

Verdant McAllister St. block 'most greenified'

\$2.5 million U.C. Hastings landscaping project wins Urban Forest neighborhood award

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the Excelsior District.

The McAllister project, hatched in 2013, broke ground in February 2015 and was completed in June 2015. The county Transportation Authority put in \$1.8 million and Hastings \$640,000 for the improvements that included sidewalk widening, pedestrian lighting and corner curb extensions.

Seward is proud that the project came in \$100,000 under budget, but he concedes it had its challenges for the neighborhood — sidewalks blocked off for six months, traffic disruptions and more.

"It really was totally chaotic some of the time, but the patience of people in the neighborhood was terrific," Seward says.

Hastings' planting project also served as the kickoff of a Tenderloin-wide planting. Landlords on other blocks opted to plant 32 trees in front of their properties, a fairly average number for other city neighborhoods but large for the TL, says Phil Pierce, Urban Forest policy and outreach director.

Adding trees in the Tenderloin has never been a slam dunk. The Extra detailed some of the knotty problems in its March 2015 issue, including that the downtown/Civic Center area has the least greenery of any San Francisco neighborhood — a tree canopy coverage of 4.1% — and that tree life expectancy is the lowest in the city, more than a third dead or dying with-

in three years of planting.

As if to make the point, a tree was vandalized just days after the McAllister planting, and in the week following the award two more were destroyed. Seward showed The Extra the stumps of the year-old trees and wondered what would motivate someone to such an act.

"Cities can be harsh environments for trees," says Carlson, "especially when they're young." Underwatering, overpruning, being struck by vehicles and damage from urine are some of the risks. "But vandalism involving the intentional injury or destruction of a tree is the hardest to understand. Incidents occur somewhere in the city every year, and they're more likely in busier neighborhoods, including the Tenderloin."

A ray of hope: Seward says the first tree that was vandalized is "in recovery." Kasey Asberry, founder and director of the Demonstration Garden at Hastings and coordinator of the Celebration Garden at Boeddeker Park, has been trying to nurse it back to health for a year, despite its broken trunk.

"I named it 'Panache!' " Asberry says, "because it's doing well despite the assault." It lives in a bright blue pot at the Demonstration Garden, a survivor, like so many in the Tenderloin.

Inspired by Panache's resilience, Seward plans to adopt one of the most recent ginkgo victims and plant it in his yard at home. ■



KASEY ASBERRY

The ginkgo named "Panache!" — planted on McAllister Street last year and almost killed soon after — is recovering at Hastings Demonstration Garden on Golden Gate, tended by Kasey Asberry.



MARJORIE BEGGS



COURTESY FRIENDS OF THE URBAN FOREST



MARJORIE BEGGS

Clockwise from top left: Ginkgo vandalized just days after Hastings won the "Most Greenified Block" award struggles to survive. The thriving trees on McAllister Street keep their 20-gallon watering bags for two years after planting. Dan Flanagan, Friends of the Urban Forest executive director, left, gives the "Most Greenified" award to Hastings CFO David Seward, and TNDC's Julie Doherty at the April 23 Earth Day San Francisco street festival in the Mission.

Tax bolsters Uber's stance on drivers

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A week after Cisneros' pronouncement, Uber settled two class action lawsuits in which Uber drivers in California and Massachusetts sought recognition as employees and access to the rights of employment — to unionize, receive unemployment and medical insurance benefits, earn pensions. Uber's settlement price tag — \$84 million now and an additional \$16 million, if the company goes public and meets certain business goals — is equivalent to a worker who earns \$50,000 a year paying a fine of \$73.50. Another way of looking at it is \$100 million is less than one-half of one percent of Uber's worth. The settlement, Uber proudly announced in a blog post entitled "Growing and growing up," means drivers will remain independent contractors, not employees.

Drivers who participated in the lawsuits will receive payouts based on the

number of miles logged for Uber. The payouts range from \$24 for those who drove less than 750 miles to nearly \$2,000 for those who exceeded 100,000 miles. Lawyers for the drivers will petition the court to award their fees from the settlement fund, capped at 25%, or a potential \$25 million.

