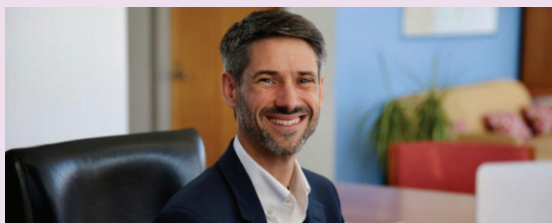


San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan has joined the race for California governor
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Santa Clara County may ditch camera vendor amid some privacy issues
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Almaden Times

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FEB. 13 - FEB. 26, 2026 ■ VOL. 39, NO. 4

San José Unified identifies options to increase alignment with elementary school ideal

No-cost access to 3 hours of after school activities for affected families

By Sean Eastwood

Times Media staff writer

The San José Unified School District's Schools of Tomorrow Implementation Committee (STIC) reached a significant milestone last week, reviewing three potential options for the future of the district's elementary schools.

The options goal is the enhancement of social and academic opportunities for students, provides more opportunities for teacher collaboration, decreases the likelihood of combination classes, and increases the support offerings available for students and staff through school consolidations, attendance boundary changes, and special program relocations.

In a community letter, San José Unified Superintendent Nancy Albarrán outlined a set of commitments San José Unified is making to students, families, school communities, and employees in the event of any changes.

The commitments include no-cost access to three hours of after-school activities for all affected families, bus service for students living more than 1.5 miles away from their newly assigned school, increased funds for schools to welcome new students and families, and a guarantee of employment at the same annual pay for all affected employees.

"I recognize that seeing a school's name included in discussion about consolidation,

See ALIGNMENT, page 3

San Jose mayor spars with gubernatorial candidates during televised debate

By Brandon Pho

San José Spotlight

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan faced his first major test as a contender for California governor Tuesday during a televised debate.

The debate, hosted in San Francisco by KTVU, had Mahan standing shoulder to shoulder with six other candidates — conservative TV news pundit Steve Hilton, billionaire Tom Steyer, former Attorney General Xavier Becerra, former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, State Superintendent Tony Thurmond and former State Controller Betty Yee. Several candidates traded barbs on topics including California's cost of living, immigration, education, homelessness and contentious climate goals.



San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan joined six other candidates for the Feb. 4, 2026 California Gubernatorial debate in San Francisco. Photo credit: Brandon Pho.

Mahan, who announced his candidacy recently, became a primary target for candidates' jabs over his rising political profile, record on addressing homelessness and favor among Silicon Valley's centrist and conservative tech elite. But the attacks teed him up for clever responses that roused audience applause on multiple occasions — boosting his share of the

limelight on stage and turning the head of at least one post-debate TV news analyst.

"I have to say — sorry to keep picking on Matt — but he just said in an interview that the thing he most admires about Gavin Newsom is his record on homelessness. You've got to be kidding, Matt," Hilton said during the

See DEBATE, page 5

Valentine's Day Senior Ball at Watermark

Saturday, February 14, senior students from Irvington High School and senior residents at Watermark at Almaden will come together for a Valentine's Day Senior Ball, bringing two generations together to enjoy music, dancing, and live performances.

The event was created through a student-led effort to address senior loneliness and grew out of regular volunteer visits among students and residents.

One of the student organizers, Josephine Sun, said her involvement was inspired by seeing her own grandparents live far away and experience isolation, motivating her to work with local seniors and build enjoyable moments and meaningful connections.



Were officials, voters misled regarding Santa Clara County's Measure A sales tax hike?

By William Bellou

Publisher

Santa Clara County's Measure A sales tax hike gained critical support from law enforcement and political leaders after revised ballot language suggested funds would aid public safety.

The measure passed with 57 percent approval, but officials now admit the money is not required to be spent on public safety, and plans are under way to allocate all new funds to health care, prompting proposed cuts to prosecution services.

Despite campaign promises and endorsements secured through assurances about raises and filling positions, many backers feel misled.

The situation underscores problems with ambiguous ballot wording and calls for greater accountability and election reform.

"I feel double-crossed," said San Jose District



Attorney **Jeff Rosen** (pictured above). "I don't understand it given that I worked very hard to get this measure passed. It's a funny way to say, 'thank you.'"

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Times **Local News**

San Jose mayor Mahan jumps into governor's race

By Keith Menconi
San José Spotlight

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan has joined the race for California governor, putting to rest months of will-he-won't-he speculation about his gubernatorial ambitions.

