

**MOM'S MEALS**  
Three top Sonoma County chefs share the homey dishes their mothers once made. **B1**



**ALL SHOOK UP**  
A new team is rising to the top in The Press Democrat's prep baseball rankings. **B7**

# The Press Democrat

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 2025 • The voice of Sonoma and Napa counties — and the North Bay • PRESSDEMOCRAT.COM

## Controversial building plan OK'd

*Sonoma County Board of Supervisors vote 3-1 to allow purchase of 2 Brickway properties for \$32 million*

By **EMMA MURPHY**  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday agreed to move forward with controversial plans to purchase two office buildings near the county's regional airport.

The purchase, which is subject to a final vote in July, passed

on a 3-1 vote using a procedural maneuver to get around the 80% supermajority required for large expenditures. Supervisor Chris Coursey was the lone dissenting vote. Supervisor David Rabbitt recused himself without comment.

The purchase price for the buildings — 3850 and 3880 Brickway Boulevard — is \$32 million,

but additional expenses including closing costs, inspections and an estimated \$15 million in renovations raise the price to \$47 million.

The board's Tuesday vote put the properties in escrow, allowing county staff to complete inspections before a final vote to complete the purchase.

The two Brickway buildings, about six miles north of the main government campus in Santa Rosa, are one piece of an increasingly contentious plan

proposed by county officials to update and modernize aging and inadequate facilities.

That plan includes purchasing a third building nearby on Aviation Boulevard, which the county currently leases, and constructing a new five-story building six miles south on the county's main Santa Rosa campus.

The entire proposal is estimated to cost \$434 million.

Rabbitt, a vocal supporter of the plan who is among sever-

al officials to call the project a "generational move," has been sidelined from voting in recent months by a conflict-of-interest complaint filed with the Fair Political Practices Commission, or FPPC.

Service Employees International Union Local 1021, the largest county employee union, filed the complaint in February claiming Rabbitt should be disqualified because his campaign

TURN TO BRICKWAY » PAGE A2

## Dignity for indigent



DARRYL BUSH / FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

People join hands Saturday during the third annual Unclaimed Memorial Service at Pleasant Hills Memorial Park And Mortuary in Sebastopol.

*'They were somebody's neighbor, somebody's friend'; ceremony in Sebastopol honors those who died with no one to mourn them*

Under blue skies and wispy clouds Saturday, in a ceremony marked by song and silence, about 50 people gathered to pay their respects to people most of them never knew.

The public memorial hosted by Sonoma County celebrated those who lived among us but who died in 2024 without the means for burial or cremation. Many of them died lacking friends or family to take responsibility for those costs.

The county has long buried those who die indigent, but only in the last three years have officials hosted a public

**KERRY BENEFIELD**



memorial. Saturday's event was held at Pleasant Hills Memorial Park and Mortuary in Sebastopol, just steps from the rose garden where, through an agreement with the county, the ashes of the dead have been scattered for years.

It is a show of dignity that all deserve,

regardless of financial circumstance, organizers said.

"They were somebody's neighbor, somebody's friend," said Angela Struckmann, director of the Sonoma County Human Services Department which oversees the event. "It's really our perspective that everybody who has been cremated and put in the garden, they were a valuable member of our community."

The idea of a pauper's graveyard or potter's field is ancient. There are corners

TURN TO BENEFIELD » PAGE A9



Donald Trump

*'Millions out on the street virtually overnight'*

*How Trump's budget proposal, program cuts could affect California*

By **BEN CHRISTOPHER**  
**AND MARISA KENDALL**  
CALMATTERS

On Friday President Trump released a budget blueprint for the next fiscal year that would take a chainsaw to social, environmental and education programs. Some of the sharpest cuts are directed at housing programs that are meant to serve the poor, housing insecure and unhoused.

In California, millions are served by these funds and state and local governments depend on them to operate affordable housing, rental assistance, homeless service, planning and legal programs.

In a letter to the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, the president's budget director, Russel Vought, laid out \$163 billion in annual spending cuts coupled with "unprecedented increases" in military and border security spending. The cuts, Vought wrote, are directed at areas of spending that the administration found to be "contrary to the needs of ordinary working Americans and tilted toward funding niche non-governmental organizations and institutions of higher education committed to radical gender and climate ideologies antithetical to the American way of life."

