



BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Doug Moran, BPA President

The Environmental Services Center (ESC)

The decisions surrounding the proposed Environmental Services Center (ESC) are the likely big local controversy for this fall.

The part of the controversy that is likely to get the most news coverage is the location for the ESC, which is a large industrial building for processing recyclables and garbage. The proposed location is in the baylands in a section of the landfill that is scheduled to become part of Byxbee Park.

The other major part of the controversy is the economics. The costs of handling garbage, recyclables and other wastes have a significant impact on the City budget directly and on your utility bills. Many people who have attended forums on this issue have come away frustrated with the very confused state of the analysis. A common complaint was that they were "comparing apples to oranges" and that too many questions were receiving non-answers.

In an extraordinary measure, the City Council instructed the City Auditor Sharon Erickson (also a Barron Park resident) to assemble and analyze the numbers. This report is

schedule to be available in October.

In another extraordinary measure, the City Council is contemplating conducting an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) as a way to further analyze the proposed project. Normally an EIR evaluates the impacts of a proposed project on the surrounding area ("the environment") on issues such as noise and traffic.

The motivation is to have the EIR do double duty—provide this analysis as well as produce the normal EIR—because they are on a short decision cycle. The proposed site is scheduled to be used as landfill, and if that happens, the location will no longer be suitable for this large building.

I started writing an overview of the proponent, the opponents, the skeptics and their issues so that ordinary residents would have a better chance of understanding what is being reported in the news. However, covering just the basic twists and turns of this issue produced a document that was much too long for the newsletter, so I am putting it on the web at <http://www2.bpaonline.org/BP-News/2004-fall/esc.html> If you don't have web access, let me know and I can provide a hardcopy (650-856-3302).

Greetings from your Barron Park Welcoming Committee!

By Gwen Luce, Chair



Whether "old," "new," or "in-between," folks came to an informal "getting-to-know-you" gathering in Bol Park on Sunday, August 22nd, in the afternoon. The weather was perfect, and we all had a great time meeting new Barron Park residents and sharing neighborhood history and happenings with them. Perry and Niner, our neighborhood donkeys, were in attendance, and over 200 scoops of ice cream were served!

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TRADITIONS OF BARRON PARK

By Doug Graham, Barron Park Historian

20 interesting (or not-so-interesting) facts or myths about Barron Park:

1. The original “Barron Park” was a 1925 subdivision of 62 small lots along El Camino, La Selva Drive and Barron Avenue. It was designed to provide a cheap way for anyone to set up a roadside business along “The State Highway” (later El Camino Real and U.S. Highway 101). It also provided cheap summer homes for San Franciscans who otherwise might have frozen to death during July and August.

2. The subdivision was laid out by Colonel Sebastian Jones, who moved here from upstate New York in 1923 and founded a military academy for boys on the old “Barron Estate.” The academy operated until 1929, and was succeeded by two more schools until the mansion burned to the ground in 1936. Hence the name of Military Way, which does not necessarily reflect any militaristic trends in the modern neighborhood.

3. Col. Jones’ tiny lots still give us troubles—they are one of the reasons it has proven so difficult to get owners to renovate or replace the business buildings on our strip. It may eventually force an Urban Removal project to get it cleaned up.

4. Barron Park really should have been named “Wallis Park,” after Sarah Wallis, who was an important historical personage. Sarah was the builder of the beautiful 3-story gingerbread Victorian mansion that Edward Barron later bought, and Col. Jones used for his academy.

5. Sarah Wallis was also the first President of the California Woman Suffrage Educational Association, the first such organization on the West Coast. She hosted Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony in 1871 and President Ulysses S. Grant in 1877 in her gingerbread mansion (honest!). Presidents since Grant have been more careful about whose party invitations they accept. Sarah, to give her due credit, was locally renowned for her parties as much as for her politics.

6. Sarah was also a member of the first overland emigrant party to bring wagons all the way across the Sierra Nevada. This means she walked all the way from Independence, Missouri to Sacramento, California. Since this was in 1844, she did this

without fanny packs, Nikes or trail mix. She also did this five years before the Gold Rush, so didn’t even get a gold nugget for her troubles.

