

VIEWPOINT

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February 2021

Howling wind and rain knocked out power, downed trees, smashed cars and forced street closures.

Major storm leaves damage in wake



Photo/Mike Scheible

By Mike and Judy Green Scheible

Just as a burst of howling wind rattled the windows at Erin and Brad Satterwhite's home on Fourth Avenue, they lost power. Then a thunderous boom happened. They grabbed their 3-year-old son, Elliott, and took him to the back bedroom before checking out what had happened. It was about 10 p.m. Jan. 26.

The Satterwhites had just finished a major remodel of their home. They had added space in front by pushing out the wall to enlarge their dining room, and they had added a master bedroom.

In checking out the source of the storm-caused boom, they discovered a huge branch from the elm tree at the curb had broken off and landed just in front of their remodeled room. It dented their rain gutter, scraped the siding and ripped one of the screens.

Lucky again. This was the third time since they moved in that a major elm branch had fallen within inches of their home.

The Satterwhites moved to Curtis Park in 2011 from East Sacramento. They bought the home, their first, just before getting married. Erin works for CalPERS, and Brad works for the city.

Despite the strong wind and heavy rain, all was comfy Tuesday night until, about 9:45 p.m., the power went out

along Third and Fourth avenues from 21st to 24th streets. A quick check of the SMUD website indicated widespread outages throughout the city. An optimistic forecast predicted early a.m. restoration of power locally. While that was true south of Fourth Avenue, others awoke to cold, dark houses.

As residents wandered out, they soon found the cause. A tall evergreen tree had fallen across 21st Street at Diagon Alley, crushing a parked car, taking out the power pole and blocking the street. SMUD crews got busy removing and replacing the damaged pole. The power was back on at 6:55 p.m.

SCNA approves emergency use of reserve fund amid pandemic

By Dennis Cusick

The SCNA board has been forced to dip into its Reserve for Replacement Fund to help cover a revenue shortfall projected to be \$20,000 a month until Sierra 2 Center can reopen and generate revenue again.

"I don't think anybody expected what befell us – and I'm speaking of COVID," SCNA President Bill Hoover said at the Jan. 13 board meeting, which was conducted via Zoom.

"Frankly, we're struggling to survive."

The Reserve for Replacement Fund exists to pay for maintenance and repair of the community center. The board voted to authorize disbursement of up to \$40,000 from the fund to cover the shortfall for the first two months of the year.

Sierra 2 Executive Director Terri Shettle said her staff is applying for a number of grants "to try to keep it as close to a zero net loss as possible." Grants, such as for payroll protection and arts funding, have to be spent for their intended purpose, so the money cannot be used to replenish the reserve fund, Terri said. However, grants can reduce the amount that has to be removed from the reserve fund in the first place.

At its first meeting of 2021, the board voted to re-elect all of its officers: Bill Hoover, president; Kathy Les, vice president; John Bailey, treasurer, and Bruce Pierini, secretary.

The only change on the Executive Committee will be the member at large. The incumbent, Andrea Rosen, declined renomination, and suggested instead that one of the new board members take the position. As a result, Mimi Budd was elected member at large.

The other new members are Jessica Bivens, Shannon Motley and Lily Harris. Lily's 9-day-old daughter, Mona, lay quietly on her lap throughout the meeting, possibly the youngest person

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Curtis Park's COVID-19 rate relatively low

By Andrea Rosen

Cases of COVID-19 infection in the area that includes most of Curtis Park have been relatively low compared to adjacent areas as well as compared to city and county totals, according to the latest available data.

The most striking contrasts are in the case rate per 1,000 population – total and for the last 30 days. As of Jan. 25, the 95818 ZIP code had logged a rate of 6.38 cases per 1,000 population in the previous 30 days, roughly one-

fifth the rate of downtown (ZIP codes 95811 and 95814), less than half the rate in the ZIP code to the north (95816), and slightly more than half the rates to the south (95822) and east (95817).

