



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal Hill, California 90755-3799

THE CITY OF SIGNAL HILL
WELCOMES YOU TO A REGULAR
SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE MEETING
May 06, 2025

The City of Signal Hill appreciates your attendance. Citizen interest provides the Sustainable City Committee with valuable information regarding issues of the community. Meetings are held four times in the 2025 calendar year: February 4, May 6, August 7, and October 7. Meetings commence at 6:00 p.m. There is a public comment period at the beginning of the regular meeting, as well as the opportunity to comment on each agenda item as it arises. Any meeting may be adjourned to a time and place stated in the order of adjournment.

The agenda is posted 72 hours prior to each meeting on the City's website and outside of City Hall and is available at each meeting. The agenda and related reports are available for review online at www.cityofsignalhill.org. You may also contact the Community Development Department at comdev@cityofsignalhill.org or by calling (562) 989-7340.

During the meeting, the Chair presents agenda items for Committee consideration. The public is allowed to address the Committee on all agenda items. The Chair may take agenda items out of order and will announce when the period for public comment is open on each agenda item. The public may speak to the Committee on items that are not listed on the agenda. This public comment period will be held at the beginning of the public portion of the meeting. Please direct your comments or questions to the Chair.

The City of Signal Hill Sustainability Committee is committed to striking a balance between economic growth, social responsibility, and environmental well-being by partnering with our neighbors, businesses, and the community to provide a healthy and enduring environment for future generations. The purpose of the Committee is to develop and recommend a sustainability framework to the City of Signal Hill City Council that promotes environmentally sound and financially practical objectives.

To participate:

- In-person Participation: Library Community Room, 1800 East Hill Street, Signal Hill, California.
- To make a general public comment or comment on a specific agenda item, you may also submit your comment, limited to 250 words or less, to

commdev@cityofsignalhill.org not later than 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 4, 2025. Written comments will be provided electronically to the Sustainable City Committee and attached to the meeting minutes. Written comments will not be read into the record.

Sustainable City Committee Members receive no compensation.

(1) CALL TO ORDER – 6:00 P.M.

(2) ROLL CALL

Local Business Representative:
DEBRA LAYTON

Community Representatives:
CECILIA FIDORA
BOZENA JAWORSKI
DAVID PERZYNSKI
LISA WONG

Commission Representatives:
KIRAN GIDWANI
DIANA PHILLIPS
SONIA SAVOULIAN - CHAIR

Commission Alternates:
JULIE DOI
PAMELA DUTCH HUGHES
SAEIDA MILLER

Council Representatives:
ROBERT COPELAND
LORI WOODS

City Staff Representatives:
CARLOS LUIS
SUSANA MARTINEZ
ALEXIS LOPEZ SEVILLA
JESUS SALDAÑA

(3) PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR ON ITEMS NOT LISTED ON THIS AGENDA

(4) ANNOUNCEMENTS

(5) EDUCATION

a. EDUCATION

Summary:

A. GUEST PRESENTATION - Christy Padini of Farm and Craft Market will

present on the financials and logistics of starting and maintaining a Farmers Market program.

Recommendation:

- A. Receive and file.

(6) STAFF NEW BUSINESS

- a. STAFF NEW BUSINESS

Summary:

A. BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON APRIL 1, 2025 - KEY TOPICS

- a. Farmers Market: Committee Members will share updates on their findings and research related to the Farmers Market initiative. Discussion will include outlining the next steps to advance the project.
- b. Artificial Turf and Parkway to Garden Program: The Public Works Department will provide a brief presentation on the City's landscape standards for new and rehabilitation projects, and current parkway standards.
- c. Member Attendance Frequency: Staff will present the findings of the three-year SCC Members' attendance report requested by Committee Member Wong.

B. FUTURE PRESENTATIONS - Committee Members may consider scheduling a presentation suggested by staff.

C. COMMITTEE MEMBER TERMS AND REAPPOINTMENTS - Staff would like to remind SCC members that their terms are set to expire in June 2025. Members interested in continuing their service should apply during the recruitment period. Interviews will be conducted during the regular meeting of August 7, 2025.

Recommendation:

- A. Discuss and determine whether any of these items should be added to the August 7, 2025, meeting agenda.
- B. Discuss and direct staff to schedule the presentation for the August 7, 2025, meeting.
- C. Receive and file.

