

POLICY WATCH – December 2023

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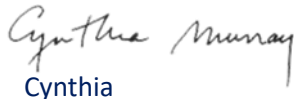


North Bay Leadership Council wishes you very Happy Holidays! We hope that you will be spending it with friends and family wherever you call home. In this issue, we look at the meaning of home and why it is so important. We also look at the differences of being unhoused v. homeless. And given the increase in homelessness, who is impacted and what we can do to have everyone “home for the holidays.”

I am retiring at the end of December and Joanne Webster is the new CEO of NBLC. We are thrilled to have Joanne become the leader of our organization and hope that you will get to know and appreciate her in this new role.

May your holidays be bright and filled with joy and love!

Best,


Cynthia

Home for the Holidays

Perhaps at no other time during the year is there more meaning in being home than during the holiday season. The belief that everyone should be able to be home and/or come home is pervasive to our thoughts of the holidays, with who and where we spend them very important. All who can try to be with their loved ones and friends to celebrate the holidays travelling distances near and far.

The words to the “Home for the Holidays” song sum up the feelings:

“Oh, there’s no place like home for the holidays
‘Cause no matter how far away you roam
If you wanna be happy in a million ways
For the holidays you can’t beat home sweet home!”

Rachel Mendoza writes about [The True Meaning Of "Home" - Going home for the holidays \(Link\)](#). Mendoza says, “As children, we weren't given much choice in the matter of where to spend our holidays, Christmas in Disney world, Thanksgiving at Grandma's, or New Years in your living room watching the ball drop from Times Square. Wherever you were, chances are it was with family. Home was a place and family were the people we spent special days with.”

“However, as we grow,” says Mendoza, “we take on new experiences, learn from them and develop a new, abstract outlook on what home really means. We learn that family isn't about who our siblings are or even who has the same blood as us. Somewhere between believing in Santa Claus and having a family of our own, we learn who our family truly is. Family are those special people that will give up their whole day to help us have a better one. Family are those who are the first to know our secrets and the last to judge our mistakes. Family are those who love us unconditionally no matter what we do or where life takes us.”

Mendoza says, “Once we come to terms with who our family really is, we are able to figure out what home really means. Home isn't a house or even the city you live in, it isn't always where your parents live or even where you fall asleep every night. Home is the place your wildest dreams reside, your hopes, your pride and every bit of your future. Home comes with the feeling of unconditional love and warmth. Many can associate "home" with a smell, like grandma's chocolate chip cookies or a sound, like waves on a beach. Many things can trigger our senses to recall memories of our idea of home.”

“Our ‘home’ can often change,” says Mendoza. “When a loved one moves, we often feel like a part of ourselves have gone with them. The more people we meet and memories we make, we learn that instead of having one home we can have several ‘homes’ all over the world because in the end, home is where the heart is and where our loved ones go.”

In [What is Home? The Many Definitions of Home \(Link\)](#) we get more understanding of what a home is, especially for the unhoused. The formerly homeless anonymous author asks: “So, What is Home? The meaning of home can change depending on who you ask. Here’s what home means for different people:

1. A Home is More Than a House

“In the dictionary, a home is defined as the “one’s place of residence”, one’s dwelling, or the place where one’s domestic activity happens. But these definitions fit more that of a house. A home is so much more than that.”

“Houses can be bought and sold over and over again. But a home stays with you forever. No matter where you go or the places you live, there’s always that yearning to return home. For some people, going back home means visiting the place where you grow up. But for most, it’s not about the place. It’s more about the feeling of being ‘at home’. It’s that feeling of relief, comfort, and warmth after a particularly exhausting day. The house you live in will not necessarily provide all those. Sometimes home, in this context, can be found in the arms of a lover, in the familiar smell of your mother, or even that favorite pillow you had since you were a child.”

2. Home is Where Memories Are Built

“There’s a reason why hometowns are called such. It’s the place you were born, took your first step, and made your first friends. In short, it’s a place filled with memories. But home doesn’t necessarily have to be the place you grew up in. It can also be that thing that takes you on a trip down memory lane. It can be anywhere or anything – from the barn you used to play in as a child to the smell of freshly-baked cookies. It’s the places or things that remind you of happy days and make you look forward to creating many more happy memories.”

