



Volunteers of the Save the Bay nonprofit organization plant native species on Dec. 10 at a horizontal levee pilot project under construction in Palo Alto. The first of its kind in the San Francisco Bay, it will debut this spring.

‘Living’ levee to rise with seas

Pilot project hopes to restore shoreline, improve water quality

By Tara Duggan
STAFF WRITER

Under a fresh plot of dirt along the San Francisco Bay, a revolutionary new way to address climate change is taking shape in Palo Alto.

Young native plants are taking root in the soil, which sits atop a layer of wood chips, a layer of sand and a layer of gravel. Treated water from a nearby wastewater plant will soon trickle through it all, irrigating the plants while getting extra filtering before going into the bay.

This so-called living levee is designed to grow in elevation as plants die off and sediment settles, adjusting to rising seas and protecting the shoreline from big storms. It can be used in conjunction with conventional seawalls, which don't integrate into the habitat and may eventually be overtopped.

That is the plan behind Palo Alto's new project along its shore, which will be the first of its kind in the San Francisco Bay when it debuts this spring and one of only a few known similar projects worldwide. Al-



Native riparian shrubs like black elderberry and ninebark and other such plants thrive in the type of freshwater marsh that originally existed here.

so called a horizontal levee because it is wide and gently sloping, it will turn a 315-foot stretch of the shoreline back to a freshwater marsh, with a few modern twists. The project is meant to be a blueprint for other projects both in Palo Alto and elsewhere in the bay; Hayward plans to debut a mile-long version next summer.

“In some ways, this is a

return to the way that water used to enter the bay before all the development took place,” said David Sedlak, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at UC Berkeley who has been doing research on a horizontal levee prototype from another Hayward location for about a decade.

California law requires all municipalities on the

bay and in the coastal zone to have a plan by 2034 to protect shorelines from sea level rise. While Foster City opted to build a massive seawall, the state encourages what are called nature-based solutions, which re-create natural flood control processes, such as restored salt marshes in the South Bay.

But the Palo Alto horizon-

Housing proposal divides Stinson

New units rare in town, but parking at hub would be lost

By Julie Johnson
STAFF WRITER

A Marin County developer is proposing a significant boost to housing in Stinson Beach.

Paul Thompson, president of Thompson Builders, a Novato-based construction firm, applied to tear down the Stinson Beach post office and build a new one with two second-floor apartments and four detached condos.

The six-unit project — a modest dent in the state's housing crisis — could offer rare new housing opportunities for the tiny seaside village with fewer than 400 full-time residents hemmed in by Mount Tamalpais and the sea. But it's not clear if local workers will benefit.

“We have a severe situation,” said Sarah Jones, director of the Marin County Community Development Agency, which oversees the approvals. “People who work in West Marin can't afford to live there. It impacts everything.”

The four condos would be market-rate residences, according to the proposal filed in November. The apartments would be moderate-income one-bedroom units with decks, covered parking and storage. In high-income Marin County, a person making as much as \$156,000 annually could qualify.

Riley Hurd, an attorney representing the developer, said Thompson jumped on the opportunity to buy the commercial property when it went up for

Condos continues on A8

How life in S.F. has changed this decade

By Danielle Echeverria
and Hanna Zakharenko

STAFF WRITERS

Just five years into the 2020s, San Francisco already looks very different than it did the previous decade. The pandemic brought on sudden and dramatic changes that continued to have ripple effects long after stay-at-home orders were lifted. The tech industry rose and fell and rose again, and residents rushed out only to begin trickling back. The streets of the city look dramatically different as downtown has hollowed, even as crime first surged and then plummeted to historic lows.

All of these developments have come with profound changes in who lives here, what we do to get by, and how we spend our time and live our lives.

Here, we'll highlight some of the largest changes that the 2020s have wrought upon the City by the Bay.

It's no secret that San Francisco's population shrank during the pandemic as workers, freed from daily commutes downtown, sought out bigger homes and more space.

That decline was not evenly distributed across the city's ethnic groups. The non-Hispanic white

Changes continues on A7

‘Monster theory’ can help chase fears

By Nanette Asimov
STAFF WRITER

It's been a tough year, with Americans deeply divided, anxieties running high — and the holidays upon us.

Monsters, it turns out, can help.

Mummies. Zombies. Vampires. Werewolves — think of them as social decoders.

“They package really serious, really political, really controversial ideas in forms that people are willing to digest,” said Renee Fox, a literature professor and co-director of the Center for Monster Studies, a research hub at UC Santa Cruz.

Feral brutes and spectral phantasms — such as Latin America's weeping Llorona, Japan's vengeful Oiwa and, always, Frankenstein's monster — including his appearance in the latest remake from filmmaker Guillermo del Toro — serve the needs of humans by embodying our worst fears, say experts in the 30-year-old academic field of, yes, “monster theory.”

This can work to the good if the monster represents stressful subjects like divorce or bullying, making them easier to talk about. It can also advance the cause of evil if the loathsome creatures are used to

Monsters continues on A9



Renee Fox, co-director of the Center for Monster Studies at UC Santa Cruz, says monster studies explore history, politics and human identity.