(7) LOCAL ACTIONS

a. LOCAL ACTIONS

Summary:

- A. RESERVOIR PARK STORMWATER IMPROVEMENTS - The Public Works Department will provide a brief presentation of the Reservoir Park Stormwater Improvements project.
- B. MAYOR'S CLEAN UP - The Spring Mayor's Clean-Up event was held on Earth Day, April 22, 2025, in the Hilltop Neighborhood. Staff will share highlights of the event.

Recommendation:

- A. Receive and file.
- B. Receive and file.

(8) PUBLIC OUTREACH

a. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Summary:

- A. CONCERTS IN THE PARK 2025 - Concerts in the Park are scheduled on Wednesday evenings, July 9th to July 30th. As in previous years, SCC will have a booth at the event each week providing information to the public about sustainable practices and water conservation. Staff would like to begin recruiting volunteers to assist with event setup, staffing, and cleanup. Two SCC members typically run the booth, with staff providing some assistance with the set-up.

During the February 4, 2025, SCC meeting, committee members discussed potential informational booth materials or giveaway items to hand out during the event. Committee members may discuss any other ideas or giveaways they find appropriate for these events.

- B. SUSTAINABILITY AWARD PROGRAM - On March 25, 2025, the City Council presented a Sustainability Award to Ground Education for their school garden learning program. Nominations remain open for SCC members to recommend other Signal Hill businesses or residents for consideration for a future award.

Recommendation:

- A. Sign up to volunteer at the SCC Summer Concerts Booth.
- B. Nominate a business or resident for a Sustainability Award.

(9) CONSENT CALENDAR

The following Consent Calendar items are expected to be routine and

non-controversial. Items will be acted upon by the Committee at one time without discussion. Any item may be removed by a Committee or member of the audience for discussion.

a. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Summary:

Regular Meeting of February 4, 2025.

Recommendation:

Approve.

b. IN THE NEWS

Summary:

Articles compiled by staff that may be of interest to the Committee.

Recommendation:

Receive and file.

(10) COMMITTEE NEW BUSINESS

(11) ADJOURNMENT

Tonight's meeting will be adjourned to the next scheduled meeting of the Sustainable City Committee to be held on August 7, 2025 at 6:00 p.m., in the Signal Hill Public Library Learning Center, 1800 E Hill St, Signal Hill, CA 90755.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

If you need special assistance beyond what is normally provided to participate in meetings, the City will attempt to accommodate you in every reasonable manner. Please call the City Clerk's office at (562) 989-7305 at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to inform us of your particular needs to determine if accommodation is feasible.

AFFIDAVIT OF POSTING

I, Phyllis Thorne, Management Assistant for the Community Development Department, do hereby certify that the foregoing agenda was posted at City Hall, at the Library, at Discovery Well Park, and at Reservoir Park 72 hours in advance of this meeting.



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL
STAFF REPORT

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal
Hill, California 90755-3799

5/6/2025

AGENDA ITEM

TO:

**HONORABLE CHAIR
AND MEMBERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE**

FROM:

**COLLEEN T. DOAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT:

EDUCATION

Summary:

- A. GUEST PRESENTATION - Christy Padini of Farm and Craft Market will present on the financials and logistics of starting and maintaining a Farmers Market program.

Recommendation:

- A. Receive and file.



STAFF REPORT

5/6/2025

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TO:

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AND MEMBERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE**

FROM:

**COLLEEN T. DOAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT:

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- a. Farmers Market: Committee Members will share updates on their findings and research related to the Farmers Market initiative. Discussion will include outlining the next steps to advance the project.
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Recommendation:

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- B. Discuss and direct staff to schedule the presentation for the August 7, 2025, meeting.

