in, I began to learn more about tenants rights laws, one such example was Proposition M of 2008, whose passage created Section 37.10B of the Administrative Code, which addressed harassment of tenants. Basically, it banned landlords from, among other things, refusing “to accept or acknowledge receipt of a tenants lawful rent payment” and refusing “to cash a rent check for over 30 days.” However, and I wonder why the proponents of this measure did not think of this, this only applied to tenants under rent control, which seems extremely arbitrary, as rent control is supposed to be about governing rental rates in buildings on the private market.

While harassment of tenants is a major issue in many supportive housing sites, I will not speak to that in this article, rather, I want to point out one example of how thousands of tenants like myself have been denied many of the same rights that those in privately run buildings have (and many of us will never have because we are too poor to get into a rent-controlled, but not vacancy-controlled building).

While it is true that accepting personal checks carries the risk of checks bouncing, the State of California does provide a legal remedy which allows for landlords to only accept cash, which is not what I want for supportive housing sites, but it would be reasonable to ask that a tenant who has bounced their check seek another alternate payment method for the next three months. And while some tenants have difficulty with drugs, alcohol and money management, the threat of eviction should be enough for them to enroll in third-party checks for a reasonable period of time.

This is actually personal for me. Every holiday season, my girlfriend sends for me to go to Oregon through the new year, and the only way I can get access to my income is when I come back to SF, go to the crowded THC office, and wait hours for someone to get my check. I dunno how I will be able to do it with COVID-19

still raging.

While Tenderloin Housing Clinic accepts money orders as an alternative, I do not trust them, given that it boosts the check cashing industry, and money orders are relatively untraceable, unlike checks, and losing a money order or having it stolen on the Tenderloin streets would be disastrous. And when I brought this up as a discussion topic at the SRO Task Force, Dan Jordan, the other tenant rep who works for my landlord, said that our checks “tend to be rubbery.” This was from our September 2018 meeting.

What we need is a uniform policy that respects supportive housing tenants’ rights to pay by any legal method unless they show they can’t. I would be willing to have a collaboration between providers and tenants, but we must draw a line in the sand around forcing people on modified payment programs when they clearly don’t need it or limiting methods of payment based on ableist and classist stereotypes. Better yet, given the move towards contactless payment options due to the pandemic, HSH should set up a portal allowing tenants to use their debit card to pay their rent.

It’s long past time for change, we deserve the right to direct deposit, we deserve the right to pay rent by check, and we even deserve contactless rent payment options as well. ■

# WATER FOR ALL: A HUMAN NEED, A HUMAN RIGHT

Brian Edwards

The COVID-19 virus and subsequent Shelter In Place (SIP) order have had stark, profound impacts on the daily lives of almost all San Franciscans, and, let’s face it — 2020 is unlikely to make anyone’s “Best Year of the Decade” list. For folks like me, our cubicles and offices have been replaced by our tiny kitchens and messy bedrooms, and the workweek has become a steady stream of endless — and sometimes pointless — Zoom meetings. Half of the neighbors on my block of Hayes Street have moved away during the pandemic, and the new ones have faces that I may not see for at least six months or more. “Honey, does this new mask make my face look fat?” is now a sentence I’ve said on multiple occasions, and probably will again, and I’m about as likely to snack on raw chicken as I am to board the 22 Fillmore these days. After nine months of SIP, nothing about the “new normal” really feels normal, nor does it even feel particularly new anymore.

One of the neighborhoods hit hardest by the pandemic has been the Tenderloin, where the pre-existing economic and

social conditions and inequalities made COVID-19 a loaded gun.

For the Tenderloin neighborhood, which some estimates say is home to close to 2,000 unhoused residents, there is exactly one available shower facility, open four hours per day, three days per week. That location had to temporarily cut back service to two days per week during the summer due to the overload and strain put on its largely volunteer staff.