"We need to stand up for our rights, for our freedoms and for our neighbors. We need to use the tools we have at hand to protect our democracy," Mahan posted on social media. "One tool is the law. The other tool is our results. We have to use both. That's how we fix California."

Alignment

Continued from page 1

attendance boundary changes, or relocation is deeply emotional," Albarrán said. "We know families love their current schools. At the same time, we know that thoughtful school portfolio changes can help ensure strong, sustainable programs for both current and future students throughout the district, continuing our long-standing legacy of tackling challenges with a focus on what is best for our students."



San Jose Mayor **Matt Mahan** is running for California governor. File photo.

Over the past two years, even as Mahan has taken steps to extend his statewide political profile, he has downplayed rumors that he is seeking higher office, consistently stating he remains focused on his duties as mayor.

However, in recent weeks Mahan signaled his thinking had changed, teasing on several TV news appearances that he would soon announce his decision on a possible run. Then last week, San José Spotlight reported that residents received a text poll gauging support for Mahan, adding yet another sign of growing momentum for an attempt at the governor's mansion.

Mahan has said he is stepping into the race because he has not been satisfied with any of the other candidates' plans to address issues like homelessness, housing affordability or crime. He has made his own track record tackling those challenges in San Jose central to his campaign pitch.

Mahan has already received an

endorsement from South Bay Congressman Sam Liccardo, who also backed Mahan during his 2022 bid to succeed Liccardo as San Jose mayor.

"Leading one of California's largest cities tests you in ways few jobs do," Liccardo said in a statement. "Sacramento needs a leader who has governed under pressure, balanced a budget and delivered results. That's San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan."

Mahan's forays into statewide politics have already laid some of the groundwork for his burgeoning campaign. Over the past two years, he has made frequent TV appearances up and down the state, often picking policy fights with Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Late last year, he launched his own 501(c)(4) political advocacy organization known as Back to Basics with his former chief of staff at the helm. The organization is intended to build a statewide political coalition around Mahan's policy agenda. In December,

Mahan hosted several gubernatorial candidates at a homeless housing site in San Jose, pressing for their buy-in to the city's strategy focused on rapid expansion of temporary homeless shelters.

But with just four months left to go before the June primary election, Mahan's candidacy faces a daunting uphill climb.

The already crowded candidate list includes East Bay Congressman Eric Swalwell, former Orange County Congresswoman Katie Porter, former state Controller Betty Yee, Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, former Assemblymember Ian Calderon, former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and billionaire Tom Steyer.

Recent internal polling from Porter's campaign placed the Southern California politician as the leading Democratic candidate with 14% support, followed by Swalwell with 11%, according to POLITICO. Mahan trailed in the middle of the pack with 5%.

"Voters have not been very excited about the field, quite frankly," Sacramento-based Democratic strategist Steven Maviglio told San José Spotlight. "It's been the not-ready-for prime time players."

With no clear frontrunner yet emerging, Maviglio said, the race remains wide open.

"I think it'll shake up the field quite a bit. The mayor has his own lane in this race," Maviglio said.

Mahan has taken a number of policy positions that have put him at odds with other California Democrats, including his vocal support for Proposition 36, the tough on crime 2024 ballot measure. But those same positions could help Mahan win support from voters who have grown frustrated with establishment Democratic leadership.

"More of them are likely to be interested in somebody like Mahan than any of the other major candidates," Larry Gerston, a professor emeritus of political science at San Jose State University, told San José Spotlight. "So he could put together a combination of moderate Democrats and independents and do much better in that fractured primary than a lot of people might think."

Democrats make up roughly 45% of registered voters in California, while no party preference voters represent 25%, according to 2025 figures compiled by the Public Policy Institute of California. Meanwhile, just more than 22% of state voters are registered Republicans.

Locally, Mahan has managed to consolidate strong support from the South Bay business community over his three years in office. At the same time, some of his policies — including efforts to shift homeless dollars away from permanent housing to temporary shelter expansion — have alienated local progressive groups. In

See RACE, page 6



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Proposed state budget short-changes Santa Clara County

By Sean Eastwood
Times Media staff writer

Gov. Gavin Newsom is not shielding Silicon Valley counties from federal cuts to public health care. Instead, they question whether he's effectively enabling the president's agenda.

