Crosstown

A data-driven approach to local journalism

THE PROBLEM

Local news is facing a financial crisis:
There is no sustainable business
model.

OUR SOLUTION:
SAVE LOCAL NEWS WITH DATA!

Use data and automation to bring down the costs of covering local communities and increase engagement.
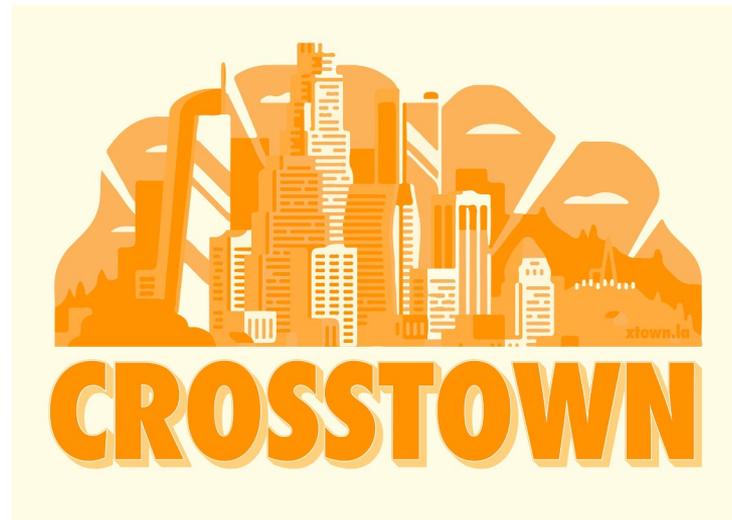
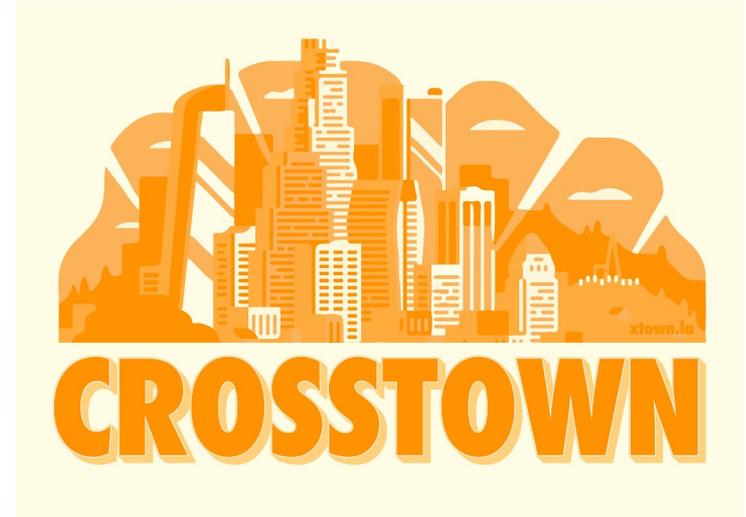**HEADLINE:**

With a newsroom of two part-time journalists, we deliver **114 unique newsletters each week** – one for each neighborhood in L.A.
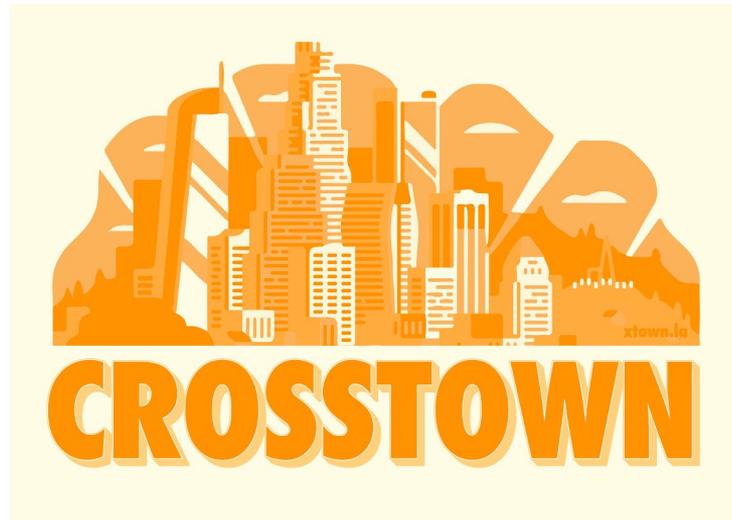
CROSSTOWN

xtown.la

HEADLINE:

With a newsroom of two part-time journalists, we deliver **114 unique newsletters each week** – one for each neighborhood in L.A.

