

San Francisco Chronicle

SFCHRONICLE.COM

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026

CONTAINS RECYCLED PAPER

\$3.00



Brontë Wittpenn/S.F. Chronicle

Manuel "Manny" Garcia waters vegetables on Monday at Fig Leaf Gardens in Oakland. Garcia does more morning and evening watering in the 1,400-square-foot garden as high temperatures near.

Homeless agency chief to exit role

Departure allows Lurie to make key appointment

By J.D. Morris and Alyce McFadden
STAFF WRITERS

Shireen McSpadden, the head of San Francisco's homelessness agency, will step down from her role this summer, the Chronicle has learned. The vacancy will present Mayor Daniel Lurie with an opportunity to make a crucial appointment and wield greater influence over the city's approach to homelessness.

McSpadden plans to retire as executive director of the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing effective June 30, according to letters she sent Monday to community partners and the heads of other city departments. She was appointed in 2021 by then-Mayor London Breed.

McSpadden did not state a reason for the timing of her retirement, though she acknowledged that she had completed nearly 23 years of service for City Hall. She joins other high-profile department heads who've left roles since Lurie took office in January 2025.

During McSpadden's tenure, San Francisco's homeless population grew to about 8,300 people, according to the most recent count in 2024, a 7% jump over 2022. That is *Homeless continues on A9*

25-story tower proposed for notorious housing site

By J.K. Dineen
STAFF WRITER

A long-stalled residential complex in San Francisco's South of Market that became notable for its abandoned foundation full of dirty water, is about to get super-sized.

One of many projects around the city that are attempting to go taller and denser in an effort to become financially viable, the new plan for 360 Fifth St. calls for a 25-story tower with 272 units.

A previous plan for an eight-story, 127-unit building was approved in 2018 but was abandoned during the pandemic after the builder excavated the foundation. That led City Attorney David Chiu to sue the owner, charging that the property had become a blighted hole in the heart of the South of Market area marred by "graffiti, garbage, mosquito infestations, and standing water." Some neighbors dubbed the property "Lake SoMa."

A new developer, Thompson Builders, acquired the site and is also buying an ad- *Tower continues on A11*

Historic winter heat wave explained

Confluence of atmospheric conditions triggers triple-digit temps

By Greg Porter
SENIOR NEWSROOM
METEOROLOGIST

It's not supposed to be like this.

Forecasts are calling for temperatures as high as 114 degrees in parts of California this week. Extreme heat warnings, among the earliest on record, are in effect from Los Angeles to Tucson, Ariz., through Friday. Hundreds of weather stations west of the Rockies are poised to shatter monthly temperature records, in some cases by as much as 10 degrees.

Those numbers would be eye-popping in the middle of summer. Seeing them in *Heat continues on A8*



Minh Connors/S.F. Chronicle

Angel Vargas, a construction worker, wipes sweat from his face after working at a construction site Tuesday in the Mission District.

INSIDE: Fears of an early wildfire season escalate amid California's summerlike weather. **A8**

Ex-fire marshal's consulting gig raises alarms

By J.K. Dineen
STAFF WRITER

In 2022 Kenneth Cofflin had a big job to do.

At the time he was the San Francisco fire marshal in charge of updating the city's

fire code, an 800-page document that included a controversial requirement that residential high-rises built before 1974 have sprinklers installed in every room. He ushered the legislation through the fire commission and the

Board of Supervisors before former Mayor London Breed signed it into law.

Now, retired from that position for a little more than a year, Cofflin has started a fire safety consulting business. Among the services he pro-

vides: helping condo homeowner associations obtain "exemptions" to the very sprinkler ordinance he wrote.

For a fee, his company, Code 403, provides a "San Francisco residential sprin- *Sprinklers continues on A11*

When safety, tech are on collision course

As vehicles become safer, Bay Area has seen an epidemic of distracted driving

By Rachel Swan
STAFF WRITER

Had the crash video not been so terrifying, it might have passed for low comedy.

A white pickup slammed into a California Highway Patrol cruiser that was parked at the scene of a prior accident. The driver told officers he had been watching YouTube videos on his phone and didn't see the flares or the stationary patrol car. He didn't even glimpse the officer who was waving a strobe flashlight, and who had to jump out of the way when the truck barreled in.

The March 3 incident on Highway 101 in Redwood City illustrated a form of driver misbehavior that's become more and more common, as screens become normalized in cars. Motorists habitually pick up their phones while sitting in traffic, or scroll dashboard touch screens as they cruise along a freeway at 65 miles per hour. People have their eyes glued to navigation apps instead of the road.

"We see people reading, watching videos, watching a football game," said CHP officer Sophie Lu, a spokesperson. *Driving continues on A9*



Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

A driver navigates with a touch screen while driving a Tesla in 2018. Experts say more people are using their screens for entertainment.

