

San Jose first city in CA to implement new ordinance that allows sale of ADUs  
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# Evergreen Times

JULY 26 - AUG. 8, 2024 ■ VOL. 41, NO. 16

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Shuttered Pleasant Hills Golf Course in Evergreen could become the future blueprint for low-density housing for the city of San Jose. File photo

## Residents convey their preferences for the proposed Pleasant Hills Golf Course Development in Evergreen

By William Bellou  
Publisher

A vast redevelopment proposal at the shuttered Pleasant Hills Golf Course in Evergreen Valley is drawing support from residents for low-density housing instead of high-density apartments for the project based on recent workshops and online survey.

The 114-acre site, located at South White and Tully roads in the Lake Cunningham area of San Jose, could possibly be transformed to residential, commercial, open spaces, amenities, transportation, sustainability, green buildings and

community programs in the next few years.

The development proposal is being presented by San Jose-based Lakeside Community, a real estate venture headed by veteran Bay Area executives Tony Arreola and Mark Lazzarini, who have proposed the redevelopment.

"We are grateful for the time and thought that local residents and business owners have invested in the community workshops and online surveys," Arreola said. "We have been eager to hear their vision" for the site's future.

### State mandated housing

The redevelopment of the old golf course is important to San Jose when the state is mandating the city to submit a blueprint for the development of 62,000 housing units over the next eight years.

Residents have voiced preference for a development that is cohesive with the attributes and characteristics of the existing neighborhood, which is comprised primarily of single-family homes, open space, and retail space specifically for locally-owned businesses, including restaurants.

Community leaders say the redevelopment proposal could become a blueprint for future infill project proposals in San Jose.

## 'Creating Leaders From Learners'

*Sacred Heart Community Service needs high-quality backpacks for their annual Pack-A-Back program*

On Tuesday, August 1st, SHCS will begin its annual Pack-A-Back school supply and backpack distribution with the goal of providing 4,000 students with the school supplies they need for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Thanks to generous support from corporate and community sponsors (listed below), SHCS has collected hundreds of backpacks. However, there is still a need for donations to ensure every child receives a high-quality backpack and school supplies. SHCS is inviting members of the community to help students in the area by donating high quality backpacks, supplies, or dollars. For information on how to donate or volunteer, please visit: <https://www.sacredheartcs.org/pab2024>

Backpacks will be distributed to parents/guardians who pre-registered online at Sacred Heart's 1381 S. First Street location on Tuesday, July 30th (8a-5p) and Thursday, August 1st (8a-3p). Please note that Sacred Heart will not be able to provide backpacks to members who have not pre-registered.

Sacred Heart Community Service has been working with the San Jose Unified School District to assess the necessary school supply lists for each grade level, ensuring students have the right materials for their first day of school. In addition to helping local students get the supplies they need, the Pack-A-Back program can save families an average of \$400 which they can



use on other recurring expenses like rent or groceries. Families will not only take home a backpack (and school supplies) for the new school year, but Sacred Heart Community Service also invites the community to learn about other health/wellness resources. During Pack-A-Back, SHCS will host a resource fair where local service providers will share information about various programs and services available to the community.

Sacred Heart is relying on donations and volunteer efforts to meet its goal of distributing backpacks to 4,000 children.

To donate/volunteer, visit: <https://www.sacredheartcs.org/pab2024>; Sacred Heart Community Service; 1381 S First St, San Jose, CA 95110.

## Restoration Shop at History San Jose restores interesting, historic items

By Allan Greenberg  
Special to the Times

Every Tuesday and Thursday the restoration shop at History San Jose comes alive with volunteers who use their talents and skills to restore interesting, historic items from the past. These items can be a 19th century stage wagon, autos like a 1903 Haynes Apperson, or even an early washing machine.

