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STREET SHEET IS READER SUPPORTED, ADVERTISING-FREE, AND AIDS TO LIFT THE VOICES OF THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY IN SAN FRANCISCO.
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.

**ORGANIZE WITH US**

**HOUSING JUSTICE WORKING GROUP**

**TUESDAYS @ NOON**
The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone! Email mcarrera@cohsf.org to get involved.

**HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP**

**WEDNESDAYS @12:30**
The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join! Email lpierce@cohsf.org

**EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!**

Street Sheet is published and distributed on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. We recognize and honor the ongoing presence and stewardship of the original people of this land. We recognize that homelessness can not truly be ended until this land is returned to its original stewards.

**HELP KEEP STREET SHEET IN PRINT!**

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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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CELEBRATE 35 YEARS OF STREET SHEET

This year marks the 35th anniversary of Street Sheet, the longest continuously running street newspaper in the United States! In celebration, we are holding a year-long fundraising campaign with a goal of $90,000, enough cover the cost of printing Street Sheet for the next 3 years! Street Sheet has been an integral part of the Coalition on Homelessness’s history, and a crucial platform for unhoused authors and artists to share their experiences. Please donate to celebrate its monumental legacy, and help us continue Street Sheet for years to come!
CITY BUDGET WOES:
NO MOTHER SHOULD ROAM, WE ALL DESERVE A HOME

After effects of a global pandemic are causing fallout for San Francisco’s budget. A deficit of over $780 million—a combination of falling business tax revenues caused by remote work, and tourism that hasn’t reached pre-pandemic levels—could fall on the backs of the most vulnerable San Franciscans. Meanwhile, San Francisco is trapped in a “doom loop” media cycle fed by too many billionaires like Garry Tan and aligned elected officials. Their push for an austerity budget will place the rising cost of housing, child care, education and life services at risk for residents while increasing policing, surveillance and corporate write-offs. Meanwhile, the City is taking proactive change, such as investing in housing by robbing other needy groups.

The San Francisco City budget process for the 2024-25 fiscal year has begun. The Board of Supervisors must finalize the budget and the mayor has to sign it by July 2024. A coalition made up of labor and non-governmental organizations called the People’s Budget Coalition is joining together to advocate for a balanced, holistic approach to housing and economic justice while coalition members anticipate budget cuts from the City.

Here at Street Sheet, which the Coalition on Homelessness publishes, we hold out hope for the future for all San Franciscans who call this city home. The diversity and vibrancy of San Francisco is what makes our city special. After all, who is the city for? Is it only for the wealthy or is it for everyone? Here at Street Sheet we cross roads we align our values and San Francisco’s history and make the right choices for all San Franciscans: one in which some of our residents are choosing between five different kinds of milk for their latte, and another where others must choose between paying the rent and food on the table.

Indeed, the City is facing tremendous problems: an untreated overdose crisis, a public health homelessness and critical workforce shortfalls, to name a few. At the same time, we need to take a proactive approach in ensuring that San Franciscans have stable housing. The last thing we need is a huge surge in homelessness.

There has been tremendous media coverage about the surge in family homelessness, with over 442 families on the waitlist for shelter and hotels. The number of homeless families has increased 35% between 2019 and 2023. Many of these families are newly unhoused, while many other families have been in shelter for months or years. Every night, we have children sleeping in parks, in cars or on benches. With one hand, the City is proposing to cut funding for Proposition C family and women’s shelters, keeping the City’s family and women’s shelters at $5 million to family housing and $5.9 million to youth housing. This money must be restored. With the other hand, the City suggests cutting vouchers and subsidies for families—this is exactly what is being proposed.

The City is asking to slash up to $23 million in back-rent support for San Franciscans at risk of homelessness and displacement. It is state money that is going away, and for those really households still not in need of assistance, it will spell disaster. The last thing we need is a huge surge in homelessness.