7. Sarah Wallis was married three times, and her first two husbands deserted her. The first one went off to Honolulu and was never spotted again. The second one was in the process of being elected Mayor of San Francisco when he was exposed as a bank embezzler and bigamist who had absconded from Philadelphia. He absconded again, claiming he was going back East to clear his name. Sarah got the State Legislature to grant her a divorce from him, even though her marriage was clearly non-existent—and, for that matter, no one knew if her first husband was dead or might be alive somewhere. It is possible that they were both bigamists (unintentional on her part).

8. Edward Barron bought Sarah’s mansion and 250-acre farm after Sarah lost most her fortune in the 1873 depression. Barron had made his first fortune as a butcher and later as a wholesale meat-packer in gold-rush San Francisco. He then made some lucky gold-mine investments in the Comstock Lode of Nevada. His obituaries claimed he was President of the biggest mine in Virginia City, but there is almost no mention of him in the historical record. It is interesting that our neighborhood was named after a one-time butcher, considering that one of the oldest place-names is Matadero (Spanish for “slaughtering-place”).

9. In contrast to Sarah Wallis, Edward Barron was only married twice. He ditched the first wife who helped him build the butcher business, then married a thirty-year younger trophy wife from Ireland. He obliged the second wife by becoming senile, dying, and leaving her his fortune and a gorgeous estate that eventually became our neighborhood.

10. Following a related train of thought I should mention Secundino Robles, the second owner of the Mexican rancho that included our land. Robles was only married once, but he fathered twenty-nine babies on his one poor wife. Luckily for his female descendants, and for the Pal Alto Unified School District, that example did

not become a neighborhood tradition.

11. Our neighborhood might have become known as Stanford Park. According to one neighborhood tradition, Leland Stanford tried to buy the place from Barron to round out his Palo Alto Farm, but Barron resisted, unlike the many other neighbors who caved in to Leland’s persuasions.

12. THIS sort of resistance DID become a tradition of sorts. One day when Col. Jones and his family were living in the mansion, an imposing passerby drove his fancy car into the stately, tree-lined winding drive and offered to buy the elaborate weather-vane off the roof. This personage loftily announced that he was “a Vanderbilt”, and apparently assumed that fact gave him rights. Col Jones told him what he could do with his limousine and that was that.

13. Later on, this tradition became useful again when Barron Park voters spurned Palo Alto’s annexation attempts five times in a row.

14. Before we spurned them, they spurned us. Two earlier requests by Barron Park voters to be annexed had been turned down by Palo Alto because we had liquor stores and bars along our El Camino Strip. This was all Leland and Jane Lathrop Stanford’s fault—they had forced the original developer of Palo Alto to include an anti-liquor clause in all the deeds. This clause bound not only the original lot purchasers but also their heirs and assigns perpetually. Leland (and Jane) backed this up with a state law that prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages within a mile and a half of the boundaries of Stanford University. This effectively kept Palo Alto dry, but not Barron Park—which lay beyond the mile-and-a-half limit. So, when Barron Park wanted to join the City in 1947, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) threw a fit before the City Council, and that was that.

15. However, Palo Altans had to drink somewhere. This led to the tradition of a string of bars along each of the three main exits from town—El Camino in Menlo Park and Barron Park, and University Avenue at “Whiskey Gulch” in East Palo Alto. Barron Park also got a string of classy restaurants, which started as roadhouses but grew fat on Palo Alto dollars. They are

mostly gone—one of the last was L'Ommies, where Walgreen's is now.