Our open rates are: >90%!!

Date	Date Time	Day	Direction	District	Freeway Segment	Hour	Hourly Average Speed	Lat It I Ude	Longitude	Month
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	S	7	I-5B	0	62	33.97	118.12309500° W	
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	N	7	I-5B	0	69.7	33.97	118.12290500° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	N	7	I-5B	0	69.2	33.98	118.13067900° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	N	7	I-5B	0	70.3	34	118.15099700° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	N	7	I-5B	0	70.4	34.01	118.16609100° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	S	7	I-5B	0	65.1	34.02	118.17127000° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	S	7	I-5A	0	68.7	34.24	118.42108000° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	N	7	I-5A	0	63.1	34.34	118.52600200° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	S	7	I-5A	0	63.6	34.37	118.55885000° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1		7		0		34.06	118.21653500° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	W	7	I-10A	0	64.6	34.03	118.41142700° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10A	0	70.2	34.03	118.38488400° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10A	0	61.9	34.03	118.34570100° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10A	0	67.5	34.03	118.33944400° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10A	0	64.6	34.04	118.31313100° W	1
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2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10B	0	67.9	34.05	118.21185900° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10B	0	71.2	34.05	118.20821400° W	1
2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10B	0	66.8	34.05	118.20347800° W	

PUBLICLY AVAILABLE DATA

Many cities now publish troves of data tracking quality of life issues: including public safety, complaint calls from residents, building permits, parking tickets and traffic accidents

TIER 1

BUT INACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

This data remains locked up in unsearchable documents and hard-to-understand spreadsheets.

TIER 1

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2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10B	0	66.8	34.05	118.20347800° W	1

This is data about:
crime, arrests, housing, construction, traffic, citizen complaints, potholes, garbage, graffiti, home values, parking, business licenses, restaurant inspections…

TIER 1

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Each row of data has a latitude/longitude.

We use those coordinates to tell stories at the neighborhood level.

2019-01-01	January 1, 2019, 12:00 AM	1	E	7	I-10B	0	64.5	34.06	118.21653500° W	1
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Each row of data has a latitude/longitude.

We use those coordinates to tell stories at the neighborhood level.

In Los Angeles, that's 114 different stories.

TIER 1

Raw Data ——— **Cloud** ——— **Synthesis** ——— **Headlines**

Data Dashboards

Millions and millions of rows of data….

suddenly easy to search and synthesize.

Data Dashboards

Data

Chicago Service 311 Community Next ▶

Filter

Sr Type is Missed Garbage Pick-Up Complaint ✕   Created Date between January 1, 2023 April 30, 2024 ✕   ➕   ▶

Chicago Service 311 Community Next → Sr Type | Is ⌄ |

◄

Search the list

☑ Missed Garbage Pick-Up Complaint

☐ 311 INFORMATION ONLY CALL

☐ Abandoned Vehicle Complaint

☐ Aircraft Noise Complaint

☐ Alley Light Out Complaint

ed Date: Month ✕   ➕   ▶

⊞
Custom column

Data Dashboards

Count by Created Date: Month
Crosstown / service / Chicago Service 311 Community Next