The 95818 ZIP code includes most of Curtis Park, Land Park, Newton Booth and Poverty Ridge neighborhoods.

The value of comparing the rate of cases logged in the last 30 days to total cases is that it demonstrates how quickly cases have jumped recently.

As of Jan. 25, the Curtis Park area had logged a total of 716 COVID-19 cases. Of the total, about one-fifth of the cases (138) had occurred in the previous 30 days.

COVID-19 is the name of the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The highly infectious virus has rampaged throughout the United States since approximately mid-January 2020, researchers believe.

California's stay-at-home order took hold approximately March 15, 2020.

Please see COVID, Page 2

COVID: People of color have been harder hit by the virus

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The virus predominantly affects the respiratory system, which means individuals with pre-existing conditions involving the respiratory system – asthma, cardiovascular disease, damaged lungs from smoking and air pollution – are going to be at greatest risk once infected.

There is a well-documented link between lower socioeconomic status and greater illness and higher death rates. It has also been widely reported that communities of color have been much harder hit by the virus.

It is possible that higher COVID-19 rates in poorer ZIP codes can be attributable to those areas having higher numbers of essential workers and lower numbers of people who can work from home, causing greater exposure to the virus.

Because of improved ICU capacity, the Sacramento region was the first to emerge recently from the governor’s stay-at-home order, but the region

Cases of COVID-19 in adjacent areas						
Area Description	ZIP code	Population	Cases last 30 days	Total cases	Rate/1,000 last 30 days	Total rate/1,000 population
East Sac	95819	19,890	120	600	6.03	29.51
Curtis Park & Land Park	95818	21,625	138	716	6.38	32.23
Downtown	95811 & 95814	18,202	562	1,343	30.88	71.42
South of Curtis Park	95822	44,741	491	2,500	10.97	54.20
Midtown/East Sac	95816	17,199	252	927	14.65	51.34
North Oak Park	95817	13,758	168	759	12.21	54.08
South Oak Park	95820	36,437	542	2,143	14.87	56.21

Chart/Mike Scheible

remains in the purple tier with restrictions on many “non-essential” businesses.

Neighbors are urged to protect themselves and the community by wearing a mask when outdoors, practicing social distancing and washing hands frequently.

Sacramento County offers almost daily updates to its epidemiological dashboards but does not report deaths by ZIP code. Available data may be seen

at <https://sac-epidemiology.maps.arcgis.com>.

SCNA board member Andrea Rosen has a background in public health. Currently, she is working for Berkeley’s Department of Public Health Communicable Disease Division as a case investigator and contact tracer through the California Connected program. Mike Scheible assembled the COVID-19 data.

Handrails going up to keep residents from falling down

By Judy Green Scheible

Several years ago, after Gerre Buehler’s downstairs tenant fell on the front steps and hit her head on the concrete, Gerre decided it was time for a handrail. The tenant, who was in her 80s, escaped serious injury.

Now, many handrails are popping up on steep and short steps in Curtis Park. It seems many aging neighbors are modifying their homes so they can stay in the neighborhood. Their stories were similar but their designs varied from simple, straightforward metal rails to some artistic curves and swirls. A few are unique.

One of those is the pair built by Tom Monahan of Portola Way. Tom finally agreed with his wife, Georgann Eberhardt, that they needed handrails off their front porch.

“Friends had remarked over the years about the steepness of the stairs and the need for handrails,” Georgann said.

Tom, who is retired from a state job that had nothing to do with his degree in architecture, spent several months on the design and selecting materials. He wanted the wood rails to blend in with the front porch of his 1912 home.

“It was tricky,” he said, “because

of the steepness and the need to anchor the rails to the concrete.”

It took Tom about a month to build the rails, which are of Douglas fir.

“The essential technique was the setting of retrofitting anchor bolts with an epoxy injection device available in hardware stores,” he said. “Actually, the best part of doing the project was meeting neighbors who stopped by while out walking.”