In the settlement, Uber agreed to allow drivers to form independent associations and to meet with the associations quarterly to review drivers' concerns.

"I think the settlement is awful," Dubal said. "Until drivers have the right to collective bargaining and to address the issues of car maintenance, insurance coverage and stable income, the companies will continue to ignore their concerns."

Life as an independent contractor isn't all that rosy. A former Uber driver, who requested anonymity because she's involved in litigation following a collision with a drunk driver, spoke of the near impossibility of earning a living wage as

a driver. "The expenses are steep. You pay Uber \$20 for the GPS software, your insurance, which if you're truthful with the insurance company — that is, you tell it that you're driving for hire — costs a fortune. Plus gas, oil and maintenance on the car — all adds up. You're constantly out of pocket. And guess what? If your riders rate you below 4.5, you have to pay \$100 to go to Uber school to improve your attitude and public presence before you can go back to work. And the city wants their cut now. It's a rip off in my opinion." ■



KEN FISHER

Little houses for homeless

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operates 10 "transitional encampments" serving about 450 people, about 20% of that city's homeless population, a church's generosity was key to getting the program started.

"A church has the right to do this because it's protected under the Constitution, the right to provide sanctuary," Cynthia Roat, president of Greater Seattle Cares, told The Extra.

That was a key in Seattle, where the concept of "transitional encampments" is well-established. They got their start in 1990 when the Immaculate Conception Church's offer of space for a shelter helped resolve a dispute around a tent city that had formed near the Kingdome after the Goodwill Games.

This prototype of a Saint Francis Village structure to temporarily house the homeless was built on a base of two wooden pallets. The design includes a window, locking door, a fold-up desk and shelving.

Last year, Seattle passed legislation written by Mayor Edward Murray to sanction three little-house camps for up to a year, with a possible year's renewal, to serve up to 100 people each.

Saint Francis Village organizers are hopeful that having mobile housing structures may provide some freedom from building codes, as has proved the case in Ventura, which operates a similar program. But in San Francisco, their slide-show points out that Police Code Sec. 97 bars the use of vehicles for human habitation on public property such as residential neighborhood streets.

In Seattle, however, accommodations have been made. Weiss and Fisher are hoping that keeping their structures mobile will make them eligible for similar leniency if they can't get around that regulation by setting up

on private property.

Another key question is what sort of documentation is needed to assure landowners who might be willing to offer their property for a Saint Francis Village pilot program that doing so would be permissible in the city's eyes. So far, their efforts to do things strictly by the book, Weiss says, have been frustrated by a lack of buy-in at No. 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place.

"That's the real story," she told The Extra. "It's doable if we're able to get the city to be a partner."

"I've got a lot on my plate," Dodge admitted. "I don't have lots of open land at my disposal. We are working diligently to open two more Navigation Centers, four more buildings with supportive housing." But, he said, "Whenever we bring on extra supply, it really would be utilized. It really is evident to me that there is a strong demand for shelter."

Weiss says that, in a city where many are seeing declining membership, she's so far been unable to find a church that has appropriate space available, "espe-

cially if it means giving up parking space for Sunday."

But she's gotten Lava Mae, which provides mobile shower facilities, on board with her project and expresses confidence in her ability to raise private donations and sufficient volunteer muscle to make it all happen once she gets a green light.

"No matter where they (Saint Francis Village) go, they'll get pushback from the community," Kelly Cutler, of the Coalition on Homelessness, told The Extra. "It's very rare, kind of unheard of, a 'welcome!'"

Weiss says that since the November election she's been spending from a quarter to half of her time advancing the Saint Francis Village vision. She and Fisher have raised \$5,000.

In Noe Valley, not far from the JungleStairs project, Fisher's residence is doubling as a construction space for a prototype of the small homes the co-founders of Saint Francis Village hope to provide (see photos). As of press time, it's taking shape, but it still lacks wheels. ■

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