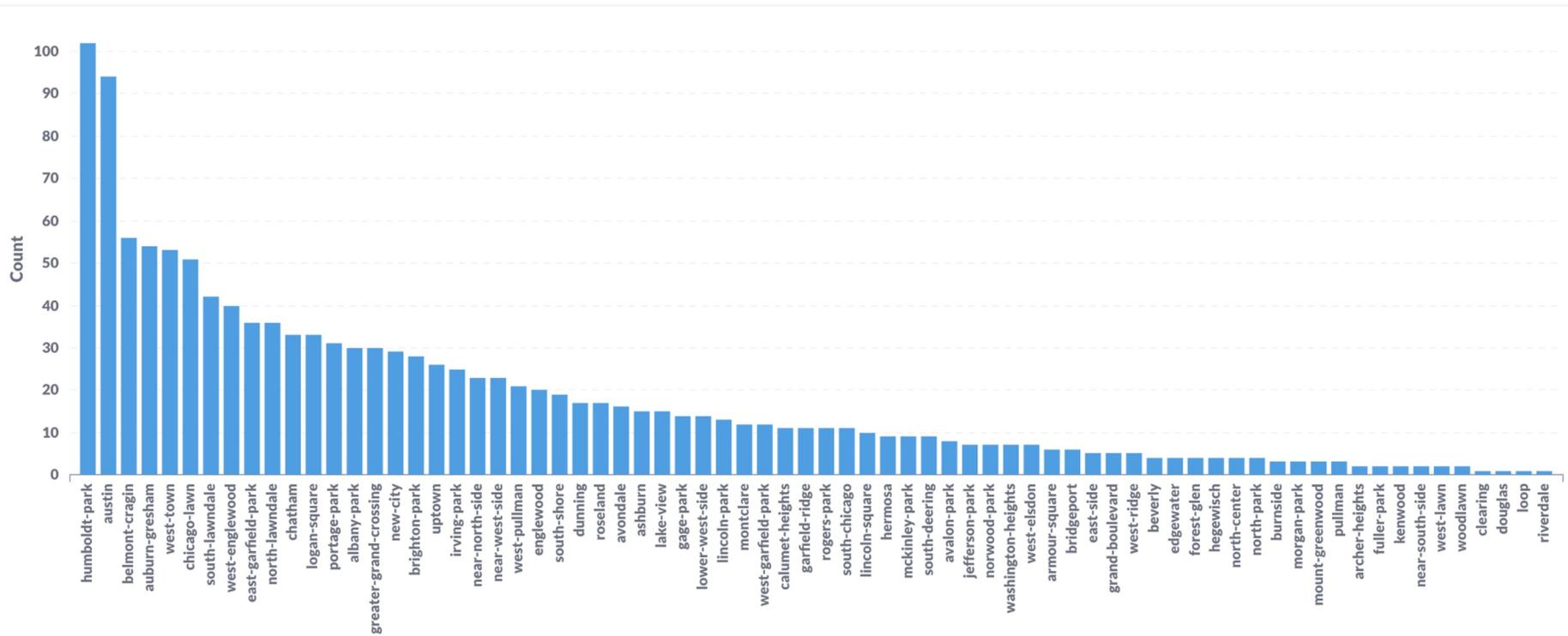**2** | Filter | Summarize | ⟳ | **Save**

Sr Type is Missed Garbage Pick-Up Complaint ✕   Created Date between January 1, 2023 April 30, 2024 ✕

Data Dashboards

Turning data into local news

Our reporters use our system to quickly browse a decade of data to break news, discover trends and deliver neighborhood-level insights.

COVID–19 leads to a spike in car thefts

During the shutdown, vehicles disappearing off Los Angeles streets in record numbers

Crime

By **Kylie Storm**
July 20, 2020
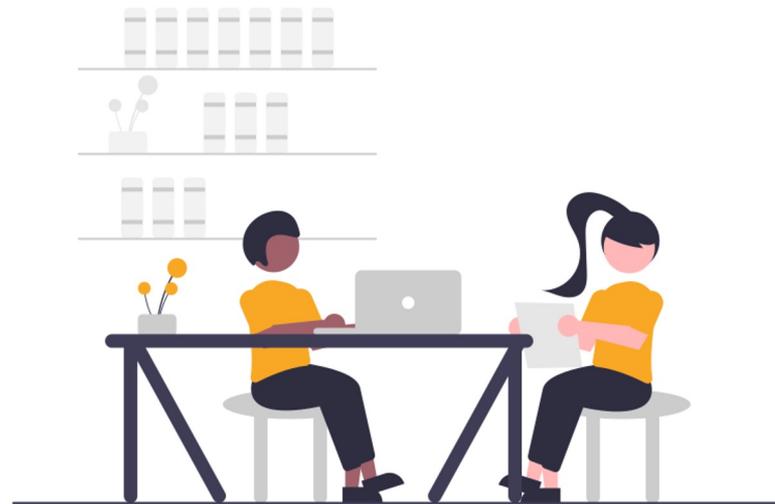
xtown.la
Designed by JD LeRoy