5/6/2025

C. Receive and file.

Three-Year Report on SCC Attendance

SCC Meeting Date	SCC Members' Attendance	Quorum Met
February 1, 2022	9 out of 13 Members	Yes
May 3, 2022	8 out of 13 Members	Yes
August 1, 2022	10 out of 13 Members	Yes
October 4, 2022	10 out of 13 Members	Yes
February 7, 2023	8 out of 12 Members (1 Vacancy)	Yes
May 2, 2023	9 out of 12 Members (1 Vacancy)	Yes
August 3, 2023	4 out of 13 Members	No
October 3, 2023	6 out of 13 Members	No
February 6, 2024	9 out of 13 Members	Yes
May 7, 2024	7 out of 13 Members	Yes
August 1, 2024	7 out of 13 Members	Yes
October 1, 2024	6 out of 13 Members	No
February 4, 2025	8 out of 13 Members	Yes



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5/6/2025

AGENDA ITEM

TO:

**HONORABLE CHAIR
AND MEMBERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE**

FROM:

**COLLEEN T. DOAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT:

LOCAL ACTIONS

Summary:

- A. RESERVOIR PARK STORMWATER IMPROVEMENTS - The Public Works Department will provide a brief presentation of the Reservoir Park Stormwater Improvements project.
- B. MAYOR'S CLEAN UP - The Spring Mayor's Clean-Up event was held on Earth Day, April 22, 2025, in the Hilltop Neighborhood. Staff will share highlights of the event.

Recommendation:

- A. Receive and file.
- B. Receive and file.



STAFF REPORT

5/6/2025

AGENDA ITEM

TO:

**HONORABLE CHAIR
AND MEMBERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE**

FROM:

**COLLEEN T. DOAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT:

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Summary:

- A. CONCERTS IN THE PARK 2025 - Concerts in the Park are scheduled on Wednesday evenings, July 9th to July 30th. As in previous years, SCC will have a booth at the event each week providing information to the public about sustainable practices and water conservation. Staff would like to begin recruiting volunteers to assist with event setup, staffing, and cleanup. Two SCC members typically run the booth, with staff providing some assistance with the set-up.

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- B. SUSTAINABILITY AWARD PROGRAM - On March 25, 2025, the City Council presented a Sustainability Award to Ground Education for their school garden learning program. Nominations remain open for SCC members to recommend other Signal Hill businesses or residents for consideration for a future award.

Recommendation:

- A. Sign up to volunteer at the SCC Summer Concerts Booth.
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CITY OF SIGNAL HILL
STAFF REPORT

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5/6/2025

AGENDA ITEM

TO:

**HONORABLE CHAIR
AND MEMBERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE**

FROM:

**COLLEEN T. DOAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT:

PREVIOUS MINUTES

Summary:

Regular Meeting of February 4, 2025.

Recommendation:

Approve.



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal Hill, California 90755-3799

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING SIGNAL HILL SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE February 04, 2025

DRAFT

A Regular Meeting of the Signal Hill Sustainable City Committee was held in-person in the Signal Hill Library Community Room on Tuesday, February 4, 2025.

(1) **CALL TO ORDER – 6:00 P.M.**

(2) **ROLL CALL**

PRESENT: ROBERT COPELAND
LORI WOODS
DIANA PHILLIPS
CHAIR SONIA SAVOULIAN
CECILIA FIDORA
BOZENA JAWORSKI
DAVID PERZYNSKI
LISA WONG

ABSENT: JULIE DOI
KIRAN GIDWANI
PAM DUTCH HUGHES
SAEIDA MILLER
DEBRA LAYTON

(3) **PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR ON ITEMS NOT LISTED ON THIS AGENDA**

There was no public business from the floor.

(4) **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(5) **EDUCATION**

a. EDUCATION

Holland Brown gave a presentation about Ground Education, a non-profit organization that partners with local schools in the Long Beach Unified School District. Committee members asked clarifying questions about the program.

- b. Commission members requested that the presentation on the Street Tree Master plan be moved to after the presentation by Ground Education.

Public Works and SWA gave a presentation on the City's Street Tree Master Plan public outreach efforts.

(6) STAFF NEW BUSINESS

a. STAFF NEW BUSINESS

A. CONCERTS IN THE PARK

The Committee discussed give-away items for the 2025 Concerts in the Park.

B. MEETING FREQUENCY

The Committee discussed adding two non-agendized meetings to the calendar for 2025.

(7) LOCAL ACTIONS

a. LOCAL ACTIONS

A. GATEWAY CITIES ENERGY ACTION AWARD

The Gateway Cities Council of Government will present the Gold Level award to the City Council during the April 8, 2025, meeting.

B. SCC SUBCOMMITTEE: FARMER'S MARKET

The subcommittee members gave an update.

C. SCC SUBCOMMITTEE: POLYSTYRENE PACKAGING CAMPAIGN

The subcommittee members gave an update.

