

SUNNYSIDE

Neighborhood News

February 2025

SUNNYSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
SunnysidePortland.org board@sunnysideportland.org

News from the President

By Chris Waldmann, SNA President

Happy February Sunnyside! February is always, to me, the ickiest month. Cold and rainy and still dark. But, the first blooms of spring are popping up, too, so it's a reminder that bright, warm days are just over the horizon!

In January, at the last General Meeting, we heard from members about their priorities for the new city government to tackle in the coming year. We used the SE Uplift District 3 Community Priorities survey as a tool to foster conversation about the issues facing our great city and its most amazing neighborhood, Sunnyside. There's a lot we want to see, none of which will probably surprise you, from traffic calming to an increase in affordable housing to improved parks and recreation opportunities. Of course, all of these wonderful things will cost the government (us) money. As we recently learned, the projected Portland government shortfall is approaching \$100 million for the coming year due to a number of factors, including declining tax revenue, the ending of COVID-related programs from the federal government and increased costs for services. The City Administrator, Michael Jordan, released a memo outlining potential cuts needed to balance the budget. Read the memo at www.portland.gov/mayor/keith-wilson/documents/01172025-budget-memo-0/download. It is obvious that our new mayor and city council will have to make some tough choices. But they can't act in a silo and that's where we, the people, come in. We must make our voices heard by those who control the levers.

So, my column this month is a call to action for everyone in the neighborhood. The council will start budget hearings in the coming weeks and must pass a new, balanced budget by June. Stay informed about potential cuts to programs you rely on. Call and write to our three new council members. The new district-based council should be responsive to citizen voices and remember, District 3 members are all up for re-election in less than two years. Both Tiffany Koyama Lane, as council vice-chair, and Steve Novick, as finance vice-chair, will have real influence over this process. Visit www.portland.gov/council/districts/3 to submit comments to our councillors.

I promise you that the SNA will be participating in this process too. And make sure you join us for our next General Meeting in March, when we hope to have one or more of our councillors on hand to answer your questions and hear from you directly.

Introducing the SSP's New Project Director

*By Hannah Wallace,
SNA Vice President*

We are excited to introduce Lindsay Cogan-Sant, the Sunnyside Shower Project's new Project Director! Lindsay has over eight years of experience in sexual harm and domestic violence advocacy, most recently working with houseless survivors of domestic violence for the YWCA's InReach program here in Portland. In this job, they created partnerships with seven homeless shelters across Multnomah County so their connections in the

Upcoming Meetings

Location details and agendas are on Sunnysideportland.org.

February

Feb. 10th: LUTC meeting

7:00-8:00 p.m.

Feb. 12th: SNA Board Meeting

7:00-8:30 p.m.

March

March 5th: SNACC meeting

6:00 p.m.

March 10th: LUTC meeting

(Zoom only) 7:00-8:00 p.m.

March 12th: SNA General Meeting

7:00-8:00 p.m.; Board Meeting

8:00-9:00 p.m.

community are vast. They have a deep commitment to trauma-informed care, are trained in de-escalation, and have worked with diverse populations both here and

in Chicago, where they worked as a rape victim advocate. They also led fundraisers including one that features a Kate Bush-interpretive dance contest! They are full of great ideas for how to improve our systems, collaborations, and fundraising at the Sunnyside Shower Project and, bonus: they live here in Sunnyside! Feel free to swing by the church during our hours (T/Th. 1-5 p.m. or Sat. 2-6 p.m.) to introduce yourself. They are spending a lot of time over there these first few weeks, getting to know our guests and volunteers.



Dresden de Vera

Getting to Know Your Neighbors

*By Hannah Wallace,
SNA Vice President*

Q&A with Dresden de Vera, SNA Board Member-At-Large

If you've attended a Board meeting recently or stopped by our booth at the Belmont Street Fair, you've likely met Dresden de Vera. De Vera, 35, joined the SNA Board last May. He moved to Portland in 2015 and eventually landed in Sunnyside, which he chose, in part, because he leads his Throw Snakes Tours bar crawl along Hawthorne. Dresden is known for his gregarious personality and positive energy. And he's already assumed some important roles on the Board. He runs both of the SNA's social media channels (Facebook and Instagram, where you should follow us at @Sunnysidepdxna) and he's also the Board's liaison to the Hawthorne Boulevard Business Association. We talked to him about his fierce love of Portland, his past as a social worker, and his ideas for the future of the SNA.

What is it about Sunnyside that attracted you to live here?

Dresden: It was always where I was naturally magnetized to. Everything I

wanted to do was here—Laurelhurst Park, Mount Tabor, cool bars. A lot of my friends would either be in the area or want to hang out here. It just made sense.

Tell me about your “weird bar crawl with a fanatical local” which you advertise on Airbnb Experiences. What year did you start the tour and how did you get the idea to do it?