Governor Newsom's January budget message prioritizes fiscal prudence over new spending initiatives — including those designed to safeguard counties from potential funding losses for Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and other social safety net programs to protect the state's financial position amidst concerns about deficits.

Newsom's approach comes despite an unexpected \$42 billion revenue increase, which has mitigated the state's previously projected \$3 billion shortfall for the current year.

County officials and statewide policy experts express concern that Newsom's proposal compels local governments to manage the repercussions of H.R. 1, former President Trump's significant spending bill, which is expected to reduce county hospital and social services funding by an estimated \$1 billion annually. Should the Governor's plan be adopted during this sum-



California Gov. **Gavin Newsom** speaks during a campaign event on Proposition 50, which passed by a wide margin on Nov. 4, 2025. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

mer's budget negotiations, counties may have to absorb the full costs of care for their most disadvantaged populations, increasing the risk of public hospital closures.

The proposal has drawn criticism from observers who note a perceived disconnect between Newsom's public opposition to federal policy changes and the practical effects of his budget recommendations. "Not only is the governor's budget message not proactive—it's not even reactive. It's basically non-responsive to H.R. 1," stated County Executive James Williams in comments recently made to San José Spotlight.

Administration finance officials counter these critiques, asserting that the state budget is structured to account for and absorb the added costs resulting from H.R. 1, without shifting additional burdens onto local governments.

According to Department of Finance spokesperson H.D. Palmer, H.R. 1 is expected to cost California an additional \$1.4 billion next year, with \$1.1 billion related to Medi-Cal. However, Palmer emphasized the state's limited capacity to assume all new health and social service restrictions imposed by recent federal legislation.

Federal policy will reduce Medi-Cal coverage for approximately 200,000 individuals, including undocumented immigrants, asylum beneficiaries, and others in non-citizen categories beginning in October of this year.

Palmer explained that providing full-scope Medi-Cal for these groups would require an additional \$1.1 billion annually—beyond the state's current ability to commit, given projected budget gaps of nearly \$3 billion in the coming year and \$22 billion the subsequent year. He also noted that affected individuals will remain eligible for emergency and pregnancy-related coverage.

Williams criticized the Governor's proposal for what he views as insufficient leadership amid ongoing threats to healthcare access in California. He stressed the importance of collaboration between counties, the Legislature, and the administration to pursue more proactive solutions.

In late 2023, county leaders successfully advocated for a five-eighths-cent sales tax increase, projected to generate \$330 million annually to help offset the financial impact of H.R. 1. Nevertheless, officials acknowledge that even with the additional revenue, cuts to public hospital systems—the second largest in California—remain likely.

Public hospitals, including those in Santa Clara County, represent about 6% of all hospitals statewide but provide over half of all trauma and burn care, according to the California Association of Public Hospitals. These facilities also train nearly half of California's new doctors, underscoring their critical role in the state's healthcare infrastructure.

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) has echoed many of Williams' concerns and is especially focused on several aspects of Newsom's budget proposal. Among these are the removal of approximately \$233 million for In-Home Supportive Services recipients with increased care needs, and a reduction in Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention funding from \$1 billion to \$500 million. Additionally, cities and counties are still awaiting the distribution of \$1 billion in allocated funds from 18 months prior.

District 4 Supervisor Susan Ellenberg, recently elected CSAC president, emphasized her commitment to advocating for adjustments to the Governor's budget that better support California's counties.

Ellenberg says we need to improve communication between state lawmakers and local leaders responsible for implementing legislative directives, noting, "The Legislature functions as lawmaking bodies, and we are the service implementers directly facing our clients every day."

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Times **Local News**

A handful of San Jose residents gathered at Pier 402, a restaurant on Race Street, to watch Mahan take part in the debate. Photo by Keith Menconi.

Debate

Continued from page 1
forum.

By this point, Hilton had already blasted Mahan's positions on housing and being against a statewide billionaire tax.

"He didn't agree with me about capping taxes on housing. He likes taxes, apparently, unless they're (for) billionaires," Hilton said earlier.

Mahan readily hit back.

"I'll just note that Steve, you came to San Jose just a week ago to see what's working in San Jose because we've been reducing unsheltered homelessness faster than any other city in the state," he said. "I don't know what's changed in the last week — it seems that it's the fact that I jumped into this race — and frankly that's exactly wrong with our politics, is that an idea is good one day until the other side (has them)."