E. HILLBROOK PARK UPDATE

Staff provided an update on the project.

(8) PUBLIC OUTREACH

a. PUBLIC OUTREACH

A. MAYOR'S CLEAN-UP:

At the request of Mayor Jones, the Spring Mayor's Clean-Up event will be held on Earth Day, Tuesday, April 22, 2025, in the Hilltop Neighborhood. Basecamp will be located at Discovery Well Park, 2200 Temple Avenue.

B. SUSTAINABILITY AWARD PROGRAM

The Committee selected Ground Education, 2633 East 28th Street Unit 626, to receive a Sustainability Award for their School Garden Learning Program.

(9) CONSENT CALENDAR

a. PREVIOUS MINUTES

b. IN THE NEWS

It was moved by COMMITTEE MEMBER COPELAND and seconded by COMMITTEE MEMBER JAWORSKI to approve the Consent Calendar.

(10) COMMITTEE NEW BUSINESS

Committee Member Wong requested to schedule a presenter at a future meeting on the topic of Community Choice Aggregation.

(11) ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by COMMITTEE MEMBER PERZYNSKI and seconded by COMMITTEE MEMBER JAWORSKI, to adjourn to the next regular meeting of the SCC to be held on Tuesday, Tuesday May 6, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Library Community Room, 1800 E Hill Street, Signal Hill, CA, 90755.

CHAIR SAVOULIAN adjourned the meeting at 8:23 p.m.

SONIA SAVOULIAN

CHAIR

Attest:

COLLEEN T. DOAN

COMMISSION SECRETARY



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL
STAFF REPORT

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5/6/2025

AGENDA ITEM

TO:

**HONORABLE CHAIR
AND MEMBERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE CITY COMMITTEE**

FROM:

**COLLEEN T. DOAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT:

IN THE NEWS

Summary:

Articles compiled by staff that may be of interest to the Committee.

Recommendation:

Receive and file.

Background and Analysis

Articles include:

- Fight intensifies over bill by former Edison executive to gut rooftop solar credits - LA Times
- How one woman transformed a trash patch into a garden - LA Times
- Long Beach-LA Region tops list of nation's smoggiest areas - Long Beach Post

Fight intensifies over bill by former Edison executive to gut rooftop solar credits



Owners of rooftop solar panels protest outside Assemblymember Lisa Calderon's office in the City of Industry on Wednesday. (Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)



By Melody Petersen
Staff Writer | [Follow](#)

April 23, 2025 6:21 PM PT

- Calderon's AB 942 would limit the energy credits provided to those who purchased the systems to 10 years — half the 20-year period the state had told rooftop owners they would receive.

- Edison and the state's two other big for-profit utilities have long tried to reduce the energy credits that incentivized Californians to invest in the solar panels.

A bill to sharply reduce the energy credits given to homeowners with rooftop solar panels is pitting union electrical workers and the state's big utilities against people who benefit from the solar credits — and one of the first skirmishes took place in the City of Industry on Wednesday.

Waving signs and blowing whistles, dozens of rooftop solar owners protested outside the office of Assemblymember Lisa Calderon (D-Whittier), who proposed Assembly Bill 942 to [slash the credits](#) for people who installed the systems before April 15, 2023.

Jim Matthews, one of the rooftop solar owners at the protest, said he doubts he would have purchased the panels if he would have known the state would be reversing the incentives.

“Stuff like this tears my heart,” said Matthews, who lives in Hawthorne. “I think it’s scandalous.”

Calderon worked for Southern California Edison and its parent company, Edison International, for 25 years before she was elected in 2020. Her last position included managing the parent company’s political action committee.

Edison and the state's two other big for-profit utilities have [long tried to reduce](#) the energy credits that incentivized Californians to invest in the solar panels. The rooftop systems have reduced the utilities’ sales of electricity.

“Calderon: For the People or for Edison?” said one sign waved by protesters outside Calderon’s office in the City of Industry. “Stop SCE’s Revolving Door in Sacramento,” said another.



Solar panel installers in Watts on June 18, 2021. (Gary Coronado/Los Angeles Times)

Calderon told the Times she introduced the bill because she had learned that 97% of the people in her district were paying higher electric bills because of the solar credits going to the remaining 3% when they sent the unused electricity from their solar panels to the grid.

“From an equity standpoint, that’s not fair,” she said. “I would love for everyone to have solar, but we need to do it in a fair and equitable way.”