16. L'Ommies (formerly L'Omелlette) was the scene of Barron Park's other Presidential Connection. It is a little known fact that, when JFK graduated from college, old Joe Kennedy sent him to the Stanford Graduate School of Business to get an MBA. John was supposed to be the businessman of the family—his older brother Joe, Jr. was the one who was supposed to grow up to be the President. Anyway, JFK came here for the fall semester of 1940 or 41—I'm not sure which—and L'Omелlette tradition held that he had a favorite bar stool where he could be found almost every night with a different floozie draped all over him (Marilyn Monroe was NOT the first conquest!) I don't know whether John flunked out, quit, or was ordered home by old Joe, but, in any case, that was the extent of his business career. L'Omелlette probably made a good profit that year, and the Biz School didn't know what it had missed.

17. Speaking of Democrats, this brings us around to the donkey tradition. It is quite possible, if not likely, that Barron Park is the only neighborhood in the country—or at least, the only urban neighborhood—with donkeys as mascots. You might ask, how did this come about? Or, on the other hand, you might NOT ask. Or you might say "don't ask." I'll tell you anyway. It has to do with Cornelis and Josina Bol. They owned what is now Bol Park and had played with farming it in the 1930s after emigrating from Holland. Stanford University had recruited Cornelis to join the Physics Department as a Research Associate, and he, in gratitude, invented the Mercury Vapor Lamp which is still the brightest form of steady electric light ever developed. Cornelis and Josina raised a large crop of vigorous boys at their home on Roble Ridge. They augmented the tribe of boys with horses and other animals. After giving up on raising crops in the park, they settled, in the 1950s, for donkeys, which amused the neighborhood kids no end. Cornelis invited the kids into the pasture in the future park for donkey petting and donkey rides (this was before liability lawyers had been invented). This got to be a new Barron Park tradition.

18. The donkey herd dwindled down to Mickey in the late 1960s. Mickey was the braying-est donkey this side of the Holy Land, but he became the neighborhood pet anyway. When the park was developed in 1973, he was ensconced in the current don-

key home ("Mickey's Pasture") and donkeys have been there ever since.

19. The world would not have Shrek's donkey (as it currently looks, anyway), if it were not for this tradition. The animators used Perry and Niner as their collective model.

20. There are other notable Barron Park traditions, too, but none of them come to mind just now. I hope you have enjoyed this somewhat irreverent rendition of Barron Park history.

**BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION
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- Christian Kalar, Secretary
- Mary Jane Leon, Treasurer
- Don Anderson
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BPA meetings are held the 3rd Tuesday of every month at 7:15 p.m.
Call Doug Moran for location: 856-3302
<http://www.bpaonline.org>

HELP SUPPORT THE BARRON PARK DONKEYS!

Support for Perry and Niner comes completely from the generosity of their neighbors and the community. The donkeys receive no tax dollars, no government funds, no funds from the City of Palo Alto, no grants from any animal welfare or humane organization. They are a part of the neighborhood simply because people who live here care about them and care about continuing this unique opportunity. In return, Perry and Niner provide warmth and joy to those who walk by their pasture; a rural equine experience for suburban children and adults who visit them on Sundays in Bol Park; an opportunity for humane education for children in Barron Park Schools; and a general reaffirmation for all of us of our connection to the natural world.

General farrier and veterinary expenses for the donkeys total about \$1,000 a year. Food costs about \$600 a year. Funds for the donkeys are managed by Acterra (formerly the Peninsula Conservation Center Foundation), which acts as fiscal agent for the Donkey Project, providing insurance and handling donations and financial affairs. Fees for these administrative services totaled about \$200 this past year. All of these expenses are funded solely through donations.

All those who care about Perry and Niner seek to guarantee their proper on-going care and shelter, as well as to ensure that assets will be available for health concerns as the donkeys age. For this reason, it is imperative that more assets be added to the donkeys' fund than are being spent for their general care on an annual basis. The handlers hope that those generous neighbors who have contributed in the past will consider increasing their support this year, and that those who have not yet made a contribution to the donkeys will consider doing so now. Contributions for the donkeys' care may be sent to: The Palo Alto Donkey Project, ACTERRA (Action for a Sustainable Earth), 3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, CA 94303-4303.