3. It’s a Place of Refuge

“We all have those moments where we just want to take a break from the rest of the world. Home is where you can do just that. It’s that little slice of paradise that is completely your own. It’s where you can be in

your pajamas while eating ice cream right off the tub – and not worry about anyone judging you. It’s your personal sanctuary, the only place you can be totally yourself, and the one place where you can forget about an overbearing boss, a stressful coworker, or a demanding customer.”

“But more than that, it’s where you can hide and cry when things just seem so overwhelming. In short, it’s your own personal refuge where the problems of the world seem to fade into the background.”

4. Home is Where You Are Accepted

“Acceptance is a fundamental need among humans. We all want to be accepted by the people around us, especially those who matter to us. But sometimes, that acceptance that we so crave cannot be given by the people we live with. As a result, we felt cut off and unloved. The people we share a house with become strangers and the place we live in becomes merely a structure where we lay our heads for the night. But to find people who fully accept you for who and what you are – now that is home. Acceptance gives you the confidence to be yourself. It gives you a sense of security in the thought that you are enough and teaches you to be comfortable in your own skin.”

“Thus, the place where you’ve experienced full acceptance – whether it’s on the streets or in a different country – will always feel like home.”

5. Home Means Stability

“For someone like me who’s had to go from one house to another, having a home meant stability. And no, I’m not talking about a house. It’s more about the feeling of having a stable ground on which I can confidently stand and people whom I can confidently rely on. It’s like having an anchor that prevents you from drifting aimlessly into the wide open sea. Other people may try to shake that ground or cut off that anchor. But as long as you know that you have a home and you belong somewhere – wherever that might be – you won’t go astray.”

6. Home Means a Future

“When someone has a place to call home, it gives them a sense of safety, security, and stability. Once you have these things, you can stop thinking about surviving day in and day out. You can finally look beyond the horizon and into the distant future. For some people, this is how important a home is. It allows them to start dreaming and making plans for the future. It’s where hopes and dreams take shape and slowly become a reality.”

The Importance of Home

“Having a place that we can call home is something that most of us often take for granted. That’s why we don’t really give much thought to how important a home is. But now that you know the definitions of home, let’s talk about its importance. Here are some of the reasons why everyone deserves a place to call home:”

1. It increases your chances of getting a decent job.

“Not a lot of people realize this but having a home can directly affect your employment opportunities. I mean, it’s not easy to get a decent job if you’re changing your address every few months. And it can be hard to do your job properly if you don’t even have anywhere to lay your head for the night. Besides, having a sense of stability helps you establish roots more easily. This, in turn, affects your attitude towards work and the people you work with.”

2. It makes it easier to integrate into society.

“Whether you admit it or not, the stigma surrounding homelessness makes homeless people pariahs. They become social outcasts. That’s why a home is instrumental in someone’s integration into society. Without a home, it can be hard to establish ties with the local community. A home provides you with an opportunity to live in a dignified way and become a productive member of society.”

3. It reduces mental stress.

“When you feel secure, accepted, and loved, your mental health will definitely benefit. That’s what a home can provide you. For instance, children who grew up in loving, secure homes are less likely to develop mental health issues. While those who grew up without knowing security or stability are more likely to continue or start a cycle of generational trauma.”

4. A home offers protection.

“Needless to say, a home offers a sense of protection not just from the elements but also from the horrors of the world. And when you feel secure, you begin to trust people and feel a sense of stability. You no longer have to constantly watch your back or keep your guard up all the time. All these can lead to better community life.”

What Does Home Mean For the Homeless?

No matter your definition of home, one thing is clear: everybody deserves one. From the birds making their nest in the trees to the earthworms burrowing on the ground, all creatures big and small deserve a place to call home. If you have one to call your own, then you are very lucky. But many people around the world aren’t. Every year, the number of homeless people continues to rise. It’s just ridiculous how having a home nowadays seems like a privilege rather than a basic human right.”

“Yes, a home is more than just a sheltered space that protects you from the elements. But it can be difficult to feel warmth, security, and stability when you’re sleeping on the cold pavement. It’s hard to dream about the future when you don’t even know where to get your next meal or where to sleep when the authorities kick you out of that pavement. There’s a reason why the homeless are called ‘homeless’ and not ‘houseless.’ Their troubles extend far beyond not having a house.”