Another set of unique handrails could easily be called metal sculpture. They appeared last summer down the front steps of Nancy and Kent Sternberg’s home on Third Avenue.

Kent said handrails were important so they can stay in their 1940s home: “Balance is an issue at our age.”

He added that design was also an issue, and Nancy had some artistic ideas. Up stepped Chris Duffy, a hobby metal sculptor and nephew of the Sternbergs’ next-door neighbor Barbara Sherry. Chris’s day job is in IT.

With Nancy’s ideas to mimic tree branches, Chris designed the rails with thick and thin pieces that curve and overlap. The rails are black metal made from chrome-plated steel and welded together to create the curves They



Tom Monahan and Georgann Eberhardt of Portola Way hold onto a handrail that Tom built.

Photo/Joan Cusick

are coated in bronze pebble powder, which becomes part of the metal finish so it won’t chip or peel. It also develops a texture that is easy to grip.

Sharon and Mark Helmar of Rochon Way installed handrails for the two steps out their back door about 12 years ago. Now they are about to add one on the side of the house for the steps out from the

dining room, where her sister recently fell.

A pair of simple, sturdy rails went up about two years ago on the double steps down from the front porch of Lenny and Patti Johnson-Yoder’s home on Fourth Avenue.

“We ain’t getting any younger,” Lenny said. “We both have knee issues.”

Many families navigating challenges of virtual teaching

By Patti Roberts

Most local schools converted from in-person classes to virtual learning more than nine months ago because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been a challenging time for teachers who have had to navigate the roller coaster of constant changes, new technologies and trying to keep online students engaged.

For some, the stress is elevated because of two-teacher or two work-from-home households, or while also parenting their own virtual-learning children.

For many teachers, classes start at 8 a.m. and go through early afternoon, with additional individual student and faculty meetings and office hours.

There are many dedicated teachers in Curtis Park going through these current challenges. *Viewpoint* reached out to three households to learn about the challenges and rewards of virtual teaching.

Leah and Chris Zamora, Leah Abigail, 5, 23rd Street

Leah has taught sixth grade for three years at Madison Elementary School in North Highlands. Chris has taught seventh-grade medieval world history and eighth-grade U.S. history for three years at Martin Luther King Jr. Tech Academy in Del Paso Heights.

Challenges: Leah: "Starting this school year without getting to meet my students in person. Building relationships and trust virtually was quite different; it took much more time and creativity." Chris: "We have less explicit time with students and must scale back some of the content to keep up with the specific needs of our students."

Positives: Leah: "My students are very resilient, and they impress me daily with their tech knowledge, support and grace." Chris: "Everyone is pulling together to make it the best possible educational experience – maintaining high standards backed by a ton of grace."

Sweet moments: Leah: "Getting a glimpse into my students' lives by getting to see their furry friends, siblings, artifacts from home that they like to showcase." Chris: "The cacophony of middle school voices scrambling to say 'bye' when dismissed from class makes me smile every day."

Two-teacher household challenges:

Leah: "The distance learning schedules between all of us can get pretty hectic at home. In addition, having a kindergartner to teach and navigate technology is a challenge." Chris: "Our home life waxes and wanes from being an orderly educational institution to that of a madhouse."



Photo/Ellen Chrismer



Photo/Joan Cusick

Above, left: Ellen Chrismer's daughter June is remote learning in second grade at Washington Elementary.

Above: Through the window, Ellen Chrismer teaches online high school English at her desk.

At left: Both teachers, Leah and Chris Zamora with daughter Leah Abigail work together at their computers in their dining room.



Photo/Judy Harper

Susan Bianchini and Jeff Shultz, Owen and Natalie (college students), Fifth Avenue

Susan has taught for 23 years, currently teaching second grade at Arlene Hein Elementary, Elk Grove. Jeff has taught for 21 years, currently teaching third grade at Carroll Elementary, Elk Grove.

