



Volume 3, Issue 2 + Grant Park Neighbors is a special project of Ante Meridiem, Inc., a 501(c)3 CA Non-Profit Corporation + Feb. - April 2021

## Interview with the Besser's on Grant Street



The tractor that once marked the Besser's lot.

Grant Park Neighbors (GPN) interviewed James, Elle, and Barrett Besser (BESSER) who recently completed their owner-designed and -built home at the corner of Emeline Avenue and Grant Street. **GPN:** How long have you lived in the neighborhood?

**BESSER:** We have lived in Santa Cruz for 5 years, before that, we lived in Austin. New to the neighborhood, before Grant Park, we lived in Scotts Valley. We bought the lot three years ago, and we even had Halloween with two years meeting trick-or-treaters on the block. Now having lived in our new home for the past two months, we have been meeting everyone when we take our dog to the dog park, and visiting with walkers as they pass our house.



The Besser's on the porch of their new home.

**GPN:** I believe your lot had a tractor on it that was a notable landmark for kids, walkers and visitors alike: What happened to it?

**BESSER: (Elle)** Sadly, the tractor was not part of the sales deal on the property. We called our house the "tractor house" as a point of reference. (Cont. Pg.2)

@grant\_park\_neighbors

@Grant Park Neighbors



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Zoom *not-in-the* Park

Next meetings are on these Saturdays: **April 24; May 15;** and **May 29** at 11 AM.  
Invitation details via email.



Join GPN and our emailing list by contacting [grantpark95060@gmail.com](mailto:grantpark95060@gmail.com) for more information, details for events, news, and volunteering.



## Professional Growth Within GPN: Celebrating my 1 Year Anniversary as an Intern

About a year ago I joined the GPN team as the Communications Coordinator. What was originally going to be a 5 month internship has blossomed into a whole year working with GPN, creating monthly newsletters, and learning more about the Grant Park Neighborhood and how rich with history and interesting people it is. GPN has helped me develop professionally in many ways and as a recent graduate from UCSC, helped me obtain the skills I need to pursue a career in the non-profit sector. Thanks to the skills I learned at GPN, I have recently been hired as the Waterbird Intern at the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. I will also continue to volunteer with GPN and I hope to learn more about non-profit development and communications. I have had a great experience as an intern with GPN and I am looking forward to seeing how the organization continues to grow in the future.



### Interview (Cont. from Pg. 1)

**BESSER:** We bought the lot from Norman, who we got to know, and who used to own our lot and each lot on either side of us on the block. (James) There used to be a bullfighting ring on Market Street; the neighborhood has a definite lore.

**GPN:** What do you do with your time, and do you work/recreate here in Santa Cruz?

**BESSER:** Elle works as an office manager at a major architecture firm, and James is a designer for an online bank. We love hiking, mountain biking, are big into food and enjoy visiting the Westside Farmer's Market. (Elle) I am now a volunteer with the neighborhood district attorney's office, working in the conflict resolution center to provide restorative justice, hoping to avoid punitive results from offenses.

**GPN:** I noticed some of the building techniques on the residence employ contemporary systems: who was your architect? Did you aim for any environmental/energy guidelines in construction?

**BESSER:** We designed it with our knowledge of and based on our research on the green building techniques. We used Brad Wilson for the building permits with the City of Santa Cruz.

(Cont. on Pg.3)



Project under construction with view to backyard.



## GUEST EDITORIAL: John Hall (jhall5@ucsc.edu)

### Why not better city planning for housing, affordable housing, and public space downtown?

Santa Cruz voters were justifiably outraged by the “bait and switch” on the 2016 Measure S bond measure. The campaign was all about “renovating” the existing downtown library on Church Street. Months later, city staff proposed building an entirely new downtown library-in-a-parking-garage that would displace the Farmers’ Market at Parking Lot 4 on Cedar Street. The market would be moved to Parking Lot 7 in the shade in back of the Del Mar Theater. When this proposal met with widespread disgust, city staff threw 50 units of affordable housing into the mix. No one I know is opposed to affordable housing, but it took a developer-fueled recall campaign against two progressive city councilmembers to create a council majority for a project costing north of \$85 million.

**What’s not to like?** Originally, staff claimed that bond money go further in a garage, making a larger downtown library possible. It turned out, though, that the costs of the two alternatives per square foot are the same. Now, the downtown library project is more than \$5 million in the hole.

**What about the parking garage?** According to consultants, demand does not justify a \$60 million new garage. Well, what about affordable housing? Compared to Lot 4, more than twice the amount could be built on Lot 7 (where city staff propose to move the Farmers’ Market). In short, the City’s scheme is bad urban planning, notably championed by the City’s Economic Development Department, not the City Planning Dept.

**Santa Cruz deserves better.** Jayson Architecture has produced a great, cost-effective proposal to renovate the existing library. An expensive and unnecessary parking garage wouldn’t solve the downtown’s post-pandemic problems. With affordable housing built on Lot 7, the present Farmers’ Market can remain in its beloved, sunny location, its 10 Heritage trees can be saved from the developer’s axe, and we can create a permanent Commons for community gatherings, concerts, and other events – usable public space that downtown Santa Cruz presently lacks. It’s time for a better vision for our city.