MORE REPORTING, LOWER COSTS

Using the data portal, a single journalist can quickly determine what is happening in each neighborhood. The data dramatically increases reporting capacity while adding minimal costs.
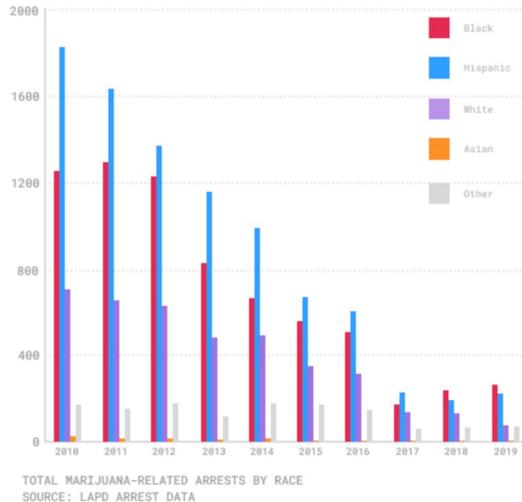
A FOCUS ON EQUITY

Our **data-driven hyperlocal approach** allows us to highlight issues of inequity and social justice. The data shows which communities experience the most acute disadvantages, which communities are improving more quickly.

Black people now account for the largest percentage of marijuana arrests

Legend: Black, Hispanic, White, Asian, Other

TOTAL MARIJUANA-RELATED ARRESTS BY RACE
SOURCE: LAPD ARREST DATA

Are COVID-19 infections moving from rich to poor?

Rates in some wealthy neighborhoods leveling off, while rates in poorer ones spike

Health

By **Bulbul Rajagopal** and **Nisha Venkat**
April 23, 2020

xtown.la
Designed by Kiera Smith
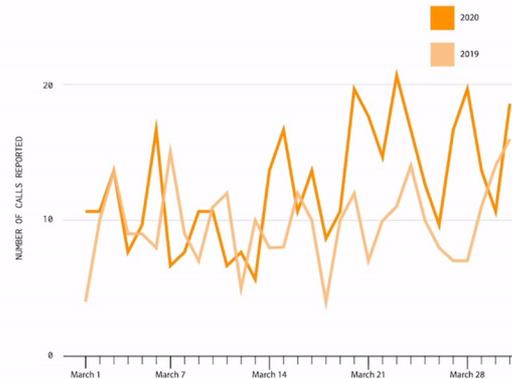
DATA VISUALIZATIONS

We develop a library of custom data visualizations that journalists can use to tell stories in fresh ways.