Dresden: I started it in 2018. When I was traveling abroad, I did a bunch of bar crawls, and I thought, “This is fun and I could do this better!” They would take us to locations, but that would be it. They wouldn't try to stir conversation between people. I was a huge fanboy of Portland. I'd tell my closest friends about how Portland is heaven on earth. I wanted to be able to talk about how great this place was all the time, and then I just combined it with my love for travelers and leading people through cool places.

You call your tour “Throw Snakes”—what does that mean?

Dresden: Throwing snakes means doing something memorable and unexpected.

Where does that come from?

Dresden: I read this column that was entitled, “How to make the most of your time at your first semester of college.” The columnist said, “Play fewer video games and throw more snakes at things.” He explains that what he means is: Be bold. And what could be more bold than throwing a snake? You could get bitten by the snake, but that's just the consequence of doing something bold. There's risk, and what is a good life but a collection of bold moments?

We live in a culture where it's really difficult to be seen, and it's to the point where being seen is being bold. The snake that a guest throws on a tour is being seen. I like to curate the experience in such a way where people know that it's a safe space to be themselves. One of the recurring reviews that I receive is, “It feels like you're hanging out with old friends.”

You mentioned earlier that you've met thousands of people since launching the tours—and renting a room out on Airbnb.

Dresden: I've met 3,000 people over the past six years.

My tours are an experience of being immersed in the values of Portland. There's this idea by [British-American author] Alan

Watts—“The menu is not the meal.” And I feel like what a lot of tour guides do is they give you the menu. And I think that the meal of Portland, the experience of Portland, is to be vulnerable and your authentic self and to realize that it can be accepted by strangers. There's a sense of kinship and camaraderie that comes from that that's very unique to Portland.

Tell me about the Day Oddities tour.

Dresden: I take people to see more of a buffet of locations along Mississippi. I take people to eccentric art shops, to oddly-themed bars, to hidden cafes. I take them to food carts that were featured on Netflix. It really paints a picture of what Portland offers.

You used to work for Transitions Project homeless shelter, right?

Dresden: I've always been in social work. I was working with youth at the Boys and Girls Club in California. When I got here, I wanted to continue in social work and what was available were homeless shelters. I did that for about five years.

What did you do at the shelters?

Dresden: The first half of my stint there, I was a residential advocate for Doreen's Place, which is a hybrid program where half of the beds are for veterans. It wasn't just a free bed—you had to be working toward self-sufficiency with the help of a case manager. That was more of an uplifting shelter.

The latter half of my time at Transitions Projects was supervising a low-barrier shelter, which, at the time, was the largest in Oregon. There were 200 beds. At this shelter, you didn't have to be making progress. And that was kind of demoralizing because you saw people who just wanted to stop falling, and they didn't have hope to climb because in their minds, they would climb to a position where they would fall from it again.

Did you burn out on that kind of work?

Dresden: It was definitely humbling, and it taught me a lot about leadership. But it ultimately led to wanting to go back to my roots of helping youth, because with youth, there's still a lot of hope. I felt my influence would go farther.

Over the past couple years, I also picked up work for Weird Portland United, building their social media. Over those two years, their following grew by over 16,000 people.

What do you think could use improvement in Sunnyside?

Dresden: I'm glad that we have a graffiti abatement program. I just worry that the businesses are being discouraged by the types of vandalism that happen to their storefronts.

And I do think that mental health has been an issue of people who seemingly are houseless and causing a scene on the street. But I do think that investing in programs like Portland Street Response is important.

Our Street Fair [the Hawthorne Street Fair] is awesome but I would love to see more community events. I know that the upper end of Hawthorne has Volume Bomb Fest—a punk rock concert where they have several bars collaborate to host different shows. I'd like to see Volume Bomb be a street event.

What do you like about serving on the Board of the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association?

Dresden: I love that I get to interview local businesses and get a more rooted sense of the magic surrounding the entrepreneurs of the city. I do think a lot of them are driven by passion and by good networking etiquette. There seems to be a trend of a supportive community behind a successful business.

Portlanders love to support their small local businesses.

Dresden: This contributes to the idea that Portland is just a self aware place. And one of the parts of being self aware is realizing that when you prioritize convenience, you sacrifice community, and community is more important than convenience.

News From Sunnyside Environmental School (SES)

By Valerie Kahn, Member-At-Large

Hello neighbors!

Thank you to everyone who came to our Riparian Festival last month. We hope you enjoyed visiting our school and seeing what our students have been working on so far this year.

Read-A-Thon Is Back!