TURN TO CALIFORNIA » PAGE A9

## Rohnert Park eyes scaling back homeless services

*With sales-tax receipts down, city looks for ways to help fill its \$5.2 million budget gap*

By **AMIE WINDSOR**  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Last year's closure of retail outlets and restaurants including Burlington Coat Factory, Red Lobster and the Dollar Store in Rohnert Park is having

an impact on the city's spending plan for the 2025-26 budget year, which begins July 1.

The City Council's initial plan calls for \$55 million in spending against an estimated \$49.8 million in revenue from property, sales and hotel use taxes, among other sources. The \$5.2 million gap is being sparked by businesses closing, with fewer sales tax dollars going into city coffers.

"Sales tax is suffering right now,"

Rohnert Park Finance Director Betsy Howze told the council during its two-day budgeting session in April.

There's also a budgetary wildcard of sorts: potential cuts at Sonoma State University, one of the city's economic engines. "For every \$1 million spent at SSU, \$625,000 is circulated through local businesses," Howze said.



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The city of Rohnert Park is facing a \$5.2 million budget deficit going into the 2025-26 fiscal year.

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**BORDER BATTLE:** Canadian PM Carney says his country is "not for sale, it won't be for sale, ever" in meeting with Trump. / **A2**

 **SANTA ROSA**  
High **69**, Low **47**  
THE WEATHER, **B14**

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The Press Democrat



# BENEFIELD

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of cemeteries across Sonoma County devoted to those who died without means. In Santa Rosa, such burials occurred in the Chanate Historic Cemetery and Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery among others.

While the notion of a public, albeit anonymous, burial is old, the idea to publicly celebrate the lives of those people is relatively new. Sonoma County has been doing a nondenominational ceremony since 2023, with the hope that more folks with attend and pay their respects.

In the hourlong ceremony Saturday, Struckmann read the names of each of the 35 people whose family and loved ones either couldn't be found or declined to participate.

"Independent of somebody's income or funds, they could have been very connected to their community, and cost should not be a barrier to recognizing somebody's life," said Paul Dunaway, director of the county's Adult and Aging Division.

To that point, Struckmann called out a personal detail for each of the 35 people honored: A Petaluma woman who loved flowers; a Cloverdale woman whose beloved dog was taken in by a friend after her death, and a Rohnert Park man who loved Nike sneakers and riding his scooter.

There were 12 women, the youngest of whom was 62.

Of the 23 men, there were two 53-year-olds, but the oldest among them was 95.

The ashes of 32 of the people remembered Saturday have been scattered in the rose garden at Pleasant Hills, including the ashes of one veteran. The remains of three other military veterans were taken to the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon in a service run by Ron Collier, who has been the county's Veteran's Remains Officer since 2012.

Collier works in concert with the county and Missing in America Veterans Recovery Program, a nonprofit organization dedicated to identifying and interring the unclaimed cremated remains of American veterans.

"What happens to all of these veterans who die and nobody is around to take care of them? ...



Members of the Sonoma County Threshold Choir sing as the names of people being honored during the third annual Unclaimed Memorial Service appear on an overhead video screen. The ceremony recognizes the lives of people who died in Sonoma County without friends or relatives to make their final arrangements.



**Venus Maher of Petaluma, right, sings with the group, Sonoma County Threshold Choir, during the third annual Unclaimed Memorial Service.**

(T)hey are forgotten," he said. "In our particular organization, you are not forgotten. We are going to make sure that you get your honors and our final benefits that you are entitled to receive from the U.S. government."

"With the help of the county, and the coroner's office, and the public guardian's office, we are able to do this for veterans that are unclaimed," he said.

It is the county's Public Administrator/Guardian Conservator office that is charged with finding family and friends of the deceased.

Of the more than 4,300 people who died in Sonoma County last year, about 150 were referred to the Office of the county Public Administrator, Guardian and

Conservator Office.

It is that office that is charged with finding family and friends of the deceased to make final arrangements.

It's part detective work, part labor of care, according to Jennifer Hainstock, the county's chief deputy Public Administrator, Guardian and Conservator, whose office oversees that search work.

"Everybody was somebody's baby at some point," she said. "They had hopes and dreams, so we want to remember everybody."