The situation for drinking water is just as dire. Many existing water fountains are located behind gates or in parks where homeless people have historically been discouraged from going. At the beginning of the pandemic, the City installed temporary manifolds — pipes with multiple connecting points — on six TL fire hydrants and distributed 1,500 collapsible water bags to unhoused residents so that they could draw and collect water for drinking and other uses. The stated intent was to eventually replace all six manifolds with permanent filling stations. The water bottles quickly proved to be leaky and

inconvenient to use, and by midsummer, there were only three manifolds left, with no permanent replacements. After widespread community outrage at their removal, a fourth manifold was returned to the neighborhood, and in November the City took delivery of 12 permanent filling stations to be installed and service the water needs of its unhoused residents. The Public Utilities Commission has targeted three of those stations for installment in the TL, a 50% reduction of its earlier commitment: three glorified drinking fountains to service 2,000 people, and 12 total citywide to service a population of nearly 10,000.

The City can do better.

WATER ACCESS ISN’T JUST ABOUT DRINKING. Having adequate clean water can be the difference between someone showing up in clean clothes for a meal, job interview or housing assessment, or choosing to stay inside their tent, dirty, ashamed and alone.

WATER ACCESS ALLOWS DIGNITY. “There are things people take for granted until you have to beg for them — then your worldview changes,” says Sam Dennison of Faithful Fools, a Tenderloin nonprofit that works with residents experiencing poverty. “Many people in our neighborhood have to ask for water every time they get thirsty. Water isn’t just a human right, it’s a human need. Human dignity is best served when everyone has access to the water that they need wherever they live and wherever they spend the day.”

WATER ACCESS IS ALSO HARM REDUCTION, ESPECIALLY IN THE TIME OF COVID. Del Seymour, the co-chair of San Francisco’s Local Homeless Coordinating Board and founder of Code Tenderloin, a nonprofit that has distributed food, masks and other emergency supplies to thousands of TL residents, says, “We distribute both kinds of masks — paper and cloth — and let me tell you, a cloth mask don’t mean a fucking thing after a day to someone who can’t wash it. But sometimes that’s all they can get.”

Not only can the City do better, it must. That’s why this month, the Coalition on Homelessness will be launching its Water For All campaign. The goals are twofold: to increase public awareness of the realities of a life on the streets without sufficient water, and to increase the City’s commitment to meeting the water needs of its unhoused residents. Currently, residents of a Syrian refugee camp are guaranteed better water and hygiene access than unhoused people living in the TL. City Attorney Dennis Herrera, in a letter to organizations intervening in this year’s lawsuit brought by UC Hastings College of the Law against the City, said that “the City disagrees with Intervenor’s assertion that it is bound by U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees standards,” but what are unhoused persons if not refugees targeted for displacement and removal? We owe them the same dignity that we demand of countries seeking aid that have internally displaced persons of their own. ■



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CH-CH-CHANGES?

Don't want to be a richer man in San Francisco's 2020 election

Keegan Medrono

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— and specifically anti-homeless rhetoric — came to dominate the 2020 election in San Francisco. Only this time, the pandemic had driven housed people into their homes, bubbled up long-standing ideas and stereotypes around hygiene, sanitation and viral spread, and made street homelessness inescapable through the over 6,000 seeking minimal refuge in tents. This time, over \$5 million was ready to flood the city’s political landscape and potentially upend the competitive odd-numbered supervisor district races and progressive tax measures with images of tents and unhoused San Franciscans.

San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors features representatives from each of the City’s 11 districts carved through neighborhoods, offset by election years focused on either the even or odd districts. 2020’s races were odd not only in their district numbers, but also in that the COVID-19 pandemic brought door-to-door campaigning to a halt and forced campaigns to reimagine events through Zoom, on social media, and — for those with money to spend — on shiny, plastic campaign mailers. These restrictions did little to impact District 9 Supervisor Hillary Ronen, who earned 99.78% of the vote, and fourth-termed (spread over 19 years) District 3 Supervisor Aaron Peskin, who largely swatted away his challenger ultimately securing 56.51% of the vote.

While COVID restrictions may not have impacted Ronen or Peskin, they were at least a point of contention between District 11 candidates Ahsha Safai and John Avalos. In an election in which many initially believed Safai to be vulnerable, Avalos was defeated by 7%, the Union organizer and former Supervisor hamstrung from what could have been his candidacies’ strongest suit — in-person campaigning. Moreover, Safai’s brand of moderate politics stitched together with labor support built a robust enough coalition in District 11 to stave off Avalos’ progressive challenge. Two progressives and a moderate re-elected, suggesting a balance on the Board.