The goal of these restorations is to bring the items back as closely as possible to when they were new



Volunteers at the Restoration Shop pose after working on the Museum's 1927 Model T Truck, getting it in good running order. So far they've rebuilt the starter, added a modern ignition switch, rewired the electrical system, and added a new one-gallon gas tank.

or early in their life. In some cases, research begins first to understand what the item is and how it functioned or looked like in its early life. Early documents, historic pho-

tos and online searches start before work begins on the item. Also, many photographs are taken before the item is disassembled. Sometimes  
*See RESTORATION, page 9*

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Times **Local News**

## California families spend just 5 hours and 51 mins of quality time together each week, according to survey

Spending time with family is universally cherished as one of life's profound yet fundamental joys. Indeed, a Pew Research Center survey found that for many Americans, family time is a paramount priority. Backyard Oasis, a company that offers premium backyard furniture & gear, recently conducted a survey of 3,000 families to determine how much quality time they spend together each week.

The survey revealed that the average California family spends just 5 hours and 51 minutes of quality time together each week (compared to a national average of 6 hours and 17 minutes). While that might sound like just enough time to binge-watch a couple of episodes of your favorite show, the good news is that, compared to a similar study

in 2018, families are spending over one and a half more hours per week together. This is a 37% increase compared to six years ago.

There were notable geographical variations. North Dakota families, for example, spend 8 hours and 30 minutes together each week, an increase of almost 100%. On the other hand, families in West Virginia spend the least amount of time together, averaging just 4 hours and 30 minutes of quality time each week.

Backyard Oasis delved further into the topic of quality family time. They asked California respondents how many times they sit together for meals each week, with the average being four times.

When it comes to activities, families have varied preferences.



The survey found that the most favored activity for families to do together is watching TV or movies, with 41% of respondents choosing this option.

Other popular activities

include:

- Playing board games or video games: 17%
- Traveling or taking day trips: 15%
- Engaging in outdoor activities

(e.g., hiking, biking): 13%

- Cooking or baking together: 13%

And then there's the question of technology. When asked about the use of electronic devices during family time, 12% of families admitted that phones are always welcome at the dinner table. A more laid-back 67% said devices are sometimes allowed, while a strict 5% said they're banned altogether.

"Family time is a cornerstone of happiness and well-being," says Andy Wu of Backyard Oasis. "Despite modern day challenges, the good news is that families are spending nearly two hours more together each week compared to a few years ago, which is a positive trend. We hope these insights encourage more families to prioritize and cherish their time together, creating lasting memories and stronger bonds."

## Silicon Valley water agency delays decision to fine homeless people

By William Bellou  
Publisher

The Valley Water board of directors last week agreed to postpone voting on a policy that poses \$500 fines or up to 30 days in jail for unhoused people residing on agency-owned land.

The directors voiced their desire to hear from other government agencies, nonprofits and unhoused advocates at an Oct. 11 housing summit before making a decision regarding imposing a new policy.

"The status quo is not working. Maybe this ordinance isn't perfect," Director Barbara Keegan said. "But we're spending a lot of money to deal with unhoused issues and it's not benefiting the unhoused or the society at large."

Over the last three years, Valley Water has spent \$8 million cleaning encampments and \$4.8 million relocating encampments along Coyote Creek. In that period, workers also removed nearly 6 million pounds of trash and debris.

There are currently more than 700 people camping along Valley Water property, a number seems to be rising each year. Valley Water owns the land rights to 295 miles of the 800 miles of waterways in Santa Clara County.

Homeless advocates urged the board not to go through with the policy until safe places for people are implemented.

By the end of fiscal year 2025, the city believes it can offer 1,200 new shelter options for the unhoused.

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Times **Community News**

# East Side Union High School District announced its policy to serve nutritious meals every school day

East Side Union High School District announced its policy to serve nutritious meals every school day under the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Afterschool Snack Program. Breakfasts and lunches will be served free of charge every school day, but East Side Union High School Dis-

trict is still required to make eligibility determinations for free and reduced price meals. Effective July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, children are considered eligible for free or reduced-price meals if the household income is less than or equal to the federal guidelines.