The people in Hainstock's office cull information from newspaper stories, social media accounts, online databases. They make calls, they send emails, they write letters.

And most of the time, they are successful.

"We are able to find a family member or other appropriate person to make arrangements for the majority of the individuals forwarded to our program," Struckmann. "But for some individuals, that's not possible which was the case for the people we are remembering here today."

In a high profile case in 2024, the people in Hainstock's office, after being unable to find family of Ellynn Grace Davis, also known as Grace Davis but more

commonly, simply "Grace," reached out to friends. While she lived in a Santa Rosa park for years, Grace cultivated a wide array of friendships.

One of those friends, Vicky Kumpfer, was reached by the county office and agreed to be responsible for Grace's remains. Kumpfer held two separate public celebrations of Grace's life, and donors offset the \$1,833 in cremation fees Kumpfer incurred.

In some cases on Saturday, family was found but were not in a position to claim the remains.

U.S. Army veteran Joseph Emmons, 63, was interred in the Pleasant Hills Memorial Park rose garden instead of the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon because of a family connection.

"As a child, he would often come to Pleasant Hills Cemetery to visit his sister's grave," Struckmann said. "Mr. Emmons' son said that it means so much to have his dad's final resting place here and that's why he chose to be here as opposed to going to the veteran's cemetery."

The ceremony was buoyed by songs performed by The Threshold Choir, a nondenominational organization that provides song for the dying. On Saturday, the group of 15 singers performed

- REMEMBERING THOSE WHO DIED IN 2024
- Hiram Aguirre, 95  
Lorenzo Ayala-Hernandez, 55  
Katheryn Boland, 70  
Diana Brand, 77  
Brian K. Burris, 61  
Janis Cavas, 77  
Robert Clark, 66  
John Coleman, 62  
Craig Delanty, 72  
Joseph Emmons, 63  
Sedigheh Fakhr, 83  
Mark Fell, 59  
Richard Fletcher, 76  
Ricardo Guzman, 70  
Jaqueline Hancock, 82  
Edward F. Hewitt, 78  
Matthew Irving, 58  
James Jordan, 69  
Holly Junemann, 75  
Jason Lamb, 53  
Nancy Lisk, 81  
Barbara Matz, 79  
Patrick Powers, 53  
Juliana Rahman, 66  
Robert Roy, 59  
Mario Russo, 80  
Michele Schauer, 62  
Stephen Schneider, 70  
Mary Jane Simoncini, 66  
Carol St. Clare 78  
Jeffrey Story, 62  
John Van Patten, 73  
David Winters, 60  
James Belden Wolverton, 66  
James Young, 82  
Source: Sonoma County

five songs, including "My Grateful Heart" by Laura Fannon.

My grateful heart, so filled with years of living.

Memories flow by me like petals on a stream.

My grateful heart forgives so many sorrows,

Brings peace that lasts forever, Illuminates the dream.

After a moment of silence facing the rose garden, the group of about 50 celebrants took each other's hands and ended the ceremony in collective song.

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# CALIFORNIA

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That includes \$33.5 billion in proposed cuts to the Housing and Urban Development department, a 44% reduction from current levels.

Presidential budget requests rarely reflect what Congress ultimately passes into law but are instead often viewed as something between an opening negotiating bid and a political vision board.

Even so, the budget document makes for quite a vision — one that, if realized, would upend decades of federal housing policy and affect millions of lives.

The sheer breadth of the cuts provides an odd kind of solace to some affordable housing advocates.

"By following through on such a huge level with so many proposals that are going to gut assistance to low-income people across the country, including his own party's states, he's putting his own members of Congress in a very difficult place," said Matt Schwartz, president of the California Housing Partnership, a nonprofit that advocates for more affordable housing. "The level of carnage that would be involved in doing these things is probably going to send some Republican senators running for the exits."

A handful of powerful GOP senators have, indeed, already pushed back on the president's proposal, though much of their ire was directed at what they saw as a lack of sufficient military spending.

The largest single cut in federal housing policy would target the Housing Choice Voucher program. Better known as Section 8, it's currently administered by the federal government and helps low-income ten-



**A homeless encampment on a dirt lot in West Fresno on Jan. 30. Proposed cuts to the Housing and Urban Development department total \$33.5 billion, a 44% reduction.**

ants with their rental payments. The White House is proposing shifting responsibility for the administration of that program, which it calls "dysfunctional," to states, while cutting its funding in half.