These results in District 3, 9 and 11 left competitive races in District 1, 5 and 7. Races which could have added three political “moderates” to the Board of Supervisors dramatically altering policy and the board’s relationship to Mayor Breed.

124 votes  
In San Francisco’s ranked-choice voting system, votes are funneled to other candidates as voters intended by listing, or not listing, a ranked series of candidates. In District 1, major candidate Connie Chan — the progressive endorsed by numerous Board members, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and various political clubs — squared off against the moderate Marjan Philhour, a former senior adviser to Mayor Breed and the vanquished candidate from the 2016 race against now-retiring Supervisor Sandra Lee Fewer.

Throughout 2020, the race remained close in the imagined consciousness of San Francisco’s politicians. Polling seemed scarce, the pandemic made scouting in-person campaign events moot, and no one really seemed to know the temperature of San Francisco voters. Were we pent-up, angry at the unhoused, fearful that progressive taxes would damage businesses and the city’s recovery? Or would the pandemic’s exacerbation of existing, profound inequities in our society inspire a consolidation around left policies and support for expanded taxes on San Francisco’s wealthiest to ensure funding for programs? The candidates sparred over many issues, but again and again returned to the tents sprouting around the Richmond.



Philhour highlighted her efforts in displacing unhoused residents living near the Alexandria Theatre on a campaign mailer and attempted to tap into the cause célèbre for moderates and anti-homeless voters in the district. Save Our Amazing Richmond (SOAR), an anti-homeless group rooted in District 1 that had worked to displace the Alexandria residents and those at the La Playa Safeway, were dutiful foot soldiers for the Philhour campaign spreading the racist and sexist attack of “Commie Chan” towards the Hong Kong-born candidate. Outside money trickled into the district, and while both candidates denounced it, the mailers strongly opposed Chan and deployed tents to incite animosity towards Chan and the unhoused people living in the district.

As results came in after November 3, the vote tally swerved from Chan to Philhour and moderates began to imagine a massive pick-up on the board and an ally for Mayor Breed. However, as the counts continued over the next few days, Chan ultimately surpassed Philhour and won with 124 votes. From one progressive supervisor to another one. Carry on.

While District 1 saw its share of anti-homeless discourse and some outside money, the bulk of the \$5 million was reserved for Democratic Socialist Supervisor Dean Preston in a rematch with former Supervisor Vallie

Brown and Preston’s Proposition I. But while outside money was spent at eye-boggling amounts, the anti-homeless sentiment, social media content and organizing is almost difficult to quantify or qualify.

‘Fight club’ mailer  
Twitter accounts stealing people’s images from the internet to post anti-Preston memes; lawsuits from Amoeba Music, Escape from New York Pizza, and others against the city sanctioned tent encampment at 730 Stanyan; the prickly “Safe and Healthy Haight” social media group which pushed a recorded fight on Haight Street as a “fight club” amongst San Francisco’s unhoused.

In the 2020 election, the corridor to the

“Summer of Love” turned to a valley of vile. And in the vacuum of moderate and anti-homeless leadership arose former Supervisor Brown, who had previously been more amenable to unhoused San Franciscans. Nevertheless, she pounced on the opportunity to utilize the exceedingly vocal minority of moderate and anti-homeless District 5 voters in an attempt to return to the seat she’d lost by 187 votes less than a year ago. Integral to the Brown campaign’s messaging were the tents that Preston had donated to shelter the homeless neighbors he was portrayed as catering to.

On top of the Brown campaign’s messaging, Better Living Hayes Valley, a group of business owners and housed residents who wanted a “tent-free zone” in their neighborhood, the sustained legal and messaging attacks on the city sanctioned tent encampment at 730 Stanyan, and the worst-kept secret of UCSF, Preston seemed to be another vulnerable incumbent, and as the only Democratic Socialist on the Board of Supervisors would have been a feather in the cap of moderates and those outside moneyed interests. But in a smashing victory, Preston and Prop. I (transfer tax on wealthiest property sales) and Prop. K (authorization for public housing) all won, setting the better part of the outside \$5 million on fire and returning to his seat by a margin of 11%. A socialist went into the campaign and a social-

ist came out of the campaign. If you’re still keeping score, nothing has really changed.