Free Eligibility Scale Meals, Snacks, and Milk						Reduced-price Eligibility Scale Meals and Snacks					
Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice Per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly	Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice Per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly
1	\$ 18,954	\$ 1,580	\$ 790	\$ 729	\$ 365	1	\$ 26,973	\$ 2,248	\$ 1,124	\$ 1,038	\$ 519
2	\$ 25,636	\$ 2,137	\$ 1,069	\$ 986	\$ 493	2	\$ 36,482	\$ 3,041	\$ 1,521	\$ 1,404	\$ 702
3	\$ 32,318	\$ 2,694	\$ 1,347	\$ 1,243	\$ 622	3	\$ 45,991	\$ 3,833	\$ 1,917	\$ 1,769	\$ 885
4	\$ 39,000	\$ 3,250	\$ 1,625	\$ 1,500	\$ 750	4	\$ 55,500	\$ 4,625	\$ 2,313	\$ 2,135	\$ 1,068
5	\$ 45,682	\$ 3,807	\$ 1,904	\$ 1,757	\$ 879	5	\$ 65,009	\$ 5,418	\$ 2,709	\$ 2,501	\$ 1,251
6	\$ 52,364	\$ 4,364	\$ 2,182	\$ 2,014	\$ 1,007	6	\$ 74,518	\$ 6,210	\$ 3,105	\$ 2,867	\$ 1,434
7	\$ 59,046	\$ 4,921	\$ 2,461	\$ 2,271	\$ 1,136	7	\$ 84,027	\$ 7,003	\$ 3,502	\$ 3,232	\$ 1,616
8	\$ 65,728	\$ 5,478	\$ 2,739	\$ 2,528	\$ 1,264	8	\$ 93,536	\$ 7,795	\$ 3,898	\$ 3,598	\$ 1,799
For each additional family member, add:	\$ 6,682	\$ 557	\$ 279	\$ 257	\$ 129	For each additional family member, add:	\$ 9,509	\$ 793	\$ 397	\$ 366	\$ 183

Households do not need to turn in an application when the household receives a notification letter saying that all children automatically qualify for free meals when any household member receives benefits from CalFresh, CalWORKs, or FDPIR. Children who meet the definition of foster, homeless, migrant, or runaway, and children enrolled in their school's Head Start program are eligible for free meals. Contact school officials if any child in the household is not on the notification letter. The household must let school officials know if they do not want to be considered eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Applications will be sent to the household with a letter about the school meal program. While breakfasts and lunches will be provided free of charge every school day, determining eligibility for free and reduced-price meals is still necessary and these determinations can be used to qualify households for other benefits. Households interested in establishing eligibility for meal benefits, must fill out one application for all children in the household and give it to the nutrition office at 830 N Capitol Avenue, San Jose, CA

95133. For a simple and secure method to apply, use our online application at <https://www.esusd.org/Students--Parents/Child-Nutrition-Svcs/Income-Eligibility-Form/index.html>. Contact Sonia Vargas at 408-347-5191 for help filling out the application. The school will provide notification regarding the outcome of your applications.

Households may turn in an application at any time during the school year. If you are not eligible now, but your household income goes down, household size goes up, or a household member starts receiving CalFresh, CalWORKs, or FDPIR, you may turn in an application at that time. Information given on the application will be used to determine eligibility and may be verified at any time during the school year by school officials. The last four digits of the Social Security number from any adult household or checking that you do not have a Social Security number is required if you include income on the application.

Households that receive Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, may be considered eligible for free or reduced-price meals

by filling out an application. Foster children are considered eligible for free meals and may be included as a household member if the foster family chooses to also apply for the non-foster children on the same application. Including foster children as a household member may help the non-foster children qualify for free or reduced-price meals. If the non-foster children are not eligible, this does not keep foster children from being considered eligible for free meals.

Your child's eligibility status from last school year will continue into the new school year for up to 30 school days or until the school processes your new application, or your child is otherwise certified for free or reduced-price meals. School officials do not have to send reminders or expired eligibility notices.