“According to a Canadian news website, home means various things for the homeless. One homeless woman shared that home for her means protection from abuse and finally having the time to confront her mental illness. It gives her hope and self-esteem. Another wrote that a home means a stable ground from which they can start to find their way back into society.”

“If you’ve never been homeless, it can be hard to understand where they’re coming from. It’s one of those things that you’ll only fully appreciate once you’re in it. But this shouldn’t hinder you from extending a helping hand. We may not be able to provide them with the safety and security of a house but we can make them feel loved, safe, and appreciated. In our own little ways, we can help them feel that someone still believes in them so they’ll feel confident in themselves again. After all, that’s what home is about.”

Upending the Myths About the Unhoused?

Speaking about the unhoused, [Who’s unhoused in California? Largest study in decades upends myths](#) by Sam Levin ([Link](#)), we learn “Nearly half of all unhoused adults in California are over the age of 50, with

Black residents dramatically overrepresented, according to the largest study of the state's homeless population in decades."

Levin says, "University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) research also revealed that 90% of the state's homeless population lost their housing in California, with 75% of them now living in the same county where they were last housed. The study further found that nearly nine out of 10 people reported that the cost of housing was the main barrier to leaving homelessness."

He adds, "The research from UCSF's Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, based on a representative survey of nearly 3,200 unhoused people, contradicts several persistent myths about the population, including that most unhoused people come from out of state to take advantage of services, as well as stereotypes that homeless people are mostly young adults who prefer to live outside and don't want help."

"People are homeless because their rent is too high. And their options are too few. And they have no cushion," Dr Margot Kushel, initiative director and lead investigator, told the Associated Press. "And it really makes you wonder how different things would look if we could solve that underlying problem."

"California is home to more than 171,000 people experiencing homelessness, comprising 30% of the homeless population in the US and half of all Americans who are unsheltered and living outside," says Levin. "The crisis has become a public health catastrophe in recent years as an ageing population is forced to live in tents, cars and other makeshift shelters, with thousands dying on the streets each year. California is considered the most unaffordable state for housing, where minimum-wage earners would have to work nearly 90 hours a week to afford a one-bedroom apartment."

He says, "The study further found that among the older population, 41% said they experienced their first episode of homelessness after age 50. Most participants in the research reported that the cost of living had become unsustainable before they lost housing, reporting a monthly median household income of \$960 in the six months before homelessness."

"Nearly half of adults surveyed were not living on a lease in the six months before facing homelessness, meaning they were couch-surfing or had moved in with family and friends in precarious situations. Renters with leases reported a median of only 10 days' notice that they were going to lose their housing, while people without leases reported a median of only one day of warning."

"Researchers reported that participants had endured significant trauma, with two-thirds reporting mental health symptoms, more than a third experiencing physical or sexual violence during homelessness, and more than a third visiting an emergency department in the past six months. Access to care and treatment was also a major challenge cited, with one in five who use substances reporting that they wanted treatment but could not obtain it."

"The study found that while Black residents make up 6% of California's general population, they account for 26% of the unhoused population. Native American and Indigenous people were also overrepresented, accounting for 12% of the unhoused population. Latinos made up 35% of the unhoused population, fairly comparable to their proportion of the general population."

“California accounts for 28% of the country’s entire homeless population and more than 50% of the unsheltered homeless individuals. The homeless population in the Bay Area has grown four times faster than the overall regional population since 2010.”

Proposition 1: Behavioral Health Bond and Services Act on the March Ballot

To provide more help for the unhoused, the Governor has placed a ballot measure on the March election. In [Gavin Newsom’s mental health plan is going to voters. Here’s what you need to know](#) by Kristen Hwang ([Link](#)) we learn that “California voters next spring will get to decide on a ballot measure to create housing and treatment options, especially for homeless individuals with serious mental illness. If it passes, the measure championed by Gov. Gavin Newsom would mark the first major overhaul of the state’s community mental health system in 20 years.”

Hwang says, “The two-pronged proposition on the March primary election ballot includes a nearly \$6.4 billion bond to build 10,000 treatment units and supportive housing. It also asks voters to redefine how counties spend money collected from a special ‘millionaire’s tax’ to allocate a share of it for housing for people with behavioral health illnesses.”