One of SES's most beloved fundraisers begins on February 19th and runs until March 6th. During Read-A-Thon we encourage students to read as much as

possible by having them track their reading and compete to see which individual, class, and grade can read (and fundraise) the most. Reading independently, being read to, or listening to an audiobook all count. Students may read whatever suits their fancy—books, comics, magazines, news articles, instructional manuals. Similar to a run-a-thon, students collect pledges for the time they spend reading, as well as flat donations. Prizes are awarded to the individuals, classes, and grades that read the most, as well as to those that raise the largest amount of money.

The competition gets fierce inside the school, where each class has a huge jar to which teachers add dyed beans corresponding to the number of minutes each student in their class read the previous day. This helps students see their progress, as well as motivates them to read more to compete with other classes. Students enjoy Dress As Your Favorite Book Character Day, and decorate their lockers to look like the spines of their favorite books.

Perhaps the best part of Read-A-Thon is the author visits. During these two weeks, a diverse group of local authors and illustrators come to SES to speak about their books, authorship, and share their own personal stories. All grade levels get to attend at least one of these assemblies, and all SES families and community members have the opportunity to purchase signed copies of the works of these local artists. This year, our list of authors who have kindly agreed to present include Mike Lawrence, Lilah Sturges, Cathy Camper, Waka T Brown, Aron Nels Steinke, and Whitney Gardner. Please consider supporting local authors, illustrators, and SES by buying signed copies of our speakers' books by using the QR code below or going to this website: sespts.square.site/shop/read-a-thon/6. If you do not currently have a student at SES please add "community member" in the order notes and we will contact you with pickup options when the books arrive. These are really special books and also make great gifts!



Additionally, if you know an SES student and would like to support them during Read-A-Thon, please reach out to them and make a donation. They will be very excited to receive it. If you would like to donate and do not know a SES student, you can use the QR code or website above and click on "Read-a-thon Pledge."

Help Our Neighborhood Get a Soccer Field

A coalition of SES parents and neighborhood community members ("Soccer Coalition") are working together to raise money to get a soccer field placed on the SES grounds. As mentioned in my first column, the school grounds become a public park open to the community after 3:15 p.m. on weekdays and all day on weekends and during the summer. While this park is lovely, it has a large amount of grassy space that kids struggle to play soccer on because there aren't any goals. The Soccer Coalition is trying to change that.

The Soccer Coalition has secured a contract from Portland Public Schools for two soccer goals. They are now raising funds to cover the cost of the goals and for ongoing maintenance, such as periodically replacing nets. These goals will be on the grounds both during school and outside of school hours, and everyone in the community will be welcome to play soccer here when school is not in session.

The Soccer Coalition is trying to raise \$6,000 by this coming spring. Please help bring access to pick-up soccer to the whole neighborhood by donating through the below QR code, or at www.gofundme.com/f/help-bring-soccer-to-sunnyside-this-spring.



Have questions about SES? Email sunnysideenvironmentalnews@gmail.com and maybe I'll answer them in a future column!

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Any opinions expressed, unless specified, are not necessarily those of the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association or its board. **Sunnyside residents are welcome to submit articles for consideration that concern neighborhood issues, by emailing newsletter@sunnysideportland.org. Deadlines are the 15th of the month prior.** Many wonderful volunteer Sunnyside residents distribute the Neighborhood News.

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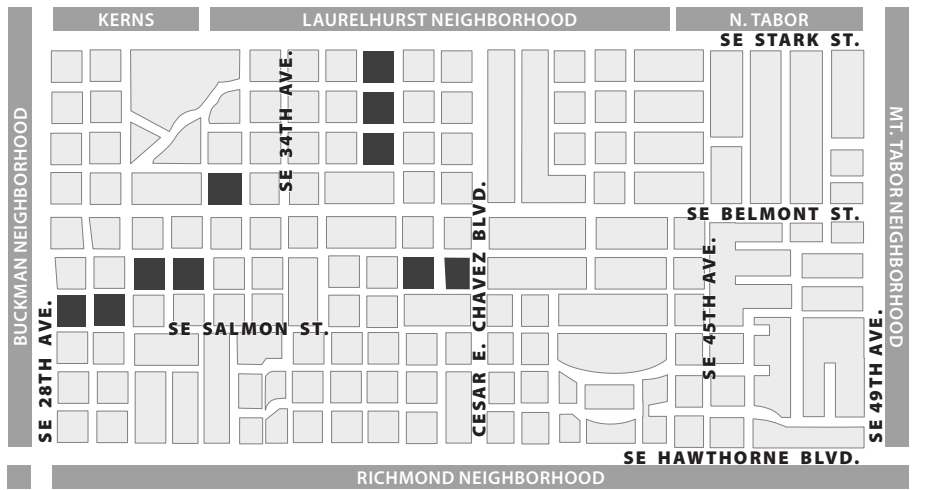
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Sunnyside Neighborhood 'Gap Map'

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