If you do not agree with the decision or results of verification, you may discuss it with school officials. You also have the right to a fair hearing, which may be requested by calling or writing the hearing official: Tom Huynh, 830 N Capitol Ave San Jose, CA 95133, 408-347-5051. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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**All shook up**  
 Four very important ways you can prepare for earthquakes in 2024  
 - SEE PAGE 6

**California walks**  
 voted among top 150 nature walks to start 2024  
 SEE PAGE 9

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## Assessing driving fitness: Strategies for determining elderly driver competency

By Michael James

As we age, our abilities and capacities evolve, affecting various aspects of our lives, including our ability to drive safely.

Driving is often associated with independence and mobility, but it also carries significant responsibilities, particularly as our cognitive and physical faculties change with time. Assessing the fitness of elderly drivers is a complex issue that requires careful consideration of multiple factors.

### Understanding the Challenges

Before delving into assessment strategies, it's crucial to understand the challenges associated with elderly driving. Aging can bring about a range of physical and cognitive changes that may impact driving ability. These changes can include diminished vision and hearing, decreased reaction times, impaired mobility, and cognitive decline, such as memory lapses and reduced attention span. Additionally, medical conditions like arthritis, Parkinson's disease, and dementia can further complicate the driving experience.

### The Importance of Assessment

Given these challenges, assessing elderly driver competency becomes imperative for ensuring road safety. However, it's essential to approach this task with sensitivity and empathy, recognizing that driving cessation can significantly impact an individual's independence and quality of life.

The goal of assessment should not be to arbitrarily restrict driving privileges but to identify potential issues and provide appropriate support and resources. It's still important to make sure your older family members as well as strangers on the road stay safe and away from getting into car accidents. If they have not been assessed for driving competency yet and have been in an accident, contact a local car accident attorney.

### Comprehensive Evaluation Strategies

• **Medical Screening:** Regular medical check-ups are essential for elderly drivers to assess overall health and identify any conditions that may affect driving ability. Healthcare professionals should inquire about vision, hearing, mobility, and cognitive function during these appointments. Conditions like cataracts, glaucoma, and hearing loss can often be managed with proper treatment, allowing individuals to continue driving safely.

• **Cognitive Assessments:** Assessing cognitive function is crucial for determining driving competency. Screening tools such as the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) or the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA) can help detect cognitive impairment. Additionally, specialized driving evaluations conducted by occupational therapists or neuropsychologists can assess specific skills relat-

ed to driving, such as attention, memory, and executive function.

### Vision and Hearing Tests

• **Good vision and hearing** are essential for safe driving. Regular eye exams can detect conditions like age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy. Hearing tests can identify hearing loss, which may affect a driver's ability to hear sirens, horns, or other important auditory cues on the road.

• **On-Road Assessments:** On-road evaluations involve observing an individual's driving skills in real-world conditions. Trained professionals, often occupational therapists or driving rehabilitation specialists, accompany the driver during a simulated driving experience or on actual roads. They assess factors such as lane positioning, speed control, signaling, and response to traffic signals and hazards.

• **Driving Simulator Tests:** Driving simulators offer a safe and controlled environment for evaluating driving performance. These simulations can replicate various driving scenarios, allowing assessors to observe how individuals respond to different situations without the risks associated with on-road evaluations. Simulators can also assess reaction times and decision-making skills.

### Assessment

Assessment outcomes may vary, with some individuals demonstrating continued competency while others may require additional support or modifications to their driving habits. Here are some supportive measures that can help elderly drivers maintain their independence while ensuring road safety:

• **Driver Training Programs:** Refresher courses tailored to elderly drivers can help update knowledge of traffic laws, refresh driving skills, and introduce strategies for coping with age-related changes. These programs can instill confidence and provide valuable tips for adapting to changing driving conditions.