Newsom and supporters have promoted Proposition 1 as a way to help address the state’s deteriorating homelessness and addiction crises. They contend increased investment and an update to the state’s Mental Health Services Act is ‘long overdue.’ The most significant change put forth by the governor is a requirement that counties invest 30% of their Mental Health Services Act tax dollars — roughly \$1 billion based on last year’s revenue — in housing programs, including rental subsidies and navigation services. Counties would have to spend half this money on people who are chronically homeless or living in encampments. They could also use up to one quarter of the money to build or purchase housing units.

The second half of Newsom’s proposal places a \$6.4 billion general obligation bond before voters to dramatically expand the state’s psychiatric and addiction treatment infrastructure.

The California Chamber of Commerce has endorsed Prop 1. “California employers are on the front lines of our state’s homelessness crisis and many have been challenged with safety issues for both their workers and customers,” said CalChamber President and CEO Jennifer Barrera. “Today, the CalChamber board voted to support Proposition 1 because it provides an effective and ambitious plan that addresses the three interrelated social crises of homelessness, untreated serious mental illness and drug abuse in California. Importantly, the measure includes accountability metrics that will ensure funds are spent in the most effective ways possible so that services that are foundational for treatment are successful.”

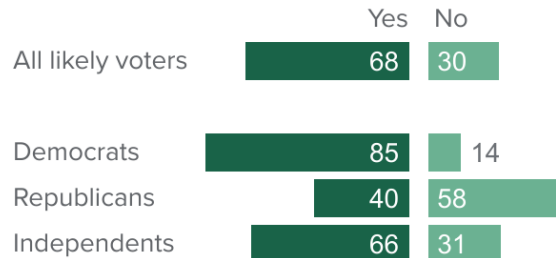
“If approved by voters, Proposition 1 will authorize \$6.38 billion in general obligation bonds to finance, among other things, more treatment beds and supportive housing units for Californians with severe behavioral health challenges and substance use disorders. Specifics of the measure can be found here ([Link](#)).”

“In addition to support from the business community, Prop. 1 has been endorsed by health care entities and cities.”

Other support for Prop 1 was found In the PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and their Government, (December 2023

[Link](#)) where “two in three likely voters would vote yes on Proposition 1, which includes the Behavioral Health Bond and Services Act.”

Two in three California likely voters say they would vote yes on Prop 1



“Six in ten Californians name economic conditions, homelessness, and housing as the three most important issues facing the people of California today.”

“A solid majority continues to view homelessness as a big problem in their part of California. Most are concerned about the presence of homeless people in their local community and see someone who is experiencing homelessness on a frequent basis. About two in ten say they have frequently interacted with homeless people or that they or someone in their close family has experienced homelessness or housing insecurity. Overwhelming majorities say that substance abuse (78%) and lack of affordable housing (70%) are major factors in homelessness in their local community. Majorities across parties favor policies to help people experiencing homelessness.”

“Californians name jobs, economy, and inflation, homelessness, and housing as the top state issues. Overwhelming majorities across the state’s major regions view housing affordability as a big problem in their part of California. About half say the cost of housing is a financial strain, and about half of lower-income adults and renters report that the cost of housing causes “a lot” of financial strain. Majorities of Californians across partisan and demographic groups and regions say the state needs more policies geared toward making both homebuying and rental housing more accessible.”

Given the housing crisis in California which contributes to the growth in homelessness, there is some good news for 2024. In [California’s Economy: Reasons For Optimism](#) ([Link](#)), UCLA Anderson Forecast report “expects a continued recovery in the housing market, including consistent new homebuilding and a demand for housing. Real estate represents a large portion of California’s GDP. According to Statista, finance, insurance, real estate, and leasing (grouped together in this metric) were \$477 billion in 2022, second only to professional and business services. 2023 has been a fairly unstable year for housing throughout the country.”

“In September, the California Association of Realtors (C.A.R.) released its 2024 Housing Market Forecast. Their predictions were guardedly optimistic, including the following:”

- Housing affordability (the percentage of households able to afford a home at the median price) will remain flat at 17%.
- The median home price will reach \$860,300, a rise of 6.2%.