Challenges: Susan: "Technology. For instance, today Zoom was down so we had to use an unfamiliar platform. Also, it's difficult to keep students engaged through a screen." Jeff: "The greatest challenge for me is to make personal connections with students."

Positives: Susan: "I'm enjoying being able to see their faces every day and to be able to interact with them. I'm also no longer fearful of using technology for teaching." Jeff: "It's been empowering. Virtual learning during the pandemic may have forced education into the 21st century."

Sweet moments: Susan: "Allowing my students into my home. They've been able to meet my own children as well as my pets, which they think is the absolute greatest thing." Jeff: "They're still just sweet little 8- and 9-year-olds trying to find their way in this new reality."

Two-teacher household challenges: Jeff: "The challenges are really technological. We don't really have an 'office' since both of our college-age kids are home, also

distance learning. We've made it work by alternating days when one of us teaches from home, the other from our empty classroom."

Ellen and Jim Chrismer, June, 8, and Clare, 5, Donner Way

Ellen has taught for 18 years, currently teaching English at Kinney High School, Rancho Cordova. Jim works for the California Census Office.

Challenges: Ellen: "I teach at a continuation high school whose students struggle with school attendance in the best of times. It can be very difficult to get students to come to a virtual class because they work full time, have Wi-Fi issues, experience unstable housing or are just disengaged from learning online."

Positives: Ellen: "I get to walk with my older daughter at lunch. And I get to have more intimate conversations with my students about what's going on in their lives and work with them one-on-one on assignments more easily."

Sweet moments: Ellen: "We laugh plenty online."

Teaching while mothering: Ellen: "It's a challenge keeping track of all the assignments and what they are supposed to be doing and on what platform. Luckily, Clare now is going to school in-person at St. Francis Elementary."

At HOME in Curtis Park.

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President's message

This neighborhood has rallied before in bleak times

With the beginning of my second year as SCNA president, I look back over the first year with some regret that many of the things I had hoped to accomplish fell victim to a pernicious virus that turned our lives upside down and threatened the very existence of the iconic Sierra 2 Center.

And yet experience tells me to stay hopeful for 2021.

**BILL
HOOVER**

**SCNA Board
President**



The missed opportunities in the last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused me to reflect on how our

neighborhood rallied in 1979 to save the shuttered Sierra School building from destruction. That single act helped transform the neighborhood. The Sierra 2 Center for the Arts and Community became the center of neighborhood activities and a home for outside organizations such as the Italian Cultural Society, Braille Transcribers and the Sacramento Ballet.

My wife and I moved from Larkin Way in Land Park to 25th Street in Curtis Park in 1977. Within a couple of years, I was drafted into the Save Sierra School movement and found myself appearing in front of City Council along with several other neighbors pleading our case. The organizing group became SSNA (Sierra School Neighborhood Association) and then morphed into SCNA (Sierra Curtis Neighborhood Association), which more accurately describes our neighborhood.

Although asked to join the new neighborhood association's board, I was newly married, had just started my job at the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office, and had a military commitment that prevented my full involvement. However, spouse Constance picked up the slack and joined the board along with several other young mothers and helped fuel the success of a variety of neighborhood activities, such as the Pickle Family Circus.

By 1987, my family had moved to 10th Avenue and I was elected to the SCNA board. It was still finding its way and gradually making its presence



1985 file photo/Dennis Renault

Neighbors helped construct a Sierra Green playground in 1985. The projects in SCNA's early years relied heavily on volunteers, many still living in Curtis Park. Proceeds from Pickle Family Circus performances helped finance those early projects.

known as a well-organized and responsible entity. During my three terms on the board, and presidency in 1989 and 1990, major changes took place that helped formalize and professionalize SCNA operations and Sierra 2 management.

The SCNA board's accomplishments were many, such as refurbishing the theater and Curtis Hall, closing cross streets that cut through the park, and adding a jogging track. Credit is due to the late Joe Serna, our former city councilmember, mayor and neighbor, who was most supportive of our efforts.