So let’s say you get the waitlist but you still need additional help in the meantime. Food and safety are provided by day at the Loaves & Fishes compound Loaves & Fishes provides a men’s wash house, breakfast and lunch, as well as counseling and health services within Friendship Park, starting at 7 a.m. every day. Also located within Friendship Park is the office of the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee (SHOC), which runs a vendor program where unhoused community members can pick up copies of Street Sheet to sell for $2 each. The vendors keep all of the money. The SHOC office is open from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. daily. Sacramento’s Homeless Union is the state’s largest open food pantry from which the community can freely take, which can be viewed on the website and social media. In addition to the services provided within Friendship Park, Loaves & Fishes also provides a bed to sleep people from youth housing, but we still need to pay for more hotel vouchers and subsidies for families—

Sacramento’s homeless landscape. Famous for retaining land promised by the state when it failed to deliver on a promise of housing for the homeless, Sacramento has more than 50 vehicularly housed guests. The RVs on site do not have running water, but they are better than staying out on the streets. Camp Resolution fights for the homeless community of Sacramento, and is currently in a legal battle with the city over housing opportunities that the city offered in the residents’ leases.

Camp Resolution has a waitlist. People who progress to this stage and apply for a spot there meet with encampment council members for an interview. Then the community members vote on who to admit the applicant. Those who are allowed entry can look forward to a community full of art, understanding and communal strength.

Despite the continued threat of sweeps, Sacramento’s unhoused residents have until recently had no alternative to shelter that the city and state provided. As long as this crisis continues, the city might never see an end to this cycle. If so, it’s up to the community to provide relief. For more resources not listed here, check the Sacramento Homeless Union’s list of citywide resources for health care, legal defense, human trafficking resources and more at https://bit.ly/SHUStreetSheetCS
Cassy Leach woke up early on April 22, the day the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in Grants Pass v. Johnson across the country in Washington, D.C.

That morning, Leach, Mobile Intergreative Navigation Team, or MINT, cofounder, a Grants Pass service provider for people living in parks, tuned into the livestream while helping a 62-year-old homeless woman look for her cat, Sylvester. The cat had gone missing in Fruitdale Park when Grants Pass police forced the woman, who is blind in one eye, to move her tent and belongings two miles away to Tussing Park.

A Grants Pass city ordinance requires homeless residents living in vehicles to move every 72 hours, and police require anyone living in parks to move as often as is allowed by state law, which is also every 72 hours. City code bars anyone from sleeping in public spaces or using sleeping materials for the purpose of maintaining a temporary place to live under threat of criminal and civil penalty.

Later that day, Leach drove another homeless resident to a doctor’s appointment, dropped off wound supplies in local parks and transported an elderly, deaf homeless resident to a medical appointment, dropped off wound supplies for the people they don’t have to live in the parks.

"We still need to do something, so let’s just do it," Leach said.

"YOU DON’T ARREST BABIES WHO HAVE BLANKETS"
The Supreme Court is a lavish theater for a case deciding whether cities can punish people for sleeping when they have nowhere else to go.

Court staff ushered some 400 guests, lawyers, journalists and family members across the Grand Hall and into the courtroom through bronze gates flanked by marbled pillars on the morning of arguments. Dark, wine-red drapery framed the chambers on all sides. Above the curtains, friezes and red drapery lined the walls. Above the curtains, friezes and red drapery framed the chambers on all sides.

In this case, counsel for homeless residents argued the city of Grants Pass punished the status of being homeless by creating ordinances making it impossible for homeless people to be anywhere in the city without receiving constant fines or jail time — a violation of the Eighth Amendment.

For over two and a half hours, the justices questioned counsel on both sides, as well as Edwin Kneedler, U.S. Justice Department deputy solicitor general. A central theme was whether the line should be drawn between the involuntary status of being homeless and the conduct associated with being homeless.

