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DURANGO
**Wanted:
School
board
member**
District D seat still
vacant after nearly
monthlong search

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Almost a month into the search, no candidates have stepped forward to fill a vacancy on the Durango School District Board of Education.

The seat became vacant in early January after board member Katie Stewart resigned.

The open seat represents District D, which has historically been difficult to fill, despite covering much of downtown Durango, board members Andrea Parmenter and Kristin Smith said.

“This district has been particularly difficult to find people to run for in an election, and difficult to find enough people to appoint,” Smith said. “We’ve never had seven or eight people come out for this particular district, for an election or for an appointment or interviews.”

Parmenter and Smith hosted a Zoom Q&A on Friday for potential candidates – but no one attended.

The District D seat – with a term running through November 2027 – has gone uncontested in recent election and appointment cycles.

Stewart was first appointed in September 2021 to replace Parmenter, who moved outside District D boundaries.

Stewart ran unopposed in 2023. Because there was no opposition, the election was canceled and she was sworn in.

She resigned Dec. 31 to focus on her legislative work with Colorado House District 59, a role she began in January 2025.

Under state law and Colorado Association of School Boards guidance, midterm vacancies must be filled by appointment.

The board declared the vacancy Jan. 13, which started a 60-day deadline to fill the seat.

If no candidates come forward by the end of the 60-day window, board President Kristen Smith may conduct interviews and appoint someone herself.

However, candidate interviews

See **SEAT, 8A**

Durango resident Maddy Surdey celebrates centennial birthday



ABOVE LEFT: Patty Racheff and her mother Maddy Surdey hold an edition of *The Durango Herald* that featured the two of them in December 2020, during a COVID-19 lockdown at Four Corners Healthcare Center in Durango. Surdey celebrated her 100th birthday on Tuesday at Cottonwood Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center, where she is a resident. ABOVE RIGHT: Patty Racheff talks on a cellphone with her then 94-year-old mother, Maddy Surdey, behind a window separating them in 2020 at Four Corners Health Care.

Resilient at 100

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Longtime Durango resident Maddy Surdey turned 100 Tuesday, officially earning her the title of centenarian – an honor only about 0.03% of Americans hold, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

Maddy, born Madeline Remus, has been a “tough broad” since she entered the world in 1926, according to her four children, Sharon, Allyn, Stephen and Patty.

Maddy has survived World War II, a broken hip, a concussion, motherhood, a divorce, depression and a pandemic – all while imparting humor and care on those around her, her children said.

The Durango Herald first met Maddy in 2020, when she was photographed speaking to Patty – her youngest daughter – through a window at the Four Corners Healthcare Center during a COVID-19 outbreak at the center.

Eighty-four residents, including Maddy, and 48 staff members contracted COVID, and three people died as of Dec. 12, 2020, according to the former public health department, San Juan Basin Public Health.

Allyn said the milestone birthday means even more after seeing her mother experience the outbreak in 2020.

“We were very fortunate that she got through,” she said. “We’re grateful for that.”

Maddy moved to the Cottonwood Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center in 2023, where she has resided since.

Maddy grew up in Forest Park, Illinois, with her mother;

See **RESILIENT, 8A**



Surdey hugs longtime friend Gary Cook while celebrating her 100th birthday on Tuesday at Cottonwood Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center, where she is a resident.

City councilors advance ADU rule changes on 1st reading

**Supporters see affordable housing, while
opponents fear neighborhood impacts**

BY CHRISTIAN BURNEY
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Durango City Council narrowly approved rolling back some restrictions on accessory dwelling units within city limits on first reading of an ordinance, voting 3-2.

Mayor Gilda Yazzie and Councilor Kip Koso voted against the ordinance. A final vote is scheduled for the City Council’s next regular meeting on Feb. 17.

The ordinance amends the city’s land-use and development code to eliminate minimum parcel size requirements for de-

tached ADUs. The maximum allowable size would remain at 550 square feet.

City Council has discussed the ordinance since August 2025. Over the past five to six months, residents have voiced support and opposition.

Proponents said ADUs are another tool for addressing the city’s affordable housing crisis, allows families opportunities for multigenerational living

arrangements and provides homeowners with an additional source of income to offset housing costs.

Those who oppose ADUs say they add to traffic and parking woes, create an extra burden for the city’s water and sewer infrastructure, and generally threaten to tarnish neighborhood character and residents’ quality of life.

Councilor Jessika Loyer said

ADUs are not alone going to solve the city’s affordable housing crisis, but they are an important part of doing so.

Councilor Dave Woodruff likewise said ADUs are just one piece of the housing puzzle. He noted Community Development Director Jayme Lopko’s presentation and that only about 10 new ADUs are developed in the

See **RULE, 8A**