TIER 2

DASHBOARDS

Providing vital signs that update automatically about individual neighborhoods.
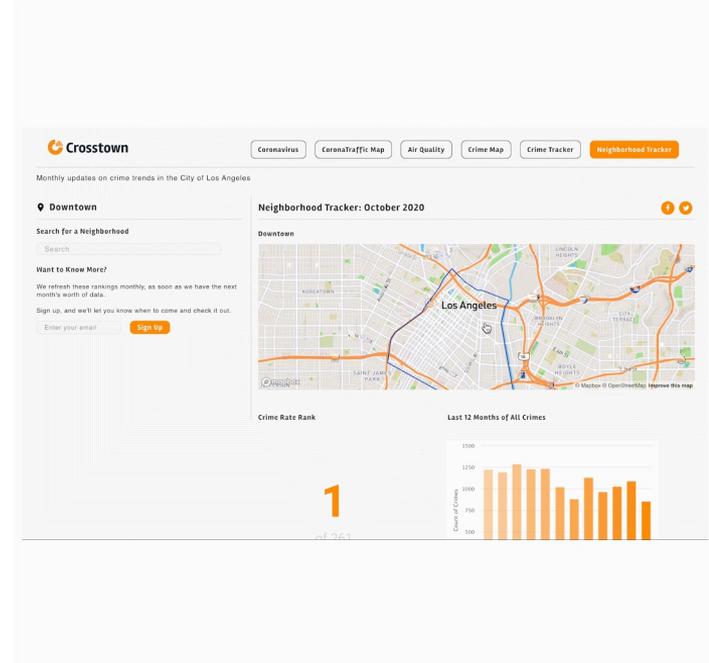
WE FILL IN NEWS DESERTS
Our data covers the whole region, even areas that rarely get media coverage. No one is left out.
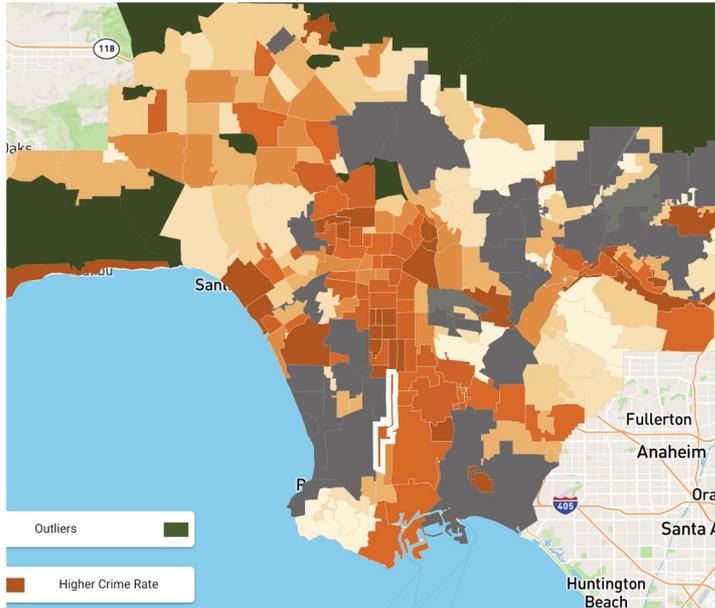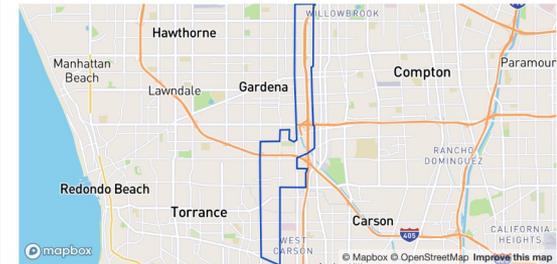
TIER 1

The
Neighborhood Newsletter

An email newsletter for each neighborhood.

We created a unique email newsletter for 114 different neighborhoods in Los Angeles. This approach **reduces costs** and efficiently **targets audiences** with news they can't get anywhere else. Our model incurs **no marginal cost** for producing two, or even 200 different newsletters.

The Crosstown Neighborhood Newsletter

We produce one newsletter template each week that contains automatically generated data visualizations for each neighborhood. In Los Angeles, we query data from 110 different neighborhoods. The stories we include in each newsletter deliver specific details and data about each neighborhood.