In December, as Mahan mulled over a decision to jump in the race, he invited several candidates to tour San Jose's temporary homeless housing sites in an effort to impress his ideas on the state's next top leader. At the time, Mahan said he was looking for a change agent governor, before ultimately deciding he fit the definition best.

A small group of Mahan supporters gathered for an informal watch party at Pier 402, a restaurant on Race Street in San Jose.

"All these other (candidates) are not change agents," San Jose resident Terrence Reilly, who helped organize the largely impromptu gathering, told San José Spotlight. "They're not doing what's best for California. If (Mahan) could take over the state and frickin' whip it, yeah, I think it would be good."

Mahan touted his experience teaching public school in East San Jose to argue that California's education problems don't just stem from lack of investment. Mahan taught from 2006 to 2008 at Alum Rock Middle School through Teach for America.

"There's also a lack of accountability," Mahan said. "The truth is we need to have high expectations for our kids. We need to assess their learning, and we need to intervene in ways that work: High dosage tutoring, summer programs, youth jobs to build confidence, ensuring every kid has a pathway to participating in our economy and thriving in our society."

On affordability, Mahan said the "biggest drivers" of California's crushing cost of living are the obstacles developers face to build housing. He touted recent San Jose City Council votes to boost developer incentives and waive fees for downtown office conversions. On energy bills, Mahan called

for data centers to pay the full cost of infrastructure upgrades so it "doesn't fall on ratepayers."

Steyer questioned Mahan's commitment to affordability.

"Right now, the big tech CEOs are terrified about the idea of paying their fair share. Right now, they're supporting Matt," Steyer said. "I'm the billionaire who's going to take on the billionaires for working families."

Then came Mahan's final retort of the night.

"I've got about three billion reasons not to trust your answer," Mahan said in an apparent reference to Steyer's net worth.

Forbes listed Steyer at \$2 billion as of Wednesday.



San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan speaks to supporters at a gubernatorial candidate debate on Feb. 4, 2026. Photo by Brandon Pho.



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Times **Local News****Race***Continued from page 3*

addition, a series of clashes between Mahan and local unions over wage negotiations have strained relations with San Jose's labor coalition.

John Tucker, a senior representative with AFSCME Local 101, which represents San Jose public employees, said Mahan's campaign raises questions about his commitment to his day job as mayor.

"From inside City Hall, it's felt for a long time like San Jose was being treated as a stepping-stone and not a long-term commitment for Matt," Tucker told San José Spotlight. "This run looks a lot less like a sudden decision and more like 'the plan all along.'"

In contrast, South Bay business leaders have been quick to voice support for Mahan's candidacy.

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Ahmad Thomas, CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, issued a statement Thursday morning applauding Mahan's announcement. Meanwhile, lobbyist Victor Gomez said he expects his political action committee, Silicon Valley Business PAC, to contribute to Mahan's campaign.

"California definitely needs a Democrat that's going to lead in a very pragmatic way," he told San José Spotlight. "I think that's what people are going to be looking for this upcoming election."

In making his announcement, Mahan claimed credit for a number of encouraging trends in San Jose, including a drop in the city's unsheltered homeless population and an uptick in new housing projects. But his critics argue these accomplishments have been overblown.

"Mahan's leadership of San Jose is no model for the state to follow," Maria Noel Fernandez, who leads the Silicon Valley Rising Action advocacy group, told San José Spotlight. "As rent, utilities and child care costs skyrocket, he has offered working families Band-Aids instead of real solutions."

Meanwhile, at least some local political figures are still making up their minds about Mahan's candidacy.

"We've worked well together on issues of homelessness, neighborhood blight removal, urban renewal and transportation infrastructure, such as the BART extension," state Sen. Dave Cortese told San José Spotlight. "I'm eager to hear more about his ideas for the state and how he'd collaborate with me as a state senator."

To succeed, Mahan will also need to break out of the local media bubble that historically has made it difficult for San Jose politicians to succeed in statewide politics. The city, California's third largest, has never produced a competitive candidate for governor in its modern history.

Santa Clara County may ditch camera vendor amid some privacy issues

By **Brandon Pho**
San José Spotlight

Cities across Silicon Valley may be on the cusp of cutting ties with a surveillance company linked to local police departments' cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Santa Clara County officials this week signaled growing distrust with Flock Safety, a company that sells license plate reading cameras to cities across California, over concerns the cameras are being used by federal immigration authorities. Flock has sold dozens of cameras to the Sheriff's Office, which has deployed them along the roadways of Saratoga, Cupertino and Los Altos Hills. Flock also has license plate reading camera agreements with San Jose and other cities in the county.

