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2020, A YEAR NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO REVIEW
HOTELS SET TO CLOSE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
TAKE MY MONEY!: AN SRO TENANT REPORTS
2020 JUSTICE CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF
2020 ELECTION REJECTS PROGRESSIVES

POETRY ISSUE DEADLINE EXTENDED: DECEMBER 22ND
SUBMIT AT 280 TURK STREET OR BY EMAIL TO QWATTS@COHSF.ORG

art by IG: @killjoy.mall, via JustSeeds
75% after a devastating outbreak at MSC-stardom. Shelters were decompressed by living in the city’s 2,000-bed shelter system, which helped reduce the approach to street homelessness and those was praised for its swift response in making the law unconstitutional. The police climate continued on page 4.

While the money was new, the messaging was very much the same. Tents; the polyes and the improper seizure of residents’ property — starting as early as December 2019. 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.

The first year into a new decade almost seemed 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.

Meanwhile, Mayor London Breed’s administration started receiving demands to de-criminalize 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 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 meant nothing to people with a home in which to stay. Exempted from these orders, unschooled 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 work-arounds 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 continue on page 4...
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 Coordinating 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 plans from moving forward, urging the City to keep the hotels open until all their guests have found permanent housing placements. Within a week, SIP shelters 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 truly seek out shelter, which I had not done. And then it kinda 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, 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 31 when a volunteer handed her a flyer outside the hotel. She said she was so scared and worried during those four hours, she was so scared and worried about people stealing her belongings, 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.

At a hotel staff worker who spoke on condition of anonymity was less hopeful that hotel residents would be moved into permanent housing once the hotels started to close. Out of the approximately 500 SIP hotel guests they work with, only two have currently been approved to move into permanent long-term housing. More have avoided 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.

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.

The truth is, they are struggling to support people in her position, the emphasize the need for help. "I would say that I think they really sincerely need to work with the homeless people or the people in the Shelter in the 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 condition of anonymity was less hopeful that hotel residents would be moved into permanent housing once the hotels started to close. Out of the approximately 500 SIP hotel guests they work with, only two have currently been approved to move into permanent long-term housing. More have avoided 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.

"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 help. "I would say that I think they really sincerely need to work with the homeless people or the people in the Shelter in the 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."

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"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 streets, 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 traumatizing, 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 re-traumatize them by sending them back to the street during a pandemic."
shelter in place without a place to shelter in? The pandemic left at least 90 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 125 rooms. The City also defined people at risk of contracting the virus as “vulnerable,” meaning people aged 60 and above or people with existing health conditions.

In pandemic times, San Francisco’s usual approach of moving its sheltered homeless population from one place to another ran contrary to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. The CDC recommended allowing its unsheltered homeless population from one place to another and have access to proper sanitation.

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 come on 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 — no 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 “vulnerable” 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-Services 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, Sunnydale and Bayview. Vertica, 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 stayed 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. The UC Hastings college refused 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 900 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-
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 Jails 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 De- partment 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 resi- dents.

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inability 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 fountain stations to service 2,000 people, and 12 total citywide to service a population of nearly 10,000.

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 fountain stations to service 2,000 people, and 12 total citywide to service a population of nearly 10,000.

The City can do better.

WATER ACCESS IS NOT 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 Dennis of Faithful Fools, a Tenderloin non-profit 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 two-fold: to increase public awareness of the realities of 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 interveners’ 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.
— 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, bumbled up long-standing ideas and stereotypes around hygiene, sanitation and viral spread, and made street homelessness incarcerable 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 — cut 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 reimage 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 93.98% of the vote, and fourth-termed (spread over 19 years) District 3 Supervisor Aaron Peskin, who largely swatted away his challenger ultimately securing 96.32% of the vote.

While COVID restrictions may not have impacted Ronen or Peskin, they were at least a point of contention between District 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 hamstring from what could have been his candidates 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 Districts in Districts 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.

Throughout 2020, the race remained close in the imagined consciousness of San Francisco’s politics. 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 examination 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.

In the 2020 election, the corridor to the 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. "Ticket club mailer" Twitter accounts stealing people’s images from the internet to post anti-Preston memes; lawsuits from Ameoba Music, Escape from New York Pizza, and others against the city sanctioned tent encampment at 350 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.

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In the 2020 election, the corridor to...
It’s time for our annual STREET SHEET POETRY ISSUE

SUBMISSIONS OPEN!
Deadline: December 22nd
Poems can be emailed to qwatts@cohsf.org or mailed to 280 Turk Street, SF 94102

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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

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.

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

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

2. No response? Call 911

You can say: “My friend stopped breathing and is turning blue!”

3. Draw up naloxone

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

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.

Love Drug Users!
Use Narcan and do rescue breathing!

• 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