✏️ Newsletter 240515   🧩 Mixins   Print   ✉️ Email

All traffic crashes as line chart

Traffic Crashes ▾

Dataset

✓ All traffic crashes
All traffic crashes-(Total Injuries)
All traffic crashes-(Fatal Injuries)
All traffic crashes-(Incapacitating Injuries)
Traffic crashes for injury and/or tow due to crash
Traffic crashes for injury and/or tow due to crash-(Fatal Injuries)
Traffic crashes for injury and/or tow-(Incapacitating Injuries)
Traffic crashes for injury and/or tow due to crash-(Total Injuries)
Traffic crashes for no injury / drive away
Traffic crashes for no injury / drive away-(Fatal Injuries)
Traffic crashes for no injury / drive away-(Incapacitating Injuries)
Traffic crashes for no injury / drive away-(Total Injuries)

Identity ▾

Statistical transformation

📅 01/01/2020   ✕

From date

Line chart ▾

Display mode

Austin ✕

Neighborhoods (leave empty unl

▷ Preview Austin ▾

22,839

processing time: 0.602s

▦ Data

TIER 3

All traffic crashes as line chart

Traffic Crashes ⌄	All traffic crashes ⌄	Austin ✕
Dataset	Category	Neighborhoods (leave

Identity ⌄	Month ⌄
Statistical transformation	Aggregation period

📅 01/01/2020 ✕	📅 04/30/2024 ✕	+
From date	To date	

Line chart ⌄
Display mode

▷ Preview Austin ⌄

All traffic crashes in Austin

TIER 3

Newsletter 2024-5-22 ADUs · Mixins · Print · Email

Left editor pane (markdown source):

```
### Hi @send-subscriber-name@,

This is Gabriel Kahn. While I'm usually writing from **Fairfax**, this week
I'm in Naples, Italy (it's for work, I swear).

Anyone who has tried to buy, rent or even couch-surf in
**`{"data":"neighborhood-names","display":"text","periods":[["2023-04-
01","2024-04-01"]],"description":"Name as
text","dataset":"neighborhood","category":"names"}`** (or anywhere else in Los
Angeles) knows that nothing comes cheap. The high cost of housing is at the
root of so many of our local issues, from homelessness to the general lack of
afforability which is [chasing people out of the region]
(https://laist.com/news/40-percent-of-california-residents-said-theyre-
considering-leaving-the-state-most-say-theyre-being-priced-out).

Crosstown recently reported on the slow pace of construction for new buildings
and the flat number of demolitions taking place—both are flashing red lights
about the city's capacity to add to its housing stock in the near future.

But there is one bright spot, and it's this:

<span style="color:blue" font-size: 20px> <font size="+6">
<b>7,621</b></font>
<span style="color:black" font-size: 20px> <font size="+6">
</font>

That's the number of **accesory dwelling units** permitted during the past 12
months (May 1, 2023—April 30, 2024). Better known as ADUs, these are the
[usually modest apartments](https://xtown.la/2022/09/20/adus-los-angeles-
housing-numbers/) in a reconfigured garage or that rise in the corner of a
backyard.

The year 2023 was the best on record, with **7,513** permits issued.
```

Right preview pane (rendered):

Hi @send-subscriber-name@,

This is Gabriel Kahn. While I'm usually writing from **Fairfax**, this week I'm in Naples, Italy (it's for work, I swear).

Anyone who has tried to buy, rent or even couch-surf in `{"data":"neighborhood-names","display":"text","periods":[["2023-04-01","2024-04-01"]],"description":"Name as text","dataset":"neighborhood","category":"names"}` (or anywhere else in Los Angeles) knows that nothing comes cheap. The high cost of housing is at the root of so many of our local issues, from homelessness to the general lack of afforability which is chasing people out of the region.

Crosstown recently reported on the slow pace of construction for new buildings and the flat number of demolitions taking place—both are flashing red lights about the city's capacity to add to its housing stock in the near future.

But there is one bright spot, and it's this:

<span style="color:blue" font-size: 20px>

7,621

R 3

Name

Newsletter 2024-05-15 Bulky Item Pick-Up, H

Neighborhoods to publish

All neighborhoods ✕   ✕ ▾

💡**Placeholders**
- @date@ set to May 15, 2024

🗐 Publish   ○ Debug

Adams-Normandie Arleta Arlington Heights Atwater Village Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw Bel-Air Beverly Crest Beverly Grove Beverlywood Boyle Heights Brentwood Broadway-Manchester Canoga Park Carthay Central-Alameda Century City Chatsworth Chatsworth Reservoir Chesterfield Square Cheviot Hills Chinatown Cypress Park Del Rey Downtown Eagle Rock East Hollywood Echo Park El Sereno Elysian Park Elysian Valley Encino Exposition Park Fairfax Florence Glassell Park Gramercy Park Granada Hills Green Meadows Griffith Park Hancock Park Hansen Dam Harbor City Harbor Gateway Harvard Heights Harvard Park Highland Park Historic South-Central Hollywood Hollywood Hills Hollywood Hills West Hyde Park Jefferson Park Koreatown Lake Balboa Lake View Terrace Larchmont Leimert Park Lincoln Heights Los Feliz Manchester Square Mar Vista Mid-City Mid-Wilshire Mission Hills Montecito Heights Mount Washington North Hills North Hollywood Northridge Pacific Palisades Pacoima Palms Panorama City Pico-Robertson Pico-Union Playa del Rey Playa Vista Porter Ranch Rancho Park Reseda San Pedro Sawtelle Sepulveda Basin Shadow Hills Sherman Oaks Silver Lake South Park Studio City Sunland Sun Valley Sylmar Tarzana Toluca Lake Tujunga University Park Valley Glen Valley Village Van Nuys Venice Vermont Knolls Vermont-Slauson Vermont Square Vermont Vista Watts West Adams Westchester West Hills Westlake West Los Angeles Westwood Wilmington Windsor Square Winnetka Woodland Hills

Last published: 05-15-2024 12:13:34 PM

Published by: Jon Regardie

TIER 3

How many of your neighbors in **Hollywood** got an ADU permit over the past 12 months?

65

In the previous 12 months **72** ADU permits were issued in the neighborhood.

The number of ADUs a neighborhood can accommodate is a function of how many single-family homes it has. **Hollywood** ranked **No. 42** in the past year for ADU permits out of 114 neighborhoods in the city. (Neighborhoods with the same number get the same rank.)

Here's how many ADUs were permitted in **Hollywood** each year from 2020–2023:

# of Building Permits for ADU modifications in Hollywood
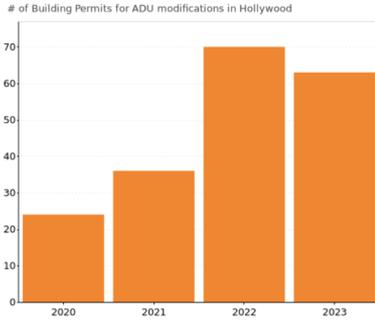
How many of your neighbors in **Reseda** got an ADU permit over the past 12 months?

198

In the previous 12 months **168** ADU permits were issued in the neighborhood.

The number of ADUs a neighborhood can accommodate is a function of how many single-family homes it has. **Reseda** ranked **No. 3** in the past year for ADU permits out of 114 neighborhoods in the city. (Neighborhoods with the same number get the same rank.)

Here's how many ADUs were permitted in **Reseda** each year from 2020–2023:

# of Building Permits for ADU modifications in Reseda
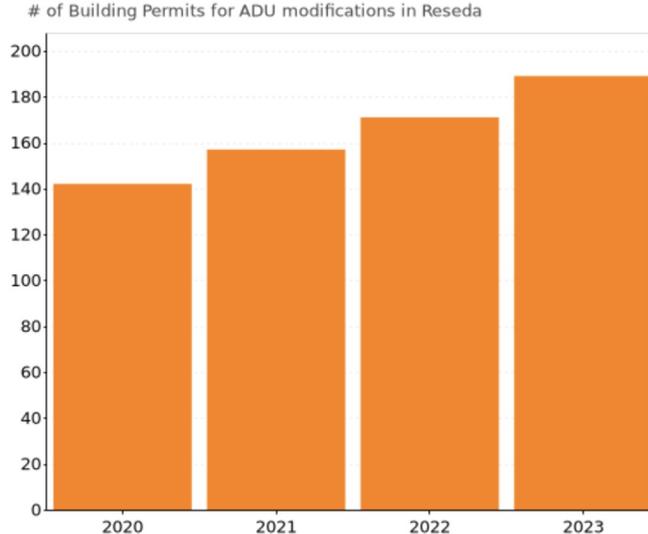
How many of your neighbors in **Fairfax** got an ADU permit over the past 12 months?