That question of status and conduct arises from a 1962 Supreme Court decision in Robinson v. California. Justices ruled it is cruel and unusual for the state to punish a person for a status — in that case, the status of being addicted to narcotics — and therefore violated the Eighth Amendment. However, in a case six years later, Powell v. Texas, justices decided the state could punish a person for the conduct of using substances, creating a legal distinction between status and conduct.

The justices presented a range of hypoetheticals meant to clarify the question: Addiction is to drug use as sleeping is to what? And where is the line between a universal need and punishable behavior?

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson helped differentiate between the conduct of drug use as a consequence of the status of having an addiction and the conduct of using a blanket for the universal status of needing to sleep. She said drug use is punishable because it is not a universal need, despite some people having an addiction to drugs. However, people cannot be held criminally liable for universally necessary acts that are in and of themselves not criminal, like using a blanket to sleep.

"Not only is it something that everybody engages in, but it’s something that everybody has to engage in to be alive," Kneedler responded.

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Jackson asked whether the same ordinance could apply to eating in public spaces. Justice Neil Gorsuch extended the question to whether other biological necessities, like urination and defecation, would be considered status or conduct. Chief Justice John Roberts went so far as to ask if being a bank robber is considered a status, while Justices Samuel Alito and Gorsuch tested whether a person could steal food if they were hungry without being punished.

In an early fiery exchange, Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked Theane Evangelis, Grants Pass’ counsel, if the city enforced the ordinance against the general public or exclusively against people who are homeless.

"If a stargazer wants to take a blanket or a sleeping bag out at night to watch the stars and falls asleep, you don’t arrest him," Sotomayor said. "You don’t arrest babies who have blankets over them. You don’t arrest people who are sleeping on the beach." Evangelis said the laws apply to everyone.

"Yeah, that’s what you want to say," Sotomayor said.

Sotomayor referenced an amicus brief filed by a group of criminal law and punishment scholars, which included testimony from a police officer saying that someone would “violate the ordinance if he did not have another home to go to” and “laying on a blanket enjoying the park” would not violate the ordinance. In other words, sleeping in public is a crime for homeless individuals, but not for those who have a home.

Evangelis said one example exists of a person being arrested in a sleeping situation despite having a home address.

"There’s nothing in the law that criminalizes homelessness," Evangelis said.

"ENDING HOMELESSNESS IS POSSIBLE"Early on the cool April morning in Washington, D.C., before oral arguments began, a crowd gathered outside the Supreme Court. In the clear sky, the sun rose behind the building, forming a corona around its roof.

The National Homelessness Law Center, or NHLC, organized a rally for "Housing Not Handcuffs," a national campaign advocating for housing as a human right and demanding an end to the criminalization of homelessness.

Over 600 people showed up for the event, which included homelessness advocates from across the country giving speeches.

Jesse Rabinowitz, NHLC campaign and communications manager, said the court’s decision to hear the case indicates how politicized homelessness has become.
"It’s also a reflection on the fact that we do have a homelessness crisis in this country and our elected officials are not doing what they need to do to make sure everyone has housing that meets their needs," Rabinowitz said.

Rabinowitz said it is a catalyzing moment for homelessness advocacy across the nation.

“We know that ending homelessness is possible, but it’s going to take building power and getting our elected officials to do their jobs," he said.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2023 “Out of Reach” report showed that a worker earning minimum wage in Oregon cannot afford a two-bedroom at fair market rent in Grants Pass.

As the justices debated the constitutionality of the ordinance, which makes it a crime to sleep or sit in public spaces, Rabinowitz said the Supreme Court will set the stage for other communities to follow.

“Objective Reasonability”

The Oregon Legislature passed ORS 195.530 in 2021, which dictates laws regulating sitting, lying, sleeping, or keeping warm and dry outdoors on public property “must be objectively reasonable with regards to people experiencing homelessness.” The statute is vague, and cities like Portland — Oregon’s largest city — have battled in court to determine what is “objectively reasonable.”