It also proposes a two-year limit on how long a single person can receive help. That change is "completely out of touch with what people are facing in the housing market," said Alex Visotzky, senior California policy fellow at the National Alliance to End Homelessness. With soaring rents outpacing people's incomes, low-income tenants aren't going to be able to magically earn enough money to start paying rent in two years, he said.

Additional cuts to four other housing voucher programs are meant to save \$27 billion annually.

"You'd be looking at millions of people out on the street virtually overnight," said Schwartz. "There's no way states could maintain the same level of assistance."

The administration proposes to save nearly \$5 billion more by eliminating funds for local economic development grants, affordable housing developments and local initiatives

to reduce regulatory barriers to new housing.

That latter program, a Biden-era initiative known as Pathways to Removing Obstacle Housing, was denounced in the administration's budget write-up as a "woke" program that has pursued "radical racial, gender, and climate goals."

The White House pointed specifically to a \$6.7 million grant made to Los Angeles County to fund infrastructure planning, public transit-oriented housing and, as described in the county's funding proposal, rezoning that would reverse the region's "legacy of past systemic racism."

**Radical policy reshuffle**

The budget would slash federal homelessness funding by \$532 million, while also radically changing the way those funds are distributed. The Continuum of Care program — the main way the federal government distributes funds to fight homelessness — would effectively end. It would be replaced by an Emergency Solutions Grant program.

The continuum program funds long-term solutions to homelessness, including permanent supportive housing, which is housing that comes with case management, counseling and

other services for people with disabilities, mental illnesses, addictions or other struggles that mean they require extra help. Emergency Solutions Grants, on the other hand, fund more short-term solutions, such as homeless shelters, or short-term rental assistance for people who don't need extra services.

That shift in funding would mean thousands of people would lose their supportive housing and end up back on the street, said Visotzky from the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

"This would be a significant shift away from the solution to homelessness, which is housing, towards shelter," he said. "This budget is going to take away all the pathways to get out of shelter and into housing."

Homeless veterans fared better. The budget proposes a \$1.1 billion increase "for the President's commitment to ending veterans' homelessness." Those funds would go to Veterans Affairs for rental assistance, case management and support services.

The budget also calls for the elimination of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, an agency tasked with coordinating homeless policy at the federal level, which the administration had already gutted.

**'Fair housing' fading?**

The White House also proposes zeroing out a grant program that funds nonprofit legal aid organizations that enforce national fair housing laws. According to the explanatory summary of the cuts published by the administration, these organizations advocate "against single family neighborhoods and promote radical equity policies."

That characterization is strongly disputed by Car-

oline Peattie, executive director of the Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California. Federally recognized nonprofit fair housing groups processed 74% of all fair housing complaints submitted across the country in 2023, according to data compiled by the National Fair Housing Alliance. The remainder go to federal and state housing regulators.

A recent example: In 2022, Peattie's organization received a complaint that a Nevada-based appraisal company was systematically undervaluing homes owned by Black and Latino Californians. The nonprofit investigated and submitted a complaint to the state. The California Civil Rights Department reached a settlement with the appraisal company in mid-April.

If all the cuts go into effect as proposed, Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California would lose roughly 75% of its funding, said Peattie.

"It's just appalling," she said. "When the fair housing organizations go away, then what?"

The across-the-board cuts come after months of legal battle between fair housing organizations and the administration. In February the Department of Government Efficiency, helmed by Elon Musk, abruptly terminated a key source of congressionally authorized funding for dozens of private fair housing organizations, including Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California. The groups sued. With that lawsuit pending, the funds, appropriated for fiscal year 2024, "are still in the ether," said Peattie.

Last month, Congress passed a bill to keep government spending at current levels from the prior year, meaning that fiscal year 2025 spending is in a holding pattern for now.

"But as for fiscal year 2026, all bets are off," said Peattie.

Life Tributes

In Loving Memory of  
Dan Nicholas  
March 1, 1934—May 7, 2019

As long as I live  
you will live.  
As long as I live  
you will be remembered.  
As long as I live  
you will be loved.

Greatly loved, deeply missed.  
Your Janis

Life Tributes

For information on how to submit a Life Tribute call  
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