For further information about making a contribution on behalf of the donkeys, please call Edith Smith at 493-9386. If you would like information about how to become one of the volunteer donkey handlers, please call Don Anderson at 494-8672.

K I D S K O R N E R

By Linda Lui, neighbor



One Week Down, Forty-One to Go

This is the end of the first week of school and I am already running ragged. The few pots of flowers in our yard are withered from lack of water and reflect the neglect of anything not connected to any of our three different schools this year, two after school childcare programs, one part-time job for Mom and a Mynah Bird in one Papaya Tree. (The Hawaiian version of A Partridge-in-a-Pear-Tree.) It didn't help that we spent the weekend in Reno for my mother-in-law's birthday and returned at bedtime the night before the first day of school. I hadn't gone grocery shopping beforehand and found myself facing the dilemma of packing lunches for my three kids with very little food in the house. No bread. No cold cuts. But wait, we do have frozen waffles. And peanut butter and jam! Simple. But as I was preparing my simple offering the next morning, I realized that although that would work for my older son at Barron Park School, Jamie had a classmate at preschool who was allergic to peanuts. No problem. Soybean butter from Trader Joe's. But wait. Matthew's Young Five class is part of Preschool Family which strictly prohibits any and all nuts. (The school uses

only snack crackers that are produced in nut-free facilities.) Well, what's wrong with an Eggo waffle with just jam? It's white flour and lots of sugar, but if I stick in a bag of baby carrots, I can rationalize that it's "part" of a semi-well balanced meal. I absolutely know Matthew-who-hates-vegetables will not touch the carrots but it's 6:30 a.m. and I really don't feel

like dealing with his nutrition issues at the moment. Then I realize his first day is an open house and he won't be eating lunch there, so none of this really matters and my mind is a terrible thing to waste.

We saw Alex to his classroom at Barron Park and it was really warm and wonderful to see familiar faces at the first day of school ceremony on Tuesday morning. Then off to buy a flower to plant at Matthew's school. All went well until I escorted him to what I thought would be his first day at ALSJCC's after school program. I hadn't received the paperwork that had been sent but I brought the all important Physician's Report and Emergency info and I figured I could fill out the rest there. Then, the bomb. Their school doesn't open until September 9th!! I felt a sense of panic since I work two days a week and to cancel a day means calling up to seven patients to reschedule their dental cleaning appointment that they've had for six months. (A free toothbrush to the first to correctly guess what I do!) My lightheadedness was mitigated when the director came out and said they could accommodate my childcare needs beginning next week. Whew! My husband said he could

cover Wednesday and I was able to arrange a play date with another student for Thursday, so I was able to make it through this week. Next revelation: the Jewish Community Center observes Jewish holidays! Now why couldn't I have thought of this six months ago instead of just weeks before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? It's surprises like this that make me the obsessive-compulsive person that I am!

Then I tried to arrange some drop-in hours for Alex at Barron Park Kids' Club since I'll have some full days next week. "Sorry" says the dashing new director, politely, "our drop-in care doesn't begin until September 7th." Bad data, bad.

For Matthew's class, we also had our first parent meeting Wednesday night and Friday was my first day of working with the children. (Palo Alto's outstanding Young Fives program involves a lot of parent participation including working in the classroom once a week and attending a couple of evening parent meetings a month.)

I really couldn't handle any more stimulation this week. I blamed the heat, but that's the real reason we skipped Barron Park's back-to-school potluck on Friday. Too pooped to pot.

Next week promises to be another busy one for us, with the second Young Fives parent meeting and work day, Jamie's 2-year old physical, transition to a new preschool and her second birthday in the middle of it all, just in case we feel like partying.

If I could morph Woody Allen's words on life; being a parent of young children is full of stress, frustration, worry, exhaustion and fatigue...and it's all over, much too quickly! (Or so I've heard.)

(Editor's note: originally written for the BPA newsletter, this article was run in the September 8 issue of the Palo Alto Weekly. We thought it was good enough to re-run here, for those of you who missed it.)

Meet Your Barron Park Donkey Handlers!