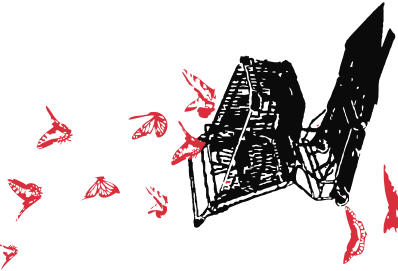
District 7, much like its yacht boating brethren to the north District 2, is viewed as one of the more conservative districts in the city. The luscious greens of Balboa Terrace and Merced Manor encircle San Francisco State University — currently functioning as a ghost town due to distance learning — and West Portal serves as safe passage away from the imagined goblins that skip down Turk Street or the young, gay kids trying to survive on the Castro’s streets. Norman Yee, the affable progressive board president, was termed out, and moderates eyed District 7 as an absolute must-win and a potential flare to the other districts of moderates’ viability in the 2020 election. At the same time, District 7 was overwhelmed with candidates that represented the various factions within the district. Perennial candidates Joel Engardio and Ben Matrangola were joined by misogynist bomb-thrower Stephen Martin-Pinto. Progressives Myrna Melgar and political newcomer Vilaska Nguyen battled it out for the vote of more left-leaning voters, while Japanese-American Dr. Emily Murase attempted to offer a palatable alternative to Melgar, Nguyen and Engardio. Martin-Pinto attacked unhoused San Franciscans online and trafficked in anti-homeless rhetoric shared by the legion of accounts dedicated to filming and photographing street homelessness in the most morally vapid way. Engardio, journalist and vice president of Stop Crime SF, ran multiple fliers that centered on tents from the pandemic, stating that they weren’t “a solution” and to “get the basics right.” But it was Nguyen who drew all the attention and outside money in an effort to torpedo his soaring campaign. Nguyen campaigned as an unabashed progressive in one of the enclaves of NIMBYism. On November 3, Engardio jumped out to an early lead (23.57%), followed at his heels by Nguyen (21.01%) and Melgar (20.04%) as the moderates plotted for at least one win in the six races. However, over the coming days, as more votes were tallied and candidates were peeled away, Melgar surged past all others ensuring another progressive would replace another progressive.

On January 8, the new Board of Supervisors will be inaugurated, and at the inauguration — after the millions upon millions spent, after the disdain that dripped through news and social media for unhoused San Franciscans, after all the shiny, plastic mailers that ultimately slipped into our blue cans and bins — the ideological composition of the board will be exactly the same as before. The progressives have a supermajority and can continue to legislate as such. One more battle may follow right after that — who will replace the aw-shucks President of the Board? It won’t be a moderate, that much I can guarantee. ■



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**STREET  
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DEC 1, 2020

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Alec Dunn & Sam Junge, from JustSeeds

**What  
to do if  
someone  
ODs!!!**

1. Sternal rub
2. Call 911
3. Inject Narcan
4. Rescue breathe
5. Narcan every 3 minutes until they wake up

1. Can you wake them up? Try rubbing their sternum

Rub your knuckles **HARD** back and forth along their upper chest (sternum).

2. No response? Call 911

You can say, "My friend is stopped breathing and is turning blue!"

3. Draw up naloxone

Prepare the naloxone. Take cap off vial. Insert muscling needle into vial, turn upside down with needle still in, and draw up all the liquid.

4. Insert the entire needle into one of these muscles: shoulder, upper butt cheek, or front/outer thigh. It will take about 3 minutes for naloxone to kick in.

5. While waiting for the naloxone to work do rescue breathing: Tilt the head back, plug their nose, and give one breath every 5 seconds. Look for their chest to rise when you blow air in. Repeat naloxone and rescue breathing cycle until they wake up.

- No naloxone left? Rescue breathing can keep someone alive!
- If you don't have a muscling needle, any 1cc needle will work!
- Call 911 because Narcan might not be enough!
- Cops don't always show up to OD's - that's why you tell 911 that the person stopped breathing and is turning blue

**Love Drug Users!  
Use Narcan and do rescue breathing!**