Calderon said Edison, Pacific Gas & Electric and San Diego Gas & Electric have all sent her letters supporting the bill.

AB 942 would limit the energy credits provided to those who purchased the systems to 10 years — half the 20-year period the state had told rooftop owners they would receive. It would also end the incentives if the house was sold.

Uniting in the effort to oppose the bill are dozens of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and the Environmental Working Group, which point out that the state has long said the solar contracts would last for 20 years.

Also attending the protest were representatives from the California Solar & Storage Assn., a trade group that represents companies selling the rooftop solar systems. The protest was organized by the [Solar Rights Alliance](#), a statewide association of solar users.



CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

Former Edison executive Calderon, now a lawmaker, seeks to cut rooftop solar credits

April 21, 2025

Jeff Monford, a spokesperson for Edison, said the company sent Calderon a letter Wednesday backing the bill. He said the bill has “nothing to do with utility profits. It will result in savings for our customers.”

The company estimates that those customers who don’t have solar would save \$500 million by 2030 if AB 942 passed, or about 3% of the average household electric bill.

The unions of electrical workers who install and repair equipment built by Edison and other electric companies are lobbying to get the bill passed.

In an email, a spokesperson for the California State Assn. of Electrical Workers said the group “strongly supports” the bill, which it said would “alleviate the financial burden on non-solar ratepayers.”

At a meeting in Sacramento in late March, leaders of the group, which represents 83,000 electrical workers in the state, [said a top goal](#) was to reform the rooftop solar incentives.

“It is unjust, unreasonable and unsustainable for Californians to continue shoveling billions of dollars every year to an industry when it is no longer justified nor fair to non-solar customers, particularly when the burden falls hardest on low-income customers,” Scott Wetch, a lobbyist for the electrical workers, wrote in a letter to the chair of the Assembly Utilities and Energy Committee.

Calderon and the electrical workers point to [an analysis](#) by the state Public Utilities Commission’s public advocates office that said the credits given to rooftop owners for the electricity they send to the grid is raising the electric bills of customers who don’t own the panels by \$8.5 billion a year.

The rooftop solar industry and environmental groups disagree with that analysis, saying it was flawed.



CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT
FOR SUBSCRIBERS

California officials push to cut energy credits to households with rooftop solar panels

Feb. 24, 2025

In a recent letter to the Assembly committee, the environmental groups pointed to an analysis that economist Richard McCann performed for the rooftop solar industry that found that electric rates had risen as the utilities spent more on infrastructure. That equipment includes the transmission lines needed to connect industrial-scale solar farms to the grid.

Even though homeowners' solar panels helped keep demand for electricity flat for 20 years, the three utilities' spending on transmission and distribution infrastructure had risen by 300%, McCann found.

“To address rising rates, California must focus on what’s really wrong with our energy system: uncontrolled utility spending and record utility profits,” the environmental groups wrote.

In December 2022, the commission voted to cut incentives for anyone installing the panels after April 15, 2023, by 75% but left the incentives in place for legacy customers.

AB 942 would not apply to rooftop solar customers who live in territory served by the state’s municipal utilities, including the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

A hearing on the bill is scheduled for April 30.

More to Read

**Edison told the government that Calderon was an ‘executive.’
Now it claims she wasn’t.**

April 29, 2025



**A desperate Hollywood looks to Sacramento for help in
stopping runaway production**

April 25, 2025



**Newsom shuns Southern California in public utilities
commission appointments**

April 14, 2025



Melody Petersen

Melody Petersen is an investigative reporter covering healthcare and business for the Los Angeles Times. Send her tips securely on Signal at (213) 327-8634.

PLANTS

How one woman is doggedly transforming an L.A. trash patch into a vibrant habitat garden



Environmental scientist Marie Massa has spent three years transforming a long, weedy strip of trash-filled public land into a fragrant native plant garden on Avenue 20, which she's named the Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor. (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

By Jeanette Marantos
Staff Writer

April 9, 2025 3 AM PT

- Marie Massa noticed a neglected strip of public land near her son's school in 2022.
- The narrow strip in Lincoln Heights next to the 5 Freeway was filled with weeds and trash, but Massa saw a few native buckwheats trying to grow and thought, "Native plants could do really well here."