By Don Anderson

This is the fifth in a series of articles introducing the community volunteers devoted to the care, feeding, and parental nurturing of the Barron Park donkeys, Miner Forty-Niner (Niner) and Pericles (Perry). Niner and Perry are the most recent in a long line of donkeys that have become a neighborhood institution in Barron Park over the years.

Our neighborhood's trademark donkeys are cared for entirely by volunteers from Barron Park and the surrounding community. In addition to feeding the boys twice a day, keeping their corral and shed clean and orderly, taking them for occasional walks, and bringing them out to meet the neighbors in Bol Park every Sunday morning, these volunteers also pick up and deliver loads of hay, make sure the donkeys receive regular attention from the vet and the farrier (horse shoe-er), and keep them clean and well curried. Read on, to meet more of the terrific crew that cares for the Barron Park donkeys!

Bob Frost



Bob has just begun working with Perry and Niner recently, but has enjoyed petting them and showing them to grandchildren for years. He grew up on a small farm near Portland, Oregon where his family

raised a few goats, chickens, hogs, and a horse. The horse was purchased with his paper-route income. In short, he has always loved being around and caring for livestock, and going to county fairs to enjoy them.

After graduating with a BSEE from Oregon State U. in 1956, Bob spent the next two years as an ensign in the US Coast and Geodetic Survey, assigned as Electronics Officer to the USS Pathfinder. The task was to update hydrographic surveys of several harbors in the Aleutian Islands. In 1960 he earned an MSEE from the University of Washington in Seattle, where he learned of Watkins-Johnson Co. (WJ), a small microwave tube company in the beautiful Palo Alto area, and was accepted there as a member of the technical staff.

Bob and his wife Alice moved to 792 Josina Ave. in 1960 and liked Barron Park so much that they stayed when upgrading to a larger home on El Cerrito Road in 1966. During the entire time, until retiring in February 2000, he worked at WJ, located over by the Veterans Hospital, and was able to ride a bike to work. Bob started out at WJ designing electron beam guns for microwave TWT vacuum tubes, designed some TWTs, then moved on to solid state devices in 1968. For the last few years at WJ he designed microwave receiver front ends for air to air missiles.

In retirement Bob and Alice are enjoying many activities, including occasional skiing in the north Lake Tahoe area, inflatable kayaking on such whitewater rivers as the Rogue River and the south fork of the American River, hiking weekly with the Sierra Club, and road biking with friends on Mondays. Bob and Alice both get a lot of satisfaction tutoring in math at Alta Vista, the continuation high school near Mountain View High, and are regular participants in the activities of the Barron Park Seniors group.

Don Anderson



Don arrived in Barron Park seventeen years ago, and thanks to daughters Laura and Sarah (then 5 and 2 years old), he immediately became

familiar with Mickey, the Barron Park donkey. Mickey's field was the preferred destination of every walk through the neighborhood, and there were many visits paid over the years.

Prior to moving to Barron Park, Don pursued a life filled with variety. Born and raised in Pasadena, he graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of California at Berkeley, went on to earn a Ph.D. in psychology at Harvard University, and spent the next ten years in the Boston area. During that time the first three of Don's five children were born; Michael, now 40, Jennifer, 33, and Sam, 29. During the late seventies Don served as Deputy

Commissioner of Mental Health for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In the early 1980's, he moved 3,000 miles and took over as CEO of Fiesta Floats, the family Rose Parade Float business in Pasadena.

Although the float business was fun—sort of like joining the circus—Don eventually decided to return to a career a little more in keeping with his education and interests. In 1987 he joined an international consulting company, William Mercer Inc., There he became leader of Mercer's U.S. behavioral health consulting practice, working with Fortune 500 companies, hospitals, and state health departments, and traveling more than 150,000 miles every year.

