

VALLEJO

Mayor on her first year: Turning the 747

Sorce brings progress to city's public safety, homelessness but economy is mixed bag



Vallejo mayor, Andrea Sorce, talks about personally having a sense of pride in the role of Mare Island during a press conference with Congressman John Garamendi about the revitalization of the U.S. shipbuilding industry. Photos by Chris Riley — Times-Herald



Vallejo Mayor Andrea Sorce gives her keynote speech during the Future Leadership Vallejo graduation at Suite Treatments in Vallejo.



Vallejo Mayor Andrea Sorce speaks during a press conference on a joint task force bust in 2025.



Santa, played by Tom Bilbo, gets out of his steampunk sleigh to dance with Vallejo Mayor Andrea Sorce during the Mad Hatter Holiday Parade. Photos by Chris Riley — Times-Herald

BY JANIS MARA

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After Vallejo Mayor Andrea Sorce took office in January 2025, she told the Times-Herald that trying to effect change was like trying to turn a 747 around: “if you turn it too fast it flips over.”

After a year, by no means have Vallejo’s many problems been solved. However, progress has been made on the city’s two biggest issues — public safety and homelessness — on her watch and that of the nearly all-new, reform City Council. The state of the local economy and city administration are a mixed bag.

Homelessness

After years of effort by previous councils, mayors, staffers and others, the 47-unit Broadway Project permanent supportive housing facility opened at the end of 2025 with a final push from Sorce and Council Member Tonia Lediju — the latter of whom, Sorce noted, is the author of the 747 analogy.

Originally budgeted at \$9 million, the cost of the Broadway Project had ballooned to \$27 million with hundreds of thousands of dollars in cost overruns. It was initially supposed to open in 2023. Date after date set for the facility to open came and went with no opening before it finally opened in December.

The final papers were signed in October. “But for Council Member (Tonia) Lediju, I don’t know those agreements would have been signed,” Sorce said at an October council meeting. “Without disclosing anything specific, this has come up several times in closed session. Councilmember Lediju and I had to get involved and sit in on some meetings to resolve some serious issues.”

Council Member Alexander Matias agreed, saying, “There’s a lot of stuff that you guys don’t see in between meetings. Each one of us does a lot of work, but in this instance I do want to publicly express my appreciation and gratitude to Council Member Lediju, who did play a role in getting this project across the finish line.”

“I applaud this success,” said civil rights attorney Osha Neumann, speaking of the Broadway Project. “All of this is especially important because the headwinds from the Trump administration are very strong against these kinds of projects and funding is going to become more and more difficult for these actual solutions.”

Neumann has been working with people experiencing homelessness for more than 35 years. One of his biggest victories included a 202 class-action lawsuit settlement that required Caltrans to reimburse homeless residents for unfairly taking their possessions between 2014 and 2019.

In another major success, Vallejo’s Navigation Center opened in June, ending a 10-year saga of delay after delay. The facility at 1937 Broadway has 125 beds for people experiencing homelessness and “took 10 years, three mayors, and six different City Councils,” then-Council Member, now Vice Mayor J.R. Matulac said at the opening.

While he said it’s “great” that the Navigation Center opened, Neumann said it’s different because a shelter does not constitute permanent housing.

Neumann noted, “You’re not going to get rid of homelessness. In fact, given the current economic situation, it’s very likely it will increase.”

In that context, any progress seems worth noting. While the people staying at the Navigation Center are not permanently housed, still, 125 beds at the center and 47 at the

Broadway Project are enough to provide relief for around 172 of the 682 people experiencing homelessness in Vallejo on a given night.

“Broadway currently has 46 people housed and next week the full 47 will be housed,” Assistant City Manager Gillian Haen told the Times-Herald Tuesday. “The Nav Center fluctuates daily as people move in and out. About 6-8 beds change over. But to your point, the City has built shelter for 172 people,” Haen said.

Public Safety

As with the homeless facilities, a plethora of people including state Sen. Bill Dodd (District 3) and Solano County Supervisor Cassandra James worked tirelessly on an arrangement for the county Sheriff’s Office to supplement the Vallejo police department’s depleted numbers. Sorce played a role in re-starting the project, which had stalled out, and getting city council approval.

“Supervisor James and Council Members Matias and Lediju and I met with (then-Solano County Sheriff Tom Ferrara) in February. The sheriff told us he had sent the term sheet for the arrangement to the city in December. Tonia had asked for an update in January but we didn’t receive anything.

“We asked for a special meeting” and got the ball rolling anew, Sorce said.