- Today Massa spends three mornings a week tending the vibrant, flower-filled native habitat garden she created mostly by herself and named the Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor.

Some people see trash and weeds and walk on by. Others rail against the slob of the world, or agencies that don't do their jobs.

And some, like environmental scientist Marie Massa, roll up their sleeves and get to work.

In Massa's case, that's meant spending six to nine hours a week since early 2023 working mostly alone to transform a long, trash-filled strip of no-man's land between Avenue 20 and Interstate 5 in Lincoln Heights into a fragrant, colorful habitat of California native plants.



Tall stems of rosy clarkia, a native wildflower, add to the riot of spring color in the Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor on Avenue 20, south of Broadway. (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

She's named the garden the Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor and features it on her Instagram page, [ave20nativeplants](#), exulting every time she spots a native bee, caterpillar or some other creature visiting the space for food or shelter.

"You see all these horrible things happening in the world," she said, "the loss of rainforests, of plants and animals and insects. ... It's so much and sometimes I can't handle all this bad news," Massa said. "That's why I feel compelled, because I can make a difference here."

Planting Change

With little fanfare, Southern Californians are quietly changing urban landscapes for the better with native plants. These are their stories.

Massa is slender and just 5 feet tall in her work boots, with strands of gray lightening her dark hair. Years ago, she helped build the [Nature Gardens at the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum](#). She wrote about wildflower blooms for the [Theodore Payne Foundation's Wild Flower Hotline](#) and volunteered to help renovate UCLA's extraordinary [Mathias Botanical Garden](#), a project that was completed in 2024.

These days Massa is a stay-at-home mom to Caleb, age 8. Her husband, Joseph Prichard, one-time lead singer for the L.A. punk band [One Man Show Live](#), now runs his own graphic design company, [Kilter](#). Most weekdays, Massa walks her son to and from school, makes her husband's lunch and tends her own private garden.



Marie Massa purchased 200 feet of hose so she could hook it up to a spigot at the neighboring Alliance Susan & Eric Smidt Technology High School, which has given her permission to use the water to keep her native plant garden project alive. (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

But Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays between 8:30 and 11:30 a.m., Massa becomes a determined eco-warrior. With her garden gloves, buckets, hand tools and a spongy cushion to protect her knees as she weeds, Massa is doggedly transforming a

strip of public land roughly 8 feet wide and around 380 feet long — longer than a football field.



LIFESTYLE

Bountiful veggies or fragrant native plants? Here's how to get a dreamy yard with both

April 8, 2025

She fills bags of trash from around her planting strip and calls 311 to have them hauled away. She drags 200 feet of hose to water her new plantings a few times a month, from a spigot made available by Alliance Susan & Eric Smidt Technology High School next door. She's spent days digging up garbage buried three feet deep in the garden and even muscled an old oven from the planting area to the curb after someone dumped it during the night.

When graffiti appears on the retaining wall below the freeway, she takes a photo and uploads it to [MyLA311](#) to get it painted over. She's lobbied for plant donations, potted up excess seedlings for people to carry home and recruited work parties for really big jobs, such as sheet mulching the parkway between the sidewalk and the street to keep weed seeds from blowing into the habitat corridor on the other side of the sidewalk.

The project started slowly in the fall of 2022. As she walked Caleb to school, less than a mile from their Lincoln Heights home, Massa noticed this long strip of neglected land between the freeway's retaining wall and the sidewalk.



Passerby Eimy Valle, 20, walks amid the abundant spring color of the Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor on Avenue 20. (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

“It was full of weedy dried grasses, all kind of brown, and lots of trash,” Massa said.
“There were also four planter beds in the parkway [the strip of land between the

sidewalk and street] with a few buckwheat and encelias (brittlebush), but every time the L.A. Conservation Corps came to mow the weeds down, they gave a huge horrible buzz cut to the native plants.”

When the buckwheats in the parkway got mowed down, she said, they blew seeds into the wider planting strip on the other side of the sidewalk, and Massa said she noticed some buckwheat seedlings coming up, trying to make space for themselves among the weeds. “I thought, ‘Native plants could do really well here,’ and I started developing this idea that the strip would be cool as a native plant garden.”

That November, she bought some wildflower seeds and sprinkled them along the corridor, to see whether the soil would support their growth. After the heavy rains that winter, she was delighted to find them sprouting in the spring, fighting through the weeds along with buckwheat seedlings.