Since retirement in 2000, Don has turned his attention to local affairs. He co-founded and for three years edited the Gunn High School email newsletter, organized the Gunn Homecoming BBQ, served on the Gunn Site Council, organized GO-FAST, a group dedicated to promoting bicycle and traffic safety, tutored students at Juana Briones Elementary School, continues to serve on the Gunn Choir Board, recently has become the photographer for Gunn High theatrical events, and is now volunteering as staff for the ongoing film series at Spangenberg Theater. For the past several years Don has also served as membership chair for the Barron Park Association, has participated as a volunteer for the Barron Park Seniors committee, has become "donkey meister," overseeing the scheduling and recruiting of donkey handlers to work with Perry and Niner (Mickey's successors, the current Barron Park Donkeys), and has organized the annual "donkey parade and holiday party" in Barron Park, featuring the Gunn choir.

Don has also taken an interest in local political activities. He has campaigned for several candidates for school board, city council, and state offices, as well as participating in campaigns to support parcel taxes to help sustain Palo Alto schools. In their leisure time, Don and his spouse Kay Canrinus, a third grade teacher at Juana Briones, enjoy traveling to places near and far. They are already planning their next big trip, flying next summer to Bali to visit Don's daughter Jennifer, her husband Dino, and Don's first grandson Kaylan, who live in Ubud.

SENIOR UPDATE, FALL '04

by Mary Jane Leon

Transportation: Aye yae yae!

Losing the ability to drive is a devastating event in any senior's life. You can't run out to get a quart of milk, make a quick trip to the hardware store, or do any of the spontaneous errands we all take for granted. It even becomes much more difficult to plan regular errands, like grocery buying or clothes shopping. Outings to restaurants, movies, or plays mean asking a friend to do the driving.

Public transportation is seldom an option for people who can no longer drive. What ever caused the loss of driving privileges usually is debilitating enough to rule out long walks to the bus stop, or carrying a bag of groceries home.

Where does that leave us? Relying on the kindness of friends and volunteers. You probably already see the sales pitch coming, don't you? Well, here it is.

If you have a neighbor who can no longer drive, offer to run an errand for her, or, better yet, take him on the errand with you. People can quickly get house-bound and feeling isolated when the automobile is no longer waiting in the driveway.

If you have your health and a few hours to spare each week, please consider volunteering with RoadRunners. You drive your own car. You don't get involved with handling money. The charges, and they are very small, are all handled through office billing. You do get involved with people who really need your services and are grateful for them. Give it a try. The Road Runners phone number is 326-5362, x25.

The American Cancer Society also uses volunteers to take people to cancer treatments. If you would like to volunteer with them, phone (408) 879-1032.

If you know of other volunteer transportation options, please let me know. See the end of this column for my phone number.

Group Lunch Time

Summer weather means that we have had two successful lunches in Bol Park—on June 8 and August 10. Again, Driftwood Deli catered, and did a fine job as always.

Now we will move back in doors for the Fall. Next lunch will be about the time this newsletter comes out—October 12, probably at Su Hong. People who attended the

August lunch voted overwhelmingly to go to a Chinese restaurant. If you want to join the group for lunch in October, just let us know. There is always room for a few more.

Services Offered

We continue to offer volunteer services to Barron Park neighbors. We can run an

errand for you or with you, do small odd jobs at your home, help you learn to use e-mail, stop by for a visit, or give you a daily phone call. We also enjoy finding information that you might need about any specific service available to local seniors.

You can reach Mary Jane Leon at 493-5248 or mjleon@earthlink.net; Julie Spengler at 493-9151 or julie.899@juno.com

More Native Plants for Bol Bike Path

by Doug Moran

After the creek bypass—under the Bol Park bike path—was completed, the BPA planted a variety of native plants to supplement those that the Water District had planted.

Some of these plants have thrived and some have died. We are looking for volunteers to handle a next round of planting. The hardest part is digging holes for the plants, and the City's Parks Dept is willing to do that for us (an auger mounted on a resident's lawn tractor was barely adequate).

We are looking for volunteers to help plan the locations of plants, do the actual plant-

ing and then the follow-up care until they are established. Planting should occur in November or early December to give the plants maximum time to put down their roots before the next dry season arrives.