Perhaps the best-known activities that have continued to the present are Music in the Park, the Home Tour and the Wine Tasting & Silent Auction.

I had hoped we could celebrate the 30th anniversary of these events. But the pandemic prevented that, forcing the cancellation of all of our activities and social functions. Sierra 2 effectively shut down, losing theater bookings and long-term tenants, with the possibility of losing others if the shutdown continues through 2021.

We continue to look for ways to cut expenses as we deal with a negative cash flow of \$18,000 to \$20,000 per month. Where we once were capable of supporting ourselves, we are reduced to relying on grants, zero-interest loans and the generosity of our neighbors and friends to ensure the survival of Sierra 2, the anchor and beacon of our neighborhood.

I remain optimistic we will survive and thrive.

Funding: Positive signs include donations, new members

Continued from Page 1

ever to attend an SCNA board meeting.

The board also voted unanimously to ratify a letter to the city urging notification to new property owners in Crocker Village of the protections granted to the Heritage oak trees that remain on their properties.

Much of the January meeting was orientation for the new members, with presentations by committee chairpersons on the responsibilities of the Finance, Facilities, Development and Neighborhood Concerns standing committees, the *Viewpoint* principal committee, and the racial justice and

quiet yard care ad hoc committees.

On Dec. 2, the new members were elected – and incumbents Susan French, John Mathews and Bruce Pierini were re-elected – by an electronic vote of 73 members at the general membership meeting via Zoom.

Before the vote on board candidates, the nominees introduced themselves to the membership.

Jessica said when she moved to the neighborhood, “I knew instantly I’d chosen the right place. I knew I wanted to get involved and contribute.”

Lily said, “Neighborhoods like this don’t just happen randomly. It’s because

of people like those on this Zoom call.”

Shannon said Curtis Park has the small-town feel of Davis, where she grew up, with “friendly neighbors, a strong foundation ... and the resources of the Sierra 2 Center.”

Mimi, who has lived on Curtis Way about 40 years, is a returning board member and former president. She joked that she is “seasoned,” having served on the board in the 1980s, when Bill Hoover was previously president.

Also at the December meeting, Treasurer John Bailey gave a presentation on SCNA's financial situation. His figures showed a decline

of \$89,295 in revenue from the 2019 fiscal year to the 2020 fiscal year. Since the beginning of the pandemic, John said, the board's focus has been on financial “damage control,” trying to find ways to stem the flow of cash while revenue is down but expenses related to the Sierra 2 Center continue.

Development Committee Chair Erik Fay pointed to some of the positive signs for SCNA in 2020: the Big Day of Giving, which raised more than \$52,000 in May; the Porch Picnic fundraiser, which netted \$17,800 in October, and 33 new SCNA members as an additional benefit of the fundraiser.

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VALENTANGLE: A ZENTANGLE WORKSHOP

Valentine's Day is right around the corner, and what better way to show your friends and family some love than creating a gift for those special people in your life. Join instructor Lee Miller for this Valentangle workshop.

During this class, you will learn an assortment of tangle styles and create Zentangle tiles of your own. No prior Zentangle experience necessary.

Zentangle is a form of artistic meditation through a very specific method of deliberate intention that produces non-objective drawings composed of patterns (tangles) that can be viewed from all four sides.

Sunday, Feb. 7, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Fee: \$25



LET'S DRAW LOVE BIRDS

Local artist and instructor Cara Gregor teaches this class that focuses on two colorful lovebirds, cuddled together to form a heart shape. Cara's simplified yet stylistic approach to drawing animals offers a fun and easy way for beginners to create cute characters. A class like this is great for all ages. No experience required in this step-by-step class.

Monday, Feb. 8, 6-7:30 p.m.
Fee: \$20



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Join us in our longest-running series at the Learnery. In Beginning Spanish, you'll build a foundation for greater intercultural communication in a small group setting. This class is for those with little to no experience with Spanish. With fun exercises and activities, you'll learn a new language in a simplified, comfortable and fun environment.