Lawmakers intended to codify the 9th Circuit’s 2018 Martin v. Boise decision to avoid due process concerns, which ruled 9th Circuit jurisdictions, including Oregon, have the authority to regulate camping on public property “must be objectively reasonable with regards to people experiencing homelessness.” The statute is somewhat vague, and cities like Portland — Oregon’s largest city — have battled in court to determine what is “objectively reasonable.”

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One Grants Pass resident previously testified in a contentious May 17, 2023, City Council meeting, saying the community needed to “get aggressive” and “take their parks back,” calling on neighbors to “make them feel uncomfortable." Less than a year later, he told City Council the new MINT shelter is a “win” because "abracadabra" won’t fix the issue regardless of the Supreme Court’s decision.

A local “park watch group” organizer recently volunteered to install flooring in the new MINT building.

“I get emotional just thinking about it,” Leach said. “When you’re doing something good and right, people come along.”

Rabinowitz said in the places the court determines the ordinance is unconstitutional, “there has wrongly interpreted the Eighth Amendment in cases like 1962’s Robinson v. California. That could make way for laws criminalizing other involuntary statuses.

Rabinowitz said in the best-case scenario, the Supreme Court will set a bar — albeit a low bar — saying homelessness cannot be criminalized. People still need a place to go, regardless of the court’s decision. Until the support systems are in place to keep people from becoming homeless, the crisis will continue, according to Rabinowitz.

“Homelessness is a choice made by our elected officials every day when they fail to fund housing,” he said.

Leach, MINT volunteers and the coalition of organizers in Grants Pass are trying to address their community’s short- and long-term needs. Whether providing emergency shelter, health care and harm reduction tools to the people in the park, Leach said she believes Grants Pass will make national news again, “but for how we worked to fix homelessness and housing.”

Despite philosophical clashes and frustrations in the local community, Leach remains hopeful as the national spotlight shines on the city.

“There’s a weird unification that’s happening,” she said. “And it’s beautiful.”
The Rise of Homelessness?

Housing is being bought up and built for profit—speculators have changed the focus from providing a place for people to live to creating a profitable investment. It also observed other key trends in government policy that have supported increased speculation and commodification.

The most potent example is Blackstone—the world’s largest private equity firm with nearly $300 billion in assets under management—which bought more than 50,000 foreclosed homes from banks in the wake of the 2008 crisis, using government aid,

The housing crisis goes deeper than housing. Start with the digital transformation of the economy. To make a long story short, the digital revolution—including robotization, automation and AI—drives the process of eliminating living-wage jobs and searching the world for cheap labor. Financial speculation, or "financialization," has become more and more attractive as compared to production and manufacturing. Privatization of every public institution and service has become the rule rather than the exception.

This process of increasing speculation and investment has accelerated the commodification of housing, according to the Urban Institute. The Washington, D.C.-based think tank noted that speculators have changed the focus from providing a place for people to live to creating a profitable investment. It also observed other key trends in government policy that have supported increased commodification. They focused on society’s basic needs.

Governing that focuses on society’s basic needs. As a result, real estate interests with their collective lobbying power were able to exert political influence to remove or decrease support for public and subsidized housing, according to the Urban Institute. The Washington, D.C.-based think tank noted that speculators have changed the focus from providing a place for people to live to creating a profitable investment. It also observed other key trends in government policy that have supported increased commodification.

• The development of suburbs surrounding the “inner city,” exploiting and increasing segregation, inequality and the racial “wealth gap,” which abandoned Black, Latinx and other people of color to poverty.

At every level, governments provided subsidies to wealthier homeowners, including the annual $26 billion mortgage interest deduction. These subsidies led to be the use of homeownership as an investment strategy for millions, linking housing to financial markets.

Second, governments—especially the federal government—cut support for public and subsidized housing that was always inadequate, demolishing and converting hundreds of thousands of apartments since the 1970s.