Contact me at (650) 856-3302 or dmoran@dougmoran.com and I will put you in contact with the other volunteers.

For further information about native plants, please see: www2.bpaonline.org/habitat/bolreveg.html and www.RosettaStoneInc.com (click on Glorious California, then on native plants).

NIGHTTIME PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

by Doug Moran

Because days get shorter gradually, it is very easy to ignore that walking and jogging that occurred in daylight is now occurring in twilight or after dark. This is the annual reminder to people to check how visible they are to approaching cars.

Dogs

When a driver is approaching a person walking a dog at night, often all that is seen of the dog is motion that could be a person without adequate reflectors. I have seen dogs wearing a variety of products that make them much more visible, accommodating what various dogs will tolerate.

Cats

Although there are relatively few cats that go out walking or jogging with their peo-

ple (but there are several), they often are out at night. There is one good reflective product for cats that I know of: The Hi Vis collar from Metropolitan Pet (www.metpet.com). This is vastly superior in both brightness and durability to other reflective collars I have found.

MetPet products are carried by a variety of local pet stores, including Pet Food Depot (at Portage Avenue). However, last I checked, none carried this collar so you need to order it on the Web or special order it through a store.

Hint: Rather than a traditional nametag, I use a label maker (Brother, Casio,) with black ink on transparent tape (3/8-inch) and stick it directly on the collar.

BUSINESS LICENSE AND BUSINESS TAX

by Doug Moran

Palo Alto is likely to institute a business license and is considering a business tax. Palo Alto is a rarity among California cities—virtually all of them have both Business Licenses and Business Taxes. Since these are often combined into a single program, this leads to the confusion that a Business License program is necessarily a Business Tax.

The City is aware that Palo Alto has many home-based businesses and wants to treat them fairly, but describing them may prove difficult. As things develop, I will post them to the BPA-news e-mail list.

The Business License will have a “minimal” fee intended to cover only the cost of data collection; it is currently expected to be in the range of \$25 per year. The considerations so far have focused on what information needs to be collected, and I don’t know how home-based businesses would be treated (they might be exempted).

During my participation on various issues, problems arose repeatedly because this data was not available. For example, part of the business license application is to specify the number of employees at each site. California cities are assigned goals for building new housing based upon their “job-housing imbalance.” That is, if they have more jobs than the housing needed for those workers, they are a net importer of commuters. As I have noted in previous articles, this is overly simplistic: When housing is built in Palo Alto, two out-bound commutes are created on average for every one in-bound commute eliminated.

The employee count of existing employers enables better predictions of the traffic impacts of new buildings because you have current data on the employee densities (number of employees per thousand square feet of floor space) for various types of business. It used to be that Research & Development operations had much lower employee densities than Office uses, because R&D people had not just offices, but laboratory spaces. With the shift of much of R&D to computers and the decreasing space required by those computers, R&D now has higher densities than many Office uses. To visualize this, think about a “cubicle farm” for a software development company (R&D) and then compare this to a law firm (Office).

Tracking employee counts (density) is also important for traffic projections: If buildings are over-utilized (for example, during the “Internet Bubble”), then you can project that those buildings will generate little more traffic and may well generate less traffic in the future as conditions return to normal. However, if buildings are under-utilized (for example, because of layoffs), then you need to project that they will be generating more traffic in the future. Failing to take this into account could lead the City to make wrong decisions about the traffic impacts of a proposed building. For example, the City probably does not want to approve a new office building if the existing buildings would create congestion when they return to normal utilization.

The Business License program is also important for tracking small businesses, such as retail stores, professional offices (for example, lawyers, doctors, financial specialists), and other service categories (for example, barbershops, nail salons). The City currently cannot effectively notify or survey these businesses on issues related to them. When businesses leave the city, the City would like to be able to conduct an “exit interview”—asking why they chose/needed to leave.

The City is considering how the data collected by the Business License program could benefit local businesses. One idea is to generate web pages giving contact information (web address, phone, location, hours, ...) organized by various categories, as well as having the