Thursdays, Feb. 25-April 1, 6-7 p.m.
Fee: \$100

PLANTS IN POTS WATERCOLOR WORKSHOP

In this workshop led by local artist and instructor Tonja Wilcox, you'll learn about watercolors and practice a variety of painting techniques using houseplants as a subject matter. We encourage you to grab a few of your favorite succulents or houseplants to use as muses of your masterpieces. Plants offer wide array of color, texture, and natural shape to explore and play with. Come celebrate nature with us.

Saturday, Feb. 27, 1-3 p.m.
Fee: \$30

New! Add our Watercolor Supply Starter Kit to your registration with easy pick up at Sierra 2 Center. Includes 10-paints in a palette, a versatile watercolor brush, and some watercolor paper.



For more information and to see more listings, visit www.sierra2.org/thelearnery.

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Aggie Square project may give economic boost to city

Much has been happening with Aggie Square since I last wrote about it – I thought this is an appropriate time for an update.

Aggie Square has huge positive potential – for its surrounding communities, the city and the region. Done correctly, and with a broad base of support, it will catalyze a renaissance of Stockton Boulevard, provide thousands of jobs, support the creation of affordable housing, and generally be an economic catalyst the likes of which we have not seen in our city.

Mayor Darrell Steinberg, Councilmember Eric Guerra and I have facilitated and attended scores of meetings with UC Davis, Wexford (the developer) and the community. Our goal is to be 100% transparent through the process as we work with all of our partners to benefit the community and support a

**JAY
SCHENIRER**
City
Council
Member
District 5



financially healthy project.

This will be codified through a series of agreements between multiple parties, including creating a new financing authority, a project labor agreement between the building trades and the developer, and a community benefits agreement between UC Davis and the city. The work generally falls into three buckets – local jobs, affordable housing and transportation. Working groups are meeting on all three topics.

Workforce can be looked at from

three perspectives. First, we are working with UC Davis Health to identify the number of current UCD employees living in neighborhoods surrounding the hospital – particularly in ZIP codes 95817 and 95820. We want to significantly increase that local percentage for a range of jobs and skill levels, and train those who need it. Second, the building trades have negotiated a project labor agreement with the developer that will provide 5,000 construction jobs for Phase 1 of Aggie Square, with requirements for apprenticeships for the local community, local hiring and small business involvement. Third is Aggie Square employment itself – 3,500 to 5,000 ongoing jobs, again with local hiring requirements.

We will also work with UC Davis and the developer to create pathways for young people's education to ensure that

our future workforce is well qualified to fill the jobs Aggie Square creates.

Aggie Square will create demand for housing in the surrounding neighborhoods. It is our responsibility to make sure locals are not displaced because of increasing rents and housing costs. Through the financing authority we are establishing, 20% of the property taxes generated by Aggie Square will go to a city trust fund for affordable housing.

Planned for an area east of Stockton Boulevard and south of Second Avenue, Aggie Square will unquestionably create more stress on our transportation system. The city is meeting with all of its partners to develop mitigation measures for this challenge.

You can learn more by attending one of our community meetings, looking at the Aggie Square web page, or contacting me at jschenirer@cityofsacramento.org.

Trees in Curtis Park

Is decomposed granite safe for landscaping around trees?

By Dan Pskowski

California's recent five-year drought coupled with watering restrictions prompted some Curtis Park residents to rethink how much turf was necessary in their yards. Many re-landscaped with drought-tolerant plants, created or enlarged patios, and used decomposed granite.

This product is formed from natural weathering and erosion of solid granite, a hard igneous rock, and composed of particles 3/8 inch or smaller in diameter.

Colors vary, depending on quarry sources, but buff to brown are the most common in the neighborhood. It's an ideal hardscape material – natural, aesthetically versatile and inexpensive. Stabilizer solutions can be added to create a durable surface that resists the erosive effects of weather or heavy traffic.