As a result, real estate interests with their copious funds were able to exert political influence to control and corrupt the political process and good governance that focuses on society’s basic needs.
**WHEN SELF RELIANCE LEADS TO SOLITUDE**

My support system includes a mental health agency and my family, yet mostly I am in charge of meeting my essential needs. I’m proud of this independence—but at the same time, I find it frightening and lonely.

My level of independence is unusual for mental health consumers with a serious condition, as people who have disabilities like mine are not known for doing what I do. Most adults who have chronic psychiatric issues need a lot of help. Some don’t live to my age—I’m 59 as of this writing—or even make it past 50. Others develop dementia or other long-term impairments.

Having the ambition to attempt a return to the workforce at my age has to be unusual. Still, I recognize the challenges I face living alone with a disability.

To avoid homelessness, I must budget my pittance of an income, pay my bills, and make sure that I don’t get overdrawn. This is challenging, but I’ve learned some strategies, and as long as you’re above board with your government benefits, you’ll be OK.

As I manage my finances, I think of some of the unhoused people I have seen alone and deteriorating. It scares me to think, “What if that happens to me?”

In the movies, people are often shown living alone. It looks very glamorous onscreen. I presume that living alone works better when you have a lot of money. I would feel better if I had a lot of money, and I wouldn’t dislike that kind of glamor, if it actually exists.

Loneliness can make you very sick. It increases vulnerability to numerous diseases, and it can negatively affect mental and physical health. But there are a few bits of silver lining to the dark clouds of being alone. Whether or not these make it worthwhile is a good question, and it can only be answered by an individual considering how they feel, and whether they would be happier with more contact with people.

When you are alone, you have to be good enough company. I’ve spent a lot of time alone. Sometimes it really sucks eggs. But other times, it is just the right thing. Everyone needs times of solitude. If you can’t get any of that with people always in your face, you are prevented from the essential activity of being able to reflect. If you are inundated with other people’s needs, their issues, or their harassment, it blocks you from being able to process well enough.

I thought I wanted to be alone when I left my wife last year after 27 years of marriage. It may have been one of my classic mistakes—one that will affect me for the rest of my life. Being with people can be very good.

I believed it was my last chance to get out, and that I should jump on it. If your significant other is excessively unkind, then maybe solitude is better.

Now I am in a situation where, to an extent, I am struggling to survive, hoping that I can climb the economic ladder, improve my conditions and not always be so damned afraid.

I’ve done some of my best or most productive work while alone. I’ve accomplished this with physical labor in my youth, as well as with my writing. I believe that if I’m unable to feel the pain of loneliness—and I should feel it—something is likely wrong.

In the place where I now live, people have formed a vibrant community. We are all jammed together in the same building, yet each one of us has their own little room.

By nature, people need to form bonds, but they need themselves, too. When your housing is contingent on pleasing or getting along with others, compromise is necessary.

The word “dysfunctional” might be trendy, but at least you have less opportunity to be “dysfunctional” when alone. Maybe, that word should not be applied when you’re with other people.

Life and all of the things in life are temporary. Sometimes we must all look in the mirror and get to know the person we are looking at. We don’t necessarily need to be defined by someone else—or at least not when we judge ourselves.
WRITING: Write about your experience of homelessness in San Francisco, about policies you think the City should put in place or change, your opinion on local issues, or about something newsworthy happening in your neighborhood!

ARTWORK: Help transform ART into ACTION by designing artwork for STREET SHEET! We especially love art that uplifts homeless people, celebrates the power of community organizing, or calls out abuses of power!

PHOTOGRAPHY: Have a keen eye for beauty? Love capturing powerful moments at events? Have a photo of a Street Sheet vendor you’d like to share? We would love to run your photos in Street Sheet!

VISIT WWW.STREETSHEET.ORG/SUBMIT-YOUR-WRITING/ OR BRING SUBMISSIONS TO 280 TURK STREET TO BE CONSIDERED

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