## Interview (Cont. from Pg. 2)

**BESSER:** In our research, we looked into LEED for Homes, but it was outside our budget. We still used many of the principles in the design with energy efficiency and healthy material selection as our two guiding principles. We also used aspects of the Living Building Challenge and the Passive House for guidance. We wanted it to have the ranch, northern California view with a wood exterior, and natural feel for the project. Tried to design for the neighborhood, instead of a block/crazy house. We designed the house so that most of the light comes from the south side, and to avoid too much head light glare from Emeline Street traffic.

**GPN:** How long did it take from building application to permit?

**BESSER:** We applied for permit in August of 2019, we were given the permit to build in January 2020. Before submitting the building application, we went through the engineering analysis, civil survey, finance planning, soils report and all the other project requirements, which took an entire year.

**GPN:** Did you have any big surprises, delightful or unfortunate, in the const. process?

**BESSER: (Elle)** We broke ground at the beginning of COVID and installing the new meter electric took a total of eleven months. Almost pushing our time to install the new meter to the first quarter of 2021. We were not able to get temporary power to the lot, so we had to build the entire project on battery power, and at times, we had to “borrow” an extension cord from our neighbor Nick. We used many of the neighbors for the “trades” as many live here in the neighborhood. Many people are always impressed that we finished our house, but we’re either going to be homeless or keep moving forward.

**GPN:** Any advice you’d give to others thinking of building a new residence in Santa Cruz?

**BESSER:** We saw a couple looking at the open lot on Glenwood, and thought of this to say to them:

- Who you work with makes the biggest difference in your experience;
- If you have fun in researching learning, it can be a rewarding;

(Cont. on Pg. 4)





Project under construction, early in development.

## GPN Writes City Council Regarding TOLO

In spite of the fact the wide majority of GPN members expressed support for the City's Temporary Outdoor Living Ordinance (hereafter TOLO) back in February 2021, with the policy's shift in direction to potentially move the local homeless population to the sidewalks of Ocean & Water Streets, GPN submitted a follow-up letter on April 11, 2021. In this letter, three major concerns were voiced that have been regularly discussed in the neighborhood:

- Increased insecurity brought to the community with new pressures from Ocean/Water Street camping;
- Creating an "unwelcome" gateway element for all those entering Santa Cruz County to spend tourist and vacation resources on Ocean Street; and
- Reducing the safety of pedestrians, cyclists, and routine vehicular traffic on Ocean and Water with the added spatial crowding impacts of the outdoor living sites.

If you wish to read the entire letter as delivered to the City Council, please write [grantpark95060@gmail.com](mailto:grantpark95060@gmail.com) with your interest in a digital copy.

## Interview (Cont. from Pg. 3)

### BESSER:

- Enjoy the process to "build a house"; we wanted to learn, develop, and we learned a lot.
- The house changed with development; we are still details on the interior we have to work on to complete.

### GPN: Will you build another project?

**BESSER:** Not right now, and we now know the path to build. It would be fun, but maybe in the way future we can think about.

### GPN: On a more general note, what do you think are the biggest challenges facing Santa Cruz?

**BESSER: (James)** It is hard to find community, and meet people, in Santa Cruz. We really love getting to know someone. I think for us it's been a challenge getting to know people. People live here a while, and people are also very transient; being on the Mountain Bike trails, it was great to meet people on the trail. It has been great building relationships with our neighbors. (Elle) I don't want to get into the housing debate, but we have family Austin, Denver, etc. You see there are "stepping stones" to build equity in their lives/homes, we sold our condo in Austin which helped buy our lot and home with the funds from the sale. We have a background in the architecture and design, we were able to manage the process to build a home. Without the opportunity to live in multi-plex condos, and without being able to own properties, you can't ever get ahead in terms of living and staying in Santa Cruz.

### GPN: GPN has been exploring what it means to be a good neighbor, a good neighborhood. What does it mean to you?

**BESSER:** Neighbors who are curious and willing to be vulnerable; being willing to be open about your life. We experienced that while building with Nick and while walking around the area. We've really appreciated neighbors taking an interest in our process.

### GPN: Is there anything else you'd like to say to your new neighbors.

**BESSER:** We love it here, we love the park; we've noticed people take pride in this neighborhood and their gardening. We feel really grateful to live in this house and live in this neighborhood. We really appreciate people here, and how people are super-passionate about living here. It encouraged my wife to do her volunteer work with the District Attorney's Office.

## GPN Working with Advocates of both San Lorenzo and Central Parks; Slow Streets Discontinued by City Staff

After meetings with advocates of both San Lorenzo and Central Parks, GPN is now actively working with these groups to advance safe, welcoming, and enjoyable open park spaces for the greater community. /// In other news from City of Santa Cruz Staff, as of April 12, the City's Slow Street program is officially discontinued. With the help of neighbors Chris Same & Lisa Just, GPN participated in the Slow Streets program, designating May Avenue a Slow Street from it's start at Grant Park all the way down to Water Street. GPN is reviewing other options to improve active transportation and safety.