Some landscaping websites suggest decomposed granite can be used as a mulch material around trees and

garden beds much like wood mulch, that it lasts longer than other mulch materials and will not attract cats like other mulches. But this is wrong.

My concern as an arborist is that when decomposed granite is installed under a tree's canopy, it drastically changes the growing environment of the tree's root system. As a building material, decomposed granite is used instead of concrete or asphalt. It is the material used on the jogging path around the perimeter of William Curtis Park.

Would you replace your entire front lawn with concrete? That is what is happening with the installation of decomposed granite. A limited amount is OK, but each site must be assessed based on tree species, soils, cultural practices and existing conditions.

Soil is a living system made up of earthworms, soil microorganisms, bacteria and fungi. Scraping away the top layer of soil to install decomposed granite removes some of these organisms. The decomposed granite also limits water percolation and oxygen exchange, which affects not just

the soil organisms but also the tree.

On most trees, the roots extend way beyond the outermost tips of the branches. Lack of water and oxygen adversely affects tree health, which could predispose the tree to insects and diseases. If the tree warrants removal, then the insect or disease is blamed for the tree's demise and not the decomposed granite that was installed years earlier, altering the soil environment.

Footpaths constructed with decomposed granite under the tree canopy are not the concern. Harm to trees can result when significant areas of lawn or shrub beds are removed and replaced with decomposed granite.

If this has occurred, add organic mulch to the decomposed granite area to remediate the situation. If the decomposed granite surface is compacted, it needs to be broken up before applying a 4- to 6-inch layer of mulch.

Given the negative impacts to trees and the soil environment, consult an arborist before installing decomposed granite under a tree's canopy.

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COMMUNITY CORNER

Starting young in SCNA

Baby **Mona Harris**, with parents **Lily** and **Chris** on their front steps, was 9 days old when she sat on her mother's lap throughout Lily's first Zoom meeting as an SCNA board member on Jan. 13. And then, five days later, the two shared their first Neighborhood Concerns Committee meeting. Mona has an older sister, **Roxana**, who will be 3 in April.



Photo/Joan Cusick

Biden appoints Maggie Thomas to climate post

Curtis Park resident **Maggie Thomas** has been appointed chief of staff for the Office of Domestic Climate Policy in the new administration, President-elect Joe Biden announced Jan. 14.

Maggie served on the Biden-Harris transition team and as a policy volunteer on the Biden-Harris campaign.

During the 2020 Democratic primaries, she was climate policy adviser to Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and, before that, an adviser to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee.

After the Warren campaign ended, Maggie became political director at Evergreen Action, a nonprofit advocating full government



Maggie Thomas Photo/Joan Cusick

mobilization to defeat the climate crisis.

She is a graduate of Bret Harte Elementary School, California Middle School, McClatchy High School and Trinity College. She also holds a master of environmental management degree from the Yale School of the Environment.

Maggie is the daughter of SCNA Vice President **Kathy Les** and attorney **Hal Thomas**.

Light Up Curtis Park top locations win prizes

By Heather Hogan

Why should East Sacramento have all the holiday decor fun? Curtis Park can light it up, too!

The inaugural Light Up Curtis Park took place in late December, as homes all over the neighborhood decorated with lights, inflatables, ornaments, cutouts, signage and even bike tires.

Entire streets banded together, stringing lights between trees and light posts all the way down the block. Some strung tunnels of lights over the sidewalks and others wrapped trees and bushes in sparkly goodness. Some houses covered their front lawns with inflatable characters, while others hung lights from tree branches.

Participants were invited to register their decorated space online, send a photo, and



3140 24th Street

get their location pin-placed on a Google map. Viewers could access the map on their mobile devices as they wandered by car, foot or bike through Curtis Park.