83

In the previous 12 months **60** ADU permits were issued in the neighborhood.

The number of ADUs a neighborhood can accommodate is a function of how many single-family homes it has. **Fairfax** ranked **No. 30** in the past year for ADU permits out of 114 neighborhoods in the city. (Neighborhoods with the same number get the same rank.)

Here's how many ADUs were permitted in **Fairfax** each year from 2020–2023:

# of Building Permits for ADU modifications in Fairfax
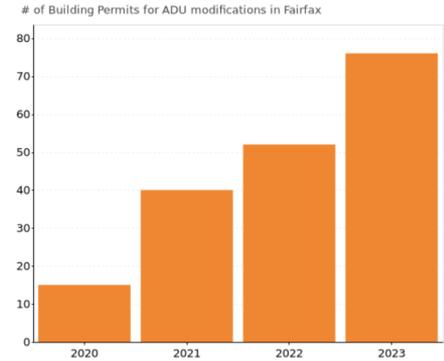
TIER 3
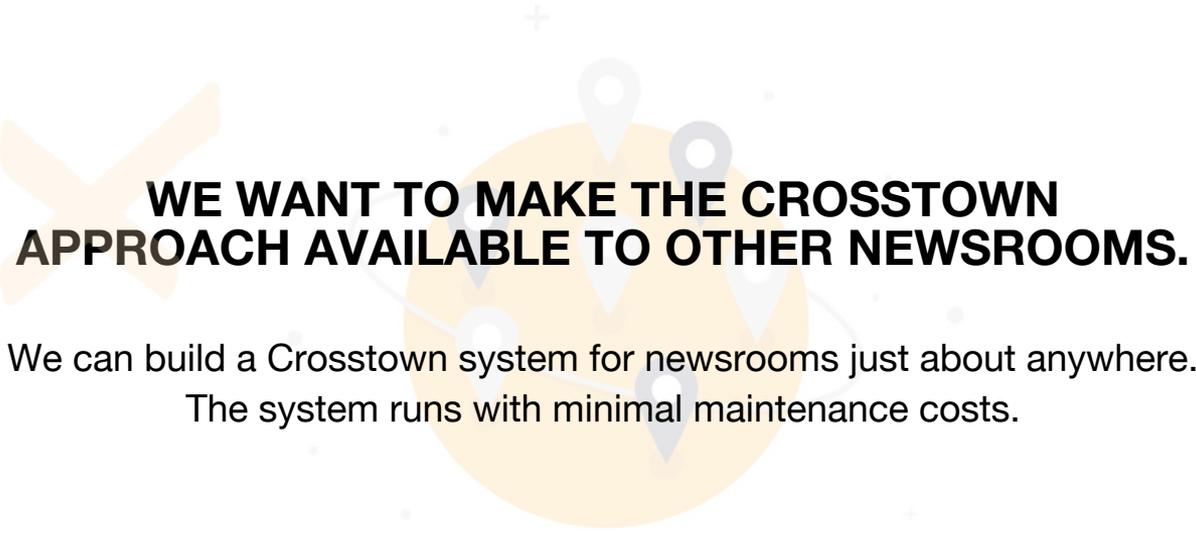
WE WANT TO MAKE THE CROSSTOWN APPROACH AVAILABLE TO OTHER NEWSROOMS.

We can build a Crosstown system for newsrooms just about anywhere. The system runs with minimal maintenance costs.

THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

With a reasonable upfront investment, we can deploy Crosstown's software, mapping and data-sorting tools in newsrooms across the country. Newsroom can use this to track the vital signs of its coverage area, along with every neighborhood in it. We know that if more journalists had the same easy access to data to cover their cities and towns, they would break new ground and expand their reporting.

DATA

You know where to find us.

If you'd like to help us save local journalism, email Gabriel at:

gabriel.kahn@usc.edu

Thank you!