

LIVING IN BAY AREA

MAYORS LAY OUT PLANS FOR GETTING DOWNTOWN AREAS BACK IN BUSINESS

Rebound from pandemic has been quickest in San Jose, as San Francisco and Oakland catch up

By Julia Prodis Sulek JSULEK@BAYAREANEWSGROUP.COM

As the Bay Area’s three major urban centers — San Jose, Oakland and San Francisco — struggle to rebound from the lingering effects of a pandemic that emptied their downtowns, the one place most often overlooked for its vibrancy is, in fact, the one that has managed to bounce back the quickest.

That would be San Jose. Not that San Jose ever likes to be compared to San Francisco — San Joseans still bristle when old timers refer to San Francisco as “the city.” But this time, the recovery in downtown San Jose and its main Santa Clara Street corridor have blown away the famed “city by the bay.” “You never thought Santa Clara Street would be a lot livelier than the streets of downtown San Francisco, but it is, oh, much more so,” said Mark Ritchie of Ritchie Commercial real estate, which has offices in San Jose and San Francisco and spends time in each.

Downtown San Jose has restored some 90% of its foot traffic compared to the prepandemic days of 2019 — with a spike in December to nearly 100%, according to cell phone tracking data compiled by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute, a think tank that studies the region. Downtown Oakland, despite its monumental problems, is back to 74% of its prepandemic street activity. San Francisco’s downtown, meanwhile, has fared the worst by the same metric. It’s downtown foot traffic regained just 59% through March.

Granted, San Jose’s downtown is much smaller than San Francisco’s and Oakland’s. With office space in San Jose of about 10 million square feet compared to San Francisco’s 80 million and Oakland’s 35 million, it didn’t have as far to climb.

All three cities are still enduring epic office vacancies: San Francisco at 36%, San Jose at nearly 31% and Oakland at 23%, Bay Area Council data shows. And all

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San Jose: Customers Michelle Bozman, second from left, and Laura Romero, center, share a laugh while dining at The Pressroom, a new restaurant in downtown San Jose on June 26. Downtown San Jose is leading the Bay Area recovery. DAI SUGANO — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Oakland: Shoppers browse a fruit and vegetable stand outside the King of Grocery store along 8th Street in Chinatown on June 24. Though overall crime is down in Oakland, the numbers remain staggeringly high in the region. ARIC CRABB — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



San Francisco: Visitors play ping pong and foosbal — new additions to Union Square — on July 2. An initiative to make it easier to convert empty offices to housing downtown aims to bring people and foot traffic to the neighborhood. DAI SUGANO — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

EASIER PATH FOR PERMITS

Deciphering new CEQA laws

2 bills might lead to construction of more housing

By Paul Rogers PROGERS@BAYAREANEWSGROUP.COM

Gov. Gavin Newsom upended the state’s oldest and most powerful environmental laws last week, signing two bills that will make it easier to build housing in a state that has some of worst shortages and highest prices in America.

Newsom described the bills as the “most consequential

housing reform that we’ve seen in modern history in the state of California.”

But the legislation has angered some environmental groups and labor unions. Here are the details:

Q: What are the politics behind all this?

A: The bills passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in Sacramento, where Democrats have large majorities in the Senate and Assembly. Newsom played political hardball, threatening to block the state budget unless they

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A residential high-rise being built in San Jose in 2023. Loosening of California’s CEQA laws could lead to more construction. DAI SUGANO — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

ICE arrests up 77% in 2025

Immigration detentions have risen since Trump took office

By Caelyn Pender, Harriet Blair Rowan and Jovi Dai STAFF WRITERS

Since President Donald Trump took office in January, Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrests have shot up 77% in Northern California since the last year-plus of Joe Biden’s administration, according to recently released data from ICE.

The sharp rise in immigration enforcement comes amid the Trump administration’s push to deport millions of immigrants lacking permanent legal status. The effort has even strained the ability of sanctuary communities, such as Santa Clara County, to resist ICE arrests in their area.

From January through May, there have been an average of 334 monthly arrests in the San Francisco Area of Responsibility. That area includes arrests from the Central Valley to the Oregon border, as well as enforcement in Hawaii, Guam and Saipan, according to ICE.

In the last 15 months of the Biden administration, monthly arrests in the same area averaged 189.

The San Francisco spike is slightly less dramatic than the spike in enforcement nationwide, where monthly arrests averaged 9,300 from September 2023 through December 2024, and have grown 90%

ICE ARRESTS 334

Average monthly arrests from January through May in Bay Area region.

189

Average monthly arrests in the last 15 months of the Biden administration.

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CALIFORNIA

Military vets diversion law facing scrutiny

Dropped charges against S.J. police officer rekindles debate

By Robert Salonga RSALONGA@BAYAREANEWSGROUP.COM

SAN JOSE — Former San Jose police officer George Brown earlier this year learned of his legal fate after he was charged with a drunken road rage episode four years ago, based on allegations he repeatedly punched a woman on the side of a freeway and abused his police authority.

When his case was adjudicated in January, a law meant to help military veterans suffering from the effects of their service led to a court suspending his criminal charges on the condition he completes court-ordered rehabilitation. His police license with the state has since been taken off suspension.

Brown’s attorney argued to the Santa Clara County Superior Court that the alleged crimes were mitigated by PTSD he suffered from his time in the Air Force — including a stint in Iraq during which he volunteered to help wounded soldiers — prior to him joining the San Jose Police Department in 2015.

Brown, 41, benefited from the state’s military diversion statute, first enacted a decade ago. This year, the law also began covering felony crimes in addition to misdemeanors.

Prosecutors fought diversion for Brown, with District Attorney Jeff Rosen telling this news organization, “I doubt this new law was intended to give a free pass to a police officer charged with using his authority to beat a woman on a highway and put his

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