Clusters of deep blue California bluebells are among the many vibrant flowers blooming at the Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor on Avenue 20.
(Christina House / Los Angeles Times)



Native sticky monkey-flowers come in two colors at the Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor: in red and here, in pale yellow with white edges. (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

She wrote a letter to people who lived near the untended land, outlining her idea to create a native plant garden to beautify the area and support pollinators. She invited neighbors to help her and included her email address. “I didn’t get any responses,” she said, “but when I went out to weed, people would come up to me and say, ‘We got your letter and this is a cool idea.’”

In the spring of 2023, as her wildflowers were sprouting, Massa called the office of [Los Angeles Council District 1](#) and told them about her project. She asked them to stop the Conservation Corps from mowing down the emerging plants and requested help from the Conservation Corps to suppress the weeds along the long strip of parkway between the sidewalk and street.

The council agreed, so between May and October of 2023, Massa organized six work sessions to sheet mulch the parkway between the sidewalk and street, laying down cardboard and city-provided mulch with help from members of the [L.A. Conservation Corps](#), [Plant Community](#) and [Aubudon Society](#). The goal was to suppress the weeds on the parkway so they didn’t add more seeds to the habitat she was trying to create on the other side of the sidewalk.



LIFESTYLE

Now’s the time to step inside the most beautiful private gardens in and around L.A.

March 26, 2025

“The sheet mulching took a looong time,” she said, “but I wanted the parkway to look nice, with cleaned up planters, so people could park along the street, easily get out of

their cars and see the corridor.”

But she still needed plants. She went to her former boss at the Natural History Museum’s Nature Gardens, native plant guru [Carol Bornstein](#), with her design, and Bornstein helped her choose colorful, fragrant and resilient native shrubs, perennials and annuals that could provide habitat for insects, birds and other wildlife.

The response to her plant quest was heartening. The [Los Angeles-Santa Monica Mountains Chapter of the California Native Plant Society](#) gave her a \$500 grant, and several nonprofit and for-profit nurseries donated plants, including the [Audubon Center at Debs Park](#), [Theodore Payne Foundation](#), [Santa Monica Mountains Fund native plant nursery](#), [TreePeople](#), [Descanso Gardens](#), [Plant Material](#), [Hardy Californians](#), [Artemisia Nursery](#) and [Growing Works Nursery](#), which even delivered the large cache of plants from its nursery in Camarillo to Lincoln Heights.

By November she had more than 400 plants, and the help of a friend, Lowell Abellon, who wanted to learn more about native plants. Working about six hours a week, they slowly began adding plants to the 380-foot strip, weeding around each addition as they went. By March they had added about half the plants, but they had to stop before it got too warm.

“If you plant them too late, they don’t have time to get good roots down into the ground [before it gets too hot],” she said. “I tried to be on top of the watering, but during the summer about half of them died, so I had to do a lot of replacement planting in the fall.”

During the summer, Massa mostly worked alone keeping the newly planted sections of the corridor weeded and watered. Because school was out, she brought her young son to help her each week. Sometimes neighbors with children would join them, she said, giving her son someone to play with, but once or twice, she resorted to offering him \$5 for his weeding work.

When school resumed in the fall, Massa was ready to start planting again, this time working mostly alone because her friend Abellon had a family emergency that took him out of state. She began in October, planting and weeding the rest of the corridor, including adding 100 plants to replace the ones that died.



The native plant corridor on Avenue 20 has many clumps of showy penstemon, native perennials that live up to their name with their deep-throated, vibrantly colored flowers in electric purple and pink. (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

Now, in the garden's third spring, the plants are filling out. There are large mounds of California buckwheat, tall spires of sweet hummingbird sage and incandescently purple clusters of showy penstemon. Monkey flowers in orange and red, scarlet bugler, purple and white sages and coffeeberry shrubs are coming into their own. And there's so much California buckwheat Massa has had to thin out some of the plants and put them in pots for others to take home.

She hopes her work will inspire others to create their own native plant gardens and even tackle a project like hers, beautifying a neglected public space. But she says it's

important that people understand such work is more than a passion; it's a long-term commitment.

Guerrilla gardeners have great intentions, she said, but it usually takes at least three years for a garden of native plants to get established, and those young plants will need water, whether it's a nearby water spigot or jerricans of water lugged to the site.