• **Vehicle Modifications:** Certain modifications to vehicles can enhance safety and comfort for elderly drivers. These may include installing adaptive devices such as hand controls, pedal extensions, or steering wheel grips to accommodate physical limitations.

• **Driving Restrictions:** In cases where individuals demonstrate limitations in certain driving skills, implementing restrictions such as avoiding night driving, limiting travel to familiar routes, or avoiding high-traffic areas can help mitigate risks while allowing continued mobility.

• **Alternative Transportation Options:** Encouraging the use of alternative transportation options such as public transit, ridesharing services, or community transportation programs can provide viable alternatives for individuals who may no longer be able to drive safely.

• **Family Involvement:** Open communication and involvement of family members in the assessment process can help facilitate difficult conversations about driving cessation. Family members can provide valuable insights into changes they may have observed in their loved one's driving behavior and offer support during the transition.

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# San Jose officials support retail theft crackdown reform

By Vicente Vera  
*San José Spotlight*

Last year San Jose City Council unanimously approved creating the Organized Retail Theft Detail, an investigative team within the San Jose Police Department to gather intelligence and track crime statistics and patterns



The Gucci Store in WestField Valley Fair was robbed by an organized retail theft ring last year. File photo.

to identify hotspots, catch criminals and reduce the rate of retail crimes. The San Jose Police Department received nearly \$8.5 million from the state to launch a three-year program.

Political consultant Rich Robinson told San José Spotlight he isn't surprised to see big city mayors like Mahan call for Prop. 47 reforms in light of organized retail theft and companies pulling out of some locations.

"Ultimately, crime has gone down in the state of California," Robinson said. "But the cause and effect of the news coverage on thefts with retail shops closing down, and they've got competition coming from Amazon and online retailers – so it's not just Prop. 47 that's causing the problems for these retailers."

A 2022 UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll co-sponsored by the Los Angeles Times found 59% of people surveyed said they supported reforming Prop. 47.

Not all political leaders are on board.

Santa Clara County Democratic Party Chair Bill James told San José Spotlight they oppose the proposition, which he said have almost nothing to do with reducing homelessness or drug addiction. Instead, it returns to failed mass incarceration strategies to combat retail theft.

"Law enforcement agencies, including the State Attorney General, already have initiatives in place that have been successful in addressing retail theft, and as the Attorney General has said retail theft by organized rings and or involving violence is already a serious crime that can and should be charged as a felony," he said.

Regardless of the actual crime statistics, Robinson said he thinks California voters will pass the proposition. Whether the reforms will lead to a decrease in crime and homelessness has yet to be seen, he said, but it will mean more work for the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office.

"I think the voters are going to pass anything that is going to punish people, especially as they see the quality of life go down," he said.



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Times **Community News**

## California Attorney General warns police about license plate data law

A recent investigation by The News Observer, found more than 20 agencies let non-California departments access license plate reader collected data in apparent violation of state law.

Despite guidance from Attorney General Rob Bonta declaring the

## Restoration

*Continued from page 1*

other museums are contacted when they have the item or have knowledge about the item.

Requests are made to History San Jose's restoration shop to restore items in their collection. Only projects from other museums or city and county agencies are accepted. Some of the projects in this category were the restoration of a 1905 Cadillac and a 1923 American LaFrance Brockway Torpedo Fire Truck for the San Jose Fire Museum.

A 1920 Model TT Fire Truck was restored for the Santa Clara Fire Museum. The Campbell Historical Museum had a 1919 Rauch & Lang electric auto that was restored by the restoration shop. The shop volunteers restored two sleighs for Christmas in the Park.

One of the projects requested by History San Jose was a Ford Model T that could be taken apart and put back together in the timed event for the yearly event that was called Antique Autos in History Park (now renamed Cars in the Park) that takes place in September. The shop volunteers were able to fulfill this request through donations only.

Some of the restoration shop volunteers started more than 30 years ago in History San Jose's Trolley Barn restoring a horse drawn street car and several trolleys. When there were no more trolleys to restore, some of the volunteers moved to the restoration shop and have worked there for more than 20 years.