District 2 Supervisor Betty Duong moved to delay a renewal of the cameras' use policy at the Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday until how they're being used can be explored further. The decision happened after Santa Cruz and Los Altos Hills became some of the first municipalities in California to sever ties with Flock entirely this month.

"Effective immediately, all Flock cameras in (Los Altos Hills) will go offline. Town staff is currently in the process of getting the Flock cameras taken down," town officials wrote on their website after the Jan. 15 decision.

The move effectively iced the sheriff's office out of accessing any of Los Altos Hills' camera data.

"We no longer receive (automated license plate reader) data from Los Altos Hills' 31 Flock Safety cameras or have access to any data from Los Altos Hills," Sgt. Brooks Jarosz, spokesperson for the sheriff's office, told San José Spotlight.

Duong said she stands by the use of license plate reading cameras in the county — and the sheriff's policies for using them. But she said she's concerned about widespread reports of local police departments searching data from Flock's cameras on behalf of ICE.

"I'm against sharing information with ICE in any way that's weaponized against our immigrant communities," Duong told San José Spotlight. "I pulled the item (Tuesday) after hearing comments from the public, and decided the responsible thing to do is to do our due diligence."

The Atlanta, Georgia-based company partners with hundreds of cities across California, and about 6,000 cities across the U.S. Flock representatives have stated publicly the company doesn't share its data with ICE. The American Civil Liberties Union asserts that Flock's user agreement gives the company broad latitude to share certain data with federal authorities, regardless of municipal restrictions.

"Flock does not have a contract with ICE, or any sub-agency of (the Department of



Santa Clara County officials have put the renewal of Flock's license plate reader cameras on hold until it can determine how the technology is being used. File photo.

Homeland Security). None of those agencies are customers of Flock," company spokesperson Holly Beilin told San José Spotlight. "In California, state law prohibits (automated license plate reader) data from being shared out of state or with federal agencies, and Flock has disabled those settings for California agencies to make compliance easier."

Beilin said communities are free to choose whether or not to implement public safety technology in their city. "California cities that choose to use Flock technology see the positive impact in crimes solved, missing persons recovered and safer communities," she said.

Duong's vote Tuesday defers a decision on renewing the sheriff's camera use policy by a month, over which time Duong requested county administration conduct a full review and investigation into whether Flock is flouting local policies restricting data sharing.

She also wants Sheriff Bob Jonsen, over this deferral period, to look for alternative companies to replace Flock as a vendor.

"I trust the sheriff to implement these cameras in a way our policies were designed," Duong said. "I'm not against (automated license plate readers), and I believe in cities' autonomy to decide the best public safety programs for them, but I am against any misuse of any personal and private data."

Jonsen's office did not respond to questions about alternative vendors.

"Sheriff Jonsen remains confident in our policy, which applies strict standards for privacy and technology implementation," Jarosz said. "He strongly supports (automated license plate readers) as a tool to protect communities and empower victims. We do not share (automated license plate reader) data with any other law enforcement agencies through Flock, and all data is owned by the cities and managed exclusively by our office — not by Flock." San Jose is being sued for its use of Flock cameras. The lawsuit by the Electronic Frontier Foundation and American Civil Liberties Union argues the city is violating the state constitution through warrantless searches of records of millions of drivers' movements.

The board of supervisors' contract delay does not affect current camera operations, Jarosz said.

"We will continue working with the board to address any concerns," he said.

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Bay 101 Casino is one of two card rooms in San Jose with new lightened restrictions. File photo.

San Jose loosens rules for local card rooms

By Sean Eastwood
Times staff writer

San Jose is easing regulations on its two card rooms, Casino M8trix and Bay 101, as part of ongoing reforms to reduce regulatory burdens.

The City Council unanimously approved five rule changes, including extending casino reporting times for illegal activity, doubling the number of betting squares per table, removing annual tournament limits, and allowing complimentary food and drinks, and repealing restrictions on time spent in casinos. Annual fees for each card room were cut from \$1 million to \$857,000, and two civilian gaming control positions were eliminated, aligning local rules more closely with state standards.

These changes modernize gambling regulations and stabilize the industry following setbacks in 2021, when state regulators blocked expansion efforts. Further rule adjustments are under review after additional consultations between city officials and casino representatives.