Viewers were encouraged to vote for their favorite spaces or blocks online. In total, 182 people voted. The top four locations were awarded prizes: Third Avenue



2533 Ninth Avenue

Photos/Heather Hogan

between 27th Street and Franklin Boulevard; 3644 W. Curtis Drive; 3140 24th St.; and 2533 Ninth Ave.

Local businesses sponsoring the event were Gunther's Ice Cream, Hop Gardens, Summer Moon Yoga and Pangaea Bier Café, all donating gift cards to reward the winners.

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City Council votes to expand options for housing on single-family parcels

By Dennis Cusick

Sacramento City Council has unanimously adopted a staff proposal that would allow fourplexes to be built on any piece of land in the city currently restricted to single-family houses.

The plan, with 10 “key strategies,” is intended to increase housing density, open neighborhoods to those who otherwise could not afford to live there, reduce residents’ dependence on cars and transition the city to all-electric construction.

It is, in part, an attempt to reverse the effects of early 20th century efforts through racial covenants and restrictive zoning to make the expanding suburbs east and south of downtown all-white and affluent.

“It is really scary as a renter right now to think that we might not be able to stay in our community,” said Councilmember Katie Valenzuela, who identified herself as the only councilmember who is a renter. “We can be great assets to a community, if given the chance and so I think this is a step in that direction.”

Sacramento is apparently the first California city to attempt such a single-family zoning rollback, following the lead of Portland, Ore., and Minneapolis.

The plan drew support from a number of neighborhood associations, but vehement opposition from other neighborhood leaders, notably in Elmhurst and Land Park. SCNA sent a letter to City Council the day of the vote, supporting “better racial integration of our older neighborhoods,” while questioning “how eliminating the R-1 zoning designation to allow up to four units on a parcel will necessarily result in additional affordable housing.”

Before the vote, several councilmembers addressed fears that had been expressed by some of the plan’s opponents in letters and in community meetings.

“The aesthetic of the existing community will drive the dialogue,” said Councilmember Angelique Ashby. “This is not about apartments. It’s also not

necessarily about affordable housing. It’s about more housing.”

Councilmember Jeff Harris said he had heard the fears expressed at community meetings about changing the character of older neighborhoods. However, “the economics of our housing stock today does not mean that East Sac or Land Park or Curtis Park or the Pocket or even North Natomas will immediately move toward adoption of multiple fourplexes. You know, the marketplace levels all of that out and as we move forward, we definitely need to create more housing options for a lot more people and ‘missing middle’ is a real thing and should be encouraged.”

The term “missing middle” refers to types of housing that are prevalent in Sacramento’s urban core, such as row houses, cottage courts and multiplexes, but prohibited in other areas by single-family zoning.

Mayor Darrell Steinberg challenged the rhetoric of some opponents. “When I hear a leader in the neighborhood movement say, ‘You know, people may not be able to live in Land Park because of affordability, but they can sure use our park,’ that troubles me as a Sacramentan because everybody should have the opportunity to not only play in Land Park but to live in Land Park,” Steinberg said. “That’s the Sacramento that we all uphold, that we love, that we value, and you better believe this drive for inclusion and equity is the driving force of our city.”

In addition to allowing more housing types in traditionally single-family neighborhoods, the plan approved by City Council includes “key strategies:”

- favor mixed-use development in key commercial corridors;
- require all new buildings to be all-electric and gradually transition existing buildings away from natural gas to electric;
- provide infrastructure to transition from gas cars to zero-emission vehicles;



Photos/City of Sacramento

City staff looked to Curtis Park for examples of a duplex (top) and triplex currently found in “single-family” neighborhoods.

- increase the amount of tree-canopy cover in the city;
- fund improvements in historically underserved neighborhoods;
- study potential future annexation of the Fruitridge Florin Study Area;
- prioritize walking, biking and transit over cars on city streets;
- eliminate parking minimums citywide and introduce parking maximums.

The overall changes in the city’s general plan will need further City Council approval, expected to be in the next year. If approved then, fourplexes could be built in about two years on parcels previously restricted to single-family homes.



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