The most current project that the restoration shop volunteers worked on is a circa 1880 horse-drawn stage wagon. This stage wagon carried passengers from San Jose to Alviso to catch a steamboat to San Francisco. Passengers from San Francisco were transported from Alviso back to San Jose. The project, which was made possible by a grant from the Farrington Historical Foundation, is now complete.

practice illegal, he and his office have not taken action against any of the agencies for sharing the information.

Some California law enforcement shared their data with dozens of outside departments, the newspaper found.

The Police Department for El Cajon, a city near San Diego, topped the list, making the information available to more than 130 non-California agencies.

Last month, Bonta's office took its most targeted action to date, sending letters to 14 police agencies in the state. Nearly all of the letters asked the departments to confirm if they were sharing data out of state. Two letters said the attorney general's office was ready to take legal action if the departments refused to cooperate.

At least one department identified in the newspaper's review reported not knowing their data was accessible outside California.

The newspaper reported that the Police Department for Seaside granted access to 19 non-California agencies as of late May, including ones in Georgia and New York.

## New California laws now in effect

By Sean Eastwood  
*Times staff writer*

Californians may not be aware of new laws ranging from housing to hidden fees.

Here are some of the laws more likely to have a direct impact on Californians.

### Housing

Senate Bill 684 aims to get more housing built by speeding up the approval process for subdivision maps. The law requires local agencies to approve those maps for projects in urban areas so long as they meet certain requirements including that the project not include more than 10 housing units.

An analysis by the legislature notes that small lot divisions allow for more medium-density housing such as "duplexes, fourplexes, garden apartments, townhomes."

### Hidden Fees

Senate Bill 478 and Assembly Bill 537 require the advertised or displayed price for most goods or services to include all fees and other charges required to make a purchase other than government taxes and fees.

SB 478 covers most types of businesses with a few exceptions for businesses that have different regulations around advertising.

AB 537 is specifically targeted at transparency of rates for short-term lodging such as hotels or peer-to-peer platforms like AirBnB.

### Drug Testing Kits

Businesses with "on-sale general public premises" alcohol licenses such as bars and restaurants are now required to sell drug-testing kits at a price not much higher than

what it costs to purchase wholesale.

Bars and restaurants must also post a notice that reads, "Don't get roofed! Drink spiking drug test kits available here. Ask a staff member for details."

### Right to Repair

Senate Bill 244 requires manufacturers of electronics priced at \$50 or higher for wholesale to make documentation and spare parts or tools available to repair or maintain a product.

Manufacturers of products priced \$100 or more for wholesale must make parts and documentation available for at least seven years after the product was last manufactured.

### Menstrual Products for Students

Assembly Bill 230, signed into law last October, takes an existing law that requires public schools that instruct any grade from 6 – 12 to provide free menstrual products in bathrooms and expands it to now include grades 3 – 5.

# San Jose first city in CA to implement new ordinance that allows sale of ADUs separate from main home

*San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan, State Assemblymember Phil Ting and housing leaders celebrate AB 1033, urge other cities to follow San Jose's lead*

By William Bellou  
*Publisher*

Mayor Matt Mahan and housing advocates highlighted a new path to affordable home ownership today as a local ordinance took effect this week.

San Jose became the first city in California to opt into AB 1033, which allows property owners to sell their accessory dwelling units (ADUs) separately from their main home.

"We all know that homeownership has become unattainable for far too many residents in San Jose and across our state," said San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan. "We need to keep the American Dream alive by bringing the innovation inherent to our region into our housing policy, and this new ordinance does just that. San Jose will continue to lead the way, but we can't solve this crisis alone – I am looking forward to seeing other California cities follow suit."

"I thank the City of San Jose for seeing the impact that my legislation could have across their neighborhoods. ADU ownership could provide a path to buying their first home, or even allow our seniors to downsize their homes," said Assemblymember Phil Ting. "With this less expensive housing option available, increased home ownership can help build stronger communities."