The council and board of supervisors passed the arrangement unanimously — and it went into effect Wednesday.

Under the plan, the sheriff’s office will deploy a dedicated team consisting of one lieutenant, one sergeant, and six deputies to patrol in East and South Vallejo. Deputies will answer calls for service every Wednesday through Saturday, from 2 p.m. to midnight through Dec. 31.

“It’s going to make a huge difference for our police response,” Sorce said. “When we have deputies patrolling South and East Vallejo, that means the Vallejo officers will be in the rest of the city. So the entire city will have an increased presence.”

Thomas Nolan, a former Boston police lieutenant and associate professor of sociology at Emmanuel College in Boston, spoke highly of the arrangement, saying that should the collaboration prove successful, “I believe that it could provide a model for law enforcement agencies nationally in addressing persistent problems with recruitment and staffing issues.”

Nolan added, “I commend Chief Ta for the level of detail and for the transparency in providing such a thorough accounting and articulation of the arrangement between the two agencies, particularly in ensuring that the Vallejo PD will continue to respond to major incidents and high priority calls for service.” Nolan has never performed work for the city or its police department.

Also on Sorce's and the council's watch, "The homicides in 2025 were the lowest they have been since the pandemic," Sorce said. "It went from 25 to 17, which is the lowest we've had since 2019.

"I'm not satisfied with seventeen. You want to not stop until you get to zero. But I do want to recognize the work of everybody involved," the mayor said.

In July, the mayor and council voted unanimously to appropriate \$1.2 million for public safety measures including purchasing security towers and re-establishing a safety-oriented school program, the Safe Start to School Program, at four Vallejo schools after school started.

Also, "in February we got increased CHP support and mutual aid from nearby cities to prevent sidseshows," leading to what she described as a "significant" reduction.

While there are still too many sidseshows, "I think the community can tell the difference — there were far fewer sidseshows this year," Sorce said. With regard only to the sidseshows disrupted by Vallejo police, in preliminary numbers, that number dropped 45 percent, from 31 in 2024 to 17 in 2025.

The Local Economy

The Dec. 31 announcement that 85 people would lose their jobs due to the loss of a contract by Mare Island Dry Dock LLC was a blow to Vallejo. The pain was especially severe coming on the heels of the closure of the Valero Benicia Refinery and the Anheuser-Busch Budweiser facility in Fairfield.

"Obviously the news is disappointing. (U.S. Rep. John) Garamendi is following up to find out what happened," Sorce said when asked how it happened that the contract slipped away. "While Dry Dock did have to do layoffs, they are very much looking at a future in Vallejo."

Dry Dock has not closed their doors, she noted, adding that they are trying to find other contracts.

"I'm optimistic about that situation," Sorce said. Garamendi, whose district includes Vallejo, has also said he is hopeful the closure was not permanent.

While the news about Dry Dock was dampening, Sorce said momentum has been building around shipbuilding in Vallejo and the area.

"I participated in a press conference with Garamendi in March about the SHIPS Act," Sorce said. The Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security for America Act is aimed at revitalizing the U.S. maritime industry. Garamendi is one of the principal architects of the act.

First introduced in December of 2024, the SHIPS Act would build 250 U.S.-flagged ships in 10 years, more than triple the number currently operating in international trade. President Donald Trump has signaled support.

“The city has retained the Roosevelt Group as a consultant to help us explore opportunities for Vallejo in Mare Island and bring together partners to see how these new federal investments in the maritime industry can be brought to our community,” Sorce said.

The announcement of a Maritime Prosperity Zone proposed by California Forever and Nimitz Group, the owners of Mare Island, is another encouraging sign. Controversial development company California Forever and Nimitz Group, the owners of Mare Island, announced Jan. 15 that they have proposed a Maritime Prosperity Zone to the federal government on the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers.

City Administration

Sorce said she is frustrated with things “not moving fast enough” when the council gives direction to city staff, citing the slow pace of getting things done.

“The council will give direction on something, but we rely on the staff to implement it in a timely manner, and that hasn’t been the case,” she said.

However, she noted, “The council devoted some funding to youth programming and also put up the security towers. That would be an example of City Council pursuing our staff to be more responsive to concerns. I don’t think we are all the way there, but we have made some progress.”

She noted that the planning department has staffed up and is making some improvements. “Their responsiveness has improved significantly,” the mayor said.

While not every one of the city’s myriad problems has been solved in the mayor’s first year, there’s more three more years to go — and the 747 hasn’t flipped over, while progress has been made.