"If you just plant and go, you might as well throw the plants in a trash can, because it's not going to work," Massa said. "If you don't water them, if you don't weed and pick up trash, people aren't going to respect the space, especially if you don't put in the effort to keep it looking good. For a garden to be successful, you have to commit to putting in the work."

Massa's son goes to another school these days, but she figures she'll keep up her three-mornings-a-week schedule at the garden for at least another year, until she's confident the plants are established enough to thrive on their own. For instance, she wants to make sure the narrow leaf milkweed she planted gets big enough to attract endangered monarch butterflies and provide a place for them to lay their eggs and plenty of food for their caterpillars every year.

"My hope is that this will become a habitat that's self-sustaining," she said, "so I can step away and be OK just picking up trash every once in a while."



Marie Massa is nearly dwarfed by the tallest plants in her Lincoln Heights California Native Plants Corridor. (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

Will she start another project somewhere else? Massa rolled her eyes.

“My husband says I can’t take on another project until this one is done, and this one has been a lot of work,” she said, laughing, “buuuut I *do* actually have my eye on another spot.”

And then suddenly she's serious, talking about this weedy strip on Main Street, not far from where she's working now. She's a little embarrassed, struggling to explain why she would want to tackle another lonely, thankless project, but defiant too, because, clearly, this is a mission.

"People in this neighborhood don't seem to know about native plants," she said, "so maybe I can show them their value, the value of having habitat and space around you that's beautiful. Maybe it could be a way of educating a new audience about the value of appreciating the environment."

Maybe so. Better watch your back, Johnny Appleseed.

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NEWS

Long Beach-Los Angeles region tops list of nation's smoggiest areas, Lung Association says



by City News Service
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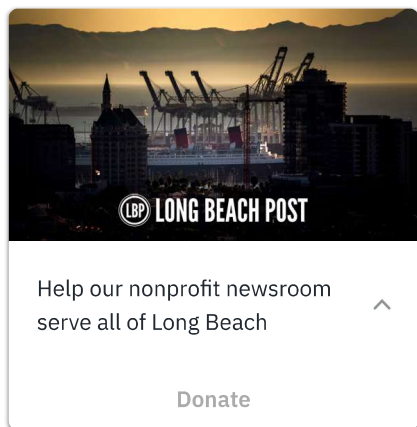


The Long Beach horizon on Oct. 15, 2021, as seen from Signal Hill. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

The Los Angeles-Long Beach area ranked as the nation's smoggiest region in a report released today by the American Lung Association, which also faulted the region for short-term and year-round particle pollution.

The association's annual State of the Air report overall found that nearly half of all people in the United States breathe unhealthy levels of air pollution, with 156 million people living in regions that received "F" grades for either smog or particle pollution.

Los Angeles-Long Beach was found to have the worst ozone, or smog, pollution in the country. Five areas of California were listed among the top 10 most polluted areas, with Visalia placing second, Bakersfield-Delano third, Fresno-Hanford-Corcoran fifth and San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad eighth.



“Ground-level ozone pollution, also known as smog, is a powerful respiratory irritant whose effects have been likened to a sunburn of the lungs,” according to the Lung Association. “Inhaling ozone can cause shortness of breath, trigger coughing and asthma attacks and may shorten life. Warmer temperatures driven by climate change make ozone more likely to form and harder to clean up.”

The Los Angeles-Long Beach region was ranked the seventh-most polluted region in the country for short-term particle pollution, and fifth-worst for year-round particle pollution. The short-term figure represents daily spikes in particle pollution, or soot, while the year-round figure is an annual average.

On a countywide level, San Bernardino County was ranked as the nation’s most ozone-polluted place to live, followed by Riverside, Los Angeles, Tulare and Kern counties. Kern County also topped the list as the most polluted county in both short-term and year-round particle pollution.

Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside counties all earned failing grades in the report for all three pollution categories, as did Fresno, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Bernardino, Stanislaus, Sutter and Tulare counties.

“Families across the U.S. are dealing with the health impacts of air pollution every day, and extreme heat and wildfires are making it worse,” Lung Association President/CEO Harold Wimmer said in a statement. “Air pollution is causing kids to have asthma attacks, making people who work outdoors sick, and leading to low birth weight in babies. This year’s report shows the dramatic impact that air pollution has on a growing number of people.”