San Jose mayor names new chief of staff

By William Bellou
Publisher

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan, who recently announced he is running for governor of California, has tapped longtime city employee **Sarah Zarate** (above) to become his new chief of staff.

Jim Reed, who held the post for more than a decade under two mayors, announced his departure to lead a statewide policy initiative on behalf of Mahan, which opened the door for Zarate who has worked in the city manager’s office for the past seven years. She also held the position of Director of the Office of Administration, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations.

“Mayor Mahan’s vision for this city and or California is bold and I believe my expertise will help execute it even as we enter a tough budget cycle. I’m looking forward to joining

and helping lead his incredible team,” said Zarate.

“I’m looking forward to working in partnership with her at this critical juncture for San Jose,” Mahan wrote. “The data shows our approaches have been working — and I know Sarah will help our progress continue and expand even as we face a difficult budget year.”

IN MEMORY
Douglas Jackson

81 years
Resident of San Jose

Douglas Jackson, passed away peacefully surrounded by his family.



Born and raised in San Jose, California, he attended Sacred Heart grammar school, Willow Glen High School and San Jose State.

Doug was an active and committed member of St. Anthony Catholic Church, volunteering his time and talents in innumerable ways. He was always willing to help and set

a great example in dedicating himself to others. He was a much-beloved husband, father, brother, grandfather and friend.

Doug was a captain with Delta Airlines and Northwest Airlines for his entire career. He learned to fly in the Navy and loved his chosen profession. With it he traveled the world, loving adventure. An avid skier and golfer, he was still skiing black diamond runs at age 80. Doug had a loving and calm demeanor and truly enjoyed the funnier side of life. We will remember his smile.

The funeral will be held on Saturday, February 28 at 10:30am at St. Anthony McKean Church. Reception follows at Cinnabar Hills Golf Club. Donations in his name can be made to St. Anthony Church in Almaden.

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Water challenges in Almaden Valley

Urgent strategies for 2026: Is Almaden drinking water safe?

By Matthew Frazier
Times Media columnist

In 2026, Almaden Valley faces a series of pressing water-related concerns that require urgent attention and comprehensive strategies.



Addressing these issues is crucial not only for the immediate welfare of residents but also for the long-term sustainability of the region's water resources.

The main areas of focus include infrastructure reliability, mercury contamination, and proactive measures to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather.

Treatment Plant Shutdown

One of the most significant developments in 2026 is the temporary

shutdown of the Rinconada Water Treatment Plant. The plant shutdown its operations on Oct. 30, 2025 and is scheduled to reopen April 28, 2026. The closure was necessary to implement essential upgrades to improve overall water treatment efficiency and safety. During this shutdown, residents on the west side of Almaden Valley are no longer receiving water from the Rinconada facility. Instead, they will rely on local groundwater sources and the Montevina Water Treatment Plant, which is designed to ensure that residents continue to have access to safe drinking water during this transitional period. It is critical for residents to stay informed about these changes and to adjust their water usage accordingly, as there may be temporary fluctuations in water quality and availability.

Mercury Contamination

Mercury contamination remains a serious environmental issue affecting water quality in Almaden Valley, particularly in the Guadalupe Watershed. Mercury-laden sediment poses a significant threat to both aquatic ecosystems and public health. In 2026, Valley Water is



Following regulatory guidance from the State Division of Safety and Dams (DSOD), Valley Water is upgrading the Almaden Dam. The Almaden Dam Improvement Project will ensure the dam's operational safety and ability to deliver water to Santa Clara County residents including environmental benefits. Photo courtesy of Valley Water.

set to pilot new oxygenation systems at the Almaden Reservoir, a forward-thinking measure to reduce the production of toxic methylmercury. This innovative technology has the potential to improve water quality while minimizing harmful algal growth, which can complicate water treatment processes. Effectively

addressing mercury contamination will require ongoing monitoring and community engagement to ensure the success of these initiatives.

Dam Safety & Seismic Upgrades

Another salient concern is the safety of the Almaden Dam, which has been classified as a "high-hazard" dam due to the population density downstream. This classification underscores the urgent need for comprehensive risk assessments and infrastructure upgrades to safeguard against potential failures. Design work is underway to modernize the aging outlet and spillway systems. These enhancements are instrumental in ensuring the dam's integrity during extreme weather events, which are becoming increasingly frequent due to climate change. Enhancing dam safety is a community priority because it directly affects the safety and well-being of all residents near the dam.