San Jose has completed nearly 1,400 new ADUs in the past five years with thousands more in the pipeline. This number represents about 23% of San Jose's new housing stock over that time frame. Now, homeowners in San Jose can sell their ADU, similar to how a condominium is sold. AB 1033 took effect this year, but cities have to take the extra step and



opt into the state law.

"The ability to sell my ADU is yet another reason this addition to my backyard was one of the smartest things I've done. Not only has it increased the value of my property, it also generates more rental income than I expected," said Joyce Higashi, San Jose ADU owner.

The Casita Coalition, a statewide organization that works to remove barriers to more affordable, sustainable homes, was a huge advocate for this legislation. They created a model ordinance that San Jose utilized to draft the local legislation required to take advantage of this new law.

"As homebuyers across the state face an extreme shortage of starter home inventory, we applaud Mayor Mahan and the City of San Jose for creating new possibilities for homeownership," said Rafael Perez, Board Presi-

dent of the Casita Coalition. "ADU condos have proven successful elsewhere, providing much-needed inventory that is more affordable than traditional single-family homes. Families in San Jose will now have more options for housing themselves and other generations on properties with an ADU. We hope other cities and counties will follow San Jose's lead!"

Assemblymember Ting has authored previous ADU legislation to make the local approval process faster and remove the parking requirements. As Assembly Budget Chair, he also championed funding for a grant program that helps homeowners pay for pre-development costs, such as design and site prep.

The City of San Jose will be hosting a workshop in the coming weeks to help homeowners understand how to use this new ordinance.



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## TECH JARGON OF THE WEEK

### Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG)

By Shubhi Asthana

**H**ave you ever stumbled into a conversation where everyone is speaking around this “techie” word – and even after you’ve broken in, it is difficult to understand the unfamiliar jargon and acronyms? Well, there’s no need to sweat it. Let me teach you the meaning of some commonly used tech words:



#### Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG)

Retrieval Augmented Generation, or RAG, is popular these days because it introduces some serious capabilities to LLMs like OpenAI’s GPT-4 - and that’s the ability to use and leverage their own data.

Why do we need RAG? There’s so much noise in the AI space and about RAG. Vendors are trying to overcomplicate it. They’re trying to inject their tools, their ecosystems, their vision. The essence of RAG involves adding your own data (via a retrieval tool) to the prompt that you pass into a large language model. As a result, you get an output. That gives you several benefits:

- You can include facts in the prompt to help the LLM avoid hallucinations
- You can (manually) refer to sources of truth when responding to a user query, helping to double check any potential issues.
- You can leverage data that the LLM might not have been trained on.

With Retrieval Augmented Generation, the sys-



tem allows the LLM to function in the context of data external to its original dataset used for pre-training. The system works as follows:

• **Ingest flow:** Data is split into sentences or other chunks of data. Each chunk or sentence is then encoded into a vector embedding and stored in a vector store.

• **Query flow:** When a query is issued, the query is first encoded into its own vector embedding, and those are compared to the data in the vector store. The most relevant sentences or facts from the vector store are retrieved. Those facts (or sentences) are then provided to a summarizer LLM so that it can respond to the query with this context (set of facts) in mind and provide an accurate response to the query, based on the data.

#### About the Author

Do you enjoy reading this column? Send in your comments or feedback to the author at shub.saxen@gmail.com. Shubhi Asthana works as a Research Senior Software Engineer at the IBM Almaden Research Center, San Jose.

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Q) What is Islam, who are Muslims, and what is the Quran?  
A) Islam is a faith and way of life. Islam began in the 7th century. People who follow Islam are known as Muslims. The Quran is the Divine book that guides Muslims to

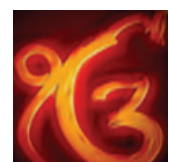
practice Islam. "Hufazik Allah Waeayilatak" the English meaning is " May Allah (swt) protect you and your family". Please visit our website to learn more.



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