- Sale of existing single-family homes will increase to 327,100 units, a rise of 22.3% from 2023.
- Slower growth and declining inflation will reduce mortgage interest rates and help stimulate home sales in California.

These housing market forecasts are another reason to be cautiously optimistic about the overall strength of California's economy in the coming years.

Where to Donate to Help the Unhoused

If you want to help the unhoused and other people in need, here are some good local charities to consider:

Sonoma County:

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Santa Rosa

Administration Offices: 987 Airway Court, Santa Rosa, CA 95403 (Map)

(707) 528-8712

www.srcharities.org

facebook.com/CatholicCharitiesSantaRosa/

Catholic Charities is an independent 501(C)(3) nonprofit serving the counties of Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Lake, Humboldt, and Del Norte. Working to solve the challenges of poverty, hunger, and marginalization, we reach over 76,000 men, women, and children each year.

Social Advocates for Youth – SAY

Administrative Offices: 2447 Summerfield Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95405 (Map)

(707) 544-3299

24-hour Emergency Hotline: (888) 729-0012

saysc.org

SAY began over 45 years ago with a mission to keep teens out of jail and off the streets. Today, they provide emergency shelter and long-term affordable housing, counseling, and career services for youth and their families of all ages throughout Sonoma County.

Here's a link to other Sonoma County organizations: [Link](#)

Marin County:

Homeward Bound of Marin

Jonathan's Place Shelter

New Beginnings Center

Transition to Wellness Medical Respite

Fourth Street Permanent Supportive Housing

Voyager Shelter

Carmel Permanent Supportive Housing

Families First Housing Case Management

Family Coordinated Entry

Casa Buena Permanent Supportive Housing

Jonathan's Place Permanent Supportive Housing

Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing
Custody to Community Jail Re-entry
Rapid Rehousing Deposit and Rental Assistance Program
Transition to Wellness Medical Respite
Whole Person Care Assertive Community Treatment & Housing Case Management Program
ESG-CV Rapid Rehousing
City High Utilizer Case Management

Other Marin County service providers for the unhoused: <https://housingfirst.marinhhs.org/community-partners>

Members in the News

Sonoma Raceway on Track for Overhaul

Cherishing a bright orange 1965 Mustang GT and a constant love of fast cars, Bay Cities Paving & Grading Vice President of Estimating, Robert Rosas, is gearing up for his dream job.

The Buck Institute's Eric Verdin Included Among Over 30 UCSF Scientists Honored for Highest Impact in Their Fields

Thirty-two UC San Francisco scientists are among the most influential individuals in their respective fields, according to the most recent analysis of research citations by the science and intellectual property company, Clarivate.

Sonoma State University President Mike Lee is at the White House for a California Stakeholder Meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris

SSU President Mike Lee is at the White House for a California Stakeholder Meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris.

The Buck Institute for Research on Aging Hosting the 1st International Roundtable of Longevity Clinics

It marks a groundbreaking moment in the field of longevity medicine.

North Bay Business Journal Celebrates the Release of the 2024 Book of Lists

The North Bay Business Journal is thrilled to celebrate the release of the 2024 Book of Lists, a resource compiled over the year containing key information about local companies, organizations, and business sectors.

Midstate Construction Corporation and Burbank Housing has Successfully Completed Two Project Homekey Projects

General Contractor Midstate Construction Corporation, has successfully completed two Project Homekey projects with Burbank Housing Development Corporation; Valley Lodge in Napa, CA, and Studios at Montero in Petaluma, CA.

The Press Democrat Announces Chris Fusco as Executive Editor

Chris Fusco, an award-winning journalist who has led newsrooms in two of the nation's largest cities, has been named executive editor of The Press Democrat.



Who We Are

Over thirty years ago, business leaders founded the North Bay Leadership Council on a simple premise: We can accomplish more by working together. Today, the Council includes 54 leading employers in the North Bay. Our members represent a wide variety of businesses, non-profits and educational institutions, with a workforce in excess of 25,000. As business and civic leaders, our goal is to promote sound public policy, innovation and sustainability to make our region a better place to live and work. For more information: Call 707.283.0028 / E-mail info@northbayleadership.org

www.northbayleadership.org