Flood Risk & Climate Resilience

As we approach Water Year 2026, predictions of a weak La Niña event have raised concerns about flooding in the Almaden Valley area. The potential for increased precipitation necessitates heightened preparedness to manage flood risks effectively. Local authorities are emphasizing the importance of capturing excess storm runoff to recharge local aquifers, which helps to mitigate flooding while enhancing water supply for future use. Engaging the community in flood preparedness initiatives, such as updating emergency response plans, is fundamental to ensuring readiness and resilience in the face of unpredictable weather patterns. The collaboration between residents, local agencies, and water management authorities will play a vital role in mitigating the impacts of potential flooding.

Long-Term Supply Planning

Looking ahead, the Water Supply Master Plan 2050 lays out a roadmap to address long-term water supply challenges in Almaden Valley. In light of projected multi-year droughts, it has become

clear that existing infrastructure will not suffice to meet future demand. As a result, substantial investments in recycled and purified water systems are necessary to enhance the region's water resilience. Promoting the use of recycled water for irrigation and other non-potable uses can significantly alleviate pressure on existing freshwater supplies. Additionally, expanding groundwater recharge projects will be paramount for sustaining the aquifers that serve as a crucial water source during dry seasons.

To summarize, the water challenges facing Almaden Valley in 2026 are multifaceted and require a collective response. From the temporary shutdown of the Rinconada Water Treatment Plant to the ongoing efforts to combat mercury contamination, safety concerns regarding the Almaden Dam, flood risk management, and long-term supply planning, each issue is interconnected. Residents are encouraged to remain engaged, stay informed, and participate in community initiatives to safeguard water resources. Your input is invaluable, particularly regarding localized flood risk updates. If you're in a specific neighborhood in Almaden Valley, please share your location so we can provide tailored flood risk information. Together, we can work towards building a resilient water future for Almaden Valley, ensuring the safety and sustainability of our vital water resources for generations to come.

1. Valley Water. (2025). Almaden Valley Water Supply and Treatment Updates. Retrieved from [valleywater.org](https://www.valleywater.org)

2. California Department of Water Resources. (2025). Water Supply Master Plan 2050. Retrieved from [water.ca.gov](https://www.water.ca.gov)

3. U.S. Geological Survey. (2026). Mercury Contamination in the Guadalupe Watershed. Retrieved from [usgs.gov](https://www.usgs.gov)

4. Almaden Dam Safety Program. (2026). Safety and Seismic Upgrade Reports. Retrieved from [almadendamssafety.org](https://www.almadendamssafety.org)

5. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2026). Climate Prediction Center. Retrieved from [ncpc.ncep.noaa.gov](https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov)

6. Local Community Engagement Programs. (2026). Flood Preparedness Initiatives. Retrieved from [localgov.org](https://www.localgov.org)

These references include resources from local government agencies, environmental studies, and relevant climate data related to the water challenges outlined for Almaden Valley in 2026.

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Times **Local News**

ASSE International Student Exchange Program

Bring the world to your home this coming fall

By Sean Eastwood

Times Media staff writer

ASSE International Student Exchange Programs (ASSE) is inviting local families to discover the many rewards of hosting a foreign exchange student.

ASSE students come from more than 50 countries worldwide: France, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Ukraine, Japan, Australia, to name a few.

"The students are between the ages of 15 and 18 years, and they are enthusiastic and excited to experience American culture, family life, school, sports, etc., said ASSE spokesperson Francisco Mosca. "They also love to share their own culture and language with their host families, who welcome the students into their home, not as guests, but as family members, giving everyone involved a rich cultural experience. Host families may be single parents, couples and single people."

The exchange students have pocket money for personal expenses and full health, accident and liability insurance. ASSE stu-

dents are carefully selected based upon academics and personality, and host families choose their students from a wide variety of backgrounds, countries and personal interests.



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Those interested in hosting an exchange student or becoming an exchange student abroad, should call 1-800-733-2773, visit www.asse.com or send an email to asseusawest@asse.com to request more information or start the application process. Students are eager to learn about their American host family, so begin the process of welcoming your new son or daughter today. The memories and the friendship you create with your exchange student will stay with you forever.



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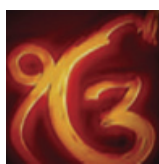


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Santa Clara County could charge for property value appeals

By **Brandon Pho**
San José Spotlight

Santa Clara County homeowners have the power to challenge how much they pay in property taxes every year. But it could start costing hundreds of dollars to appeal.

County leaders are considering charging single-family home and condo owners \$290 to appeal the county assessor's determination of their property's value, which in turn determines the taxes homeowners pay on their property. The \$290 fee will also apply to owners of townhomes and multifamily properties with four homes or fewer, as well as agricultural land and vacant land appeals.

County leaders are also proposing a non-refundable \$675 charge for appeals on commercial, industrial and multifamily apartment properties with more than four homes. They argue the appeals process is taking up time and resources that the county budget doesn't have as it absorbs massive federal funding losses. If approved, the new fees would bring in \$3.4 million in revenue per year — largely covering the \$3.5 million cost to run the assessment appeals program annually.

The recommendations moved forward Tuesday in a unanimous vote by the county Finance and Government Operations Committee. The proposal will go before the Board of Supervisors for final approval at a later date.

It's part of a broader county effort to rethink the fees officials charge for certain public services — and squeeze every dime the county can to grapple with its structural budget deficit.

"In response to unprecedented federal budget cuts, county administration is actively reviewing fee structures across programs to ensure effective cost recovery," County Executive James Williams told San José Spotlight. "Our recent study confirmed that a reasonable, fair fee structure based on appeal type will make the program financially self-sufficient and significantly reduce reliance on the general fund, freeing up dollars for critical, at-risk services."

Acting Assessor Greg Monteverde — who filled the role of Assessor-elect Neysa Fligo — said his office wasn't involved in this request. The county clerk handles assessment appeals.

"The Assessor's Office did not propose this fee, nor are any of the assessor's costs included in it," Monteverde told San José Spotlight.

The county is looking at the fees to clamp down on another emerging problem.

Officials said the appeals process is being gamed and monetized by third parties who convince property owners it's cheaper to file appeals on their behalf. County leaders said these third parties generally collect a fee regardless of whether the savings result from a formal appeal or informal review and proactive reduction. These appeals have risen from 315 in 2019 to 2,623 in 2025, according to the county.

"It's a mechanism that has been taken advantage



Santa Clara County is considering charging homeowners when they appeal the appraised value of their property. File photo.

of due to the fact that this county is one of the counties that does not have assessment appeals fees," Williams said at the meeting. "The huge volume increase creates on its own significant burden that impacts the system's collective ability to timely dispense with actual assessment appeals being brought forward by people acting on their own behalf or who have chosen to retain an agent with some actual conscious effort."

Cupertino Mayor Liang Chao has been a vocal opponent of making residents shoulder the burden of the county's budget recovery efforts. She campaigned against Measure A, a five-eighths-cent sales tax increase approved by voters in November. The county has said it will use the revenue to protect its hospitals from federal spending cuts, though funds aren't specifically earmarked for that purpose.

Chao isn't entirely opposed to charging for property value appeals. Other counties collect fees for assessment appeal applications — Los Angeles County charges about \$50 and San Francisco County charges \$120.

"While introducing fees makes sense, jumping from \$0 to full cost recovery ... seems too aggressive," Chao told San José Spotlight. "A more prudent approach might be to start with 50% cost recovery while also exploring opportunities for cost reductions."

Chao also called for a comparison with other counties' fees before adopting a full cost recovery model.

Michael Gordon, president of the Santa Clara County Association of Realtors, is voicing a higher register of alarm. He said charging homeowners to challenge their property tax assessment is "fundamentally unfair."

"The assessment appeals process is a core county function that is already funded by taxpayers, and imposing an additional fee amounts to double taxation on residents who are simply exercising their right to ensure their home is assessed accurately," Gordon told San José Spotlight. "At a time when housing affordability is already under pressure, this proposal risks discouraging legitimate appeals and shifts the county's budget problems onto homeowners who may already be overpaying."

Property owners receive yearly notice of their assessed value in June. Most appeals are filed between July 2 and Sept. 15 and residents usually receive their final tax bill in October. Other appeals come year-round based on various activities and supplemental assessments.

County Clerk Curtis Boone said the county takes proactive measures to find relief for property owners every year. That includes a computer-assisted mass appraisal system to find homes that merit a value reduction.

Residential property owners can also request an informal review by the Assessor's Office before filing an appeal, allowing residents to bring new information that might affect the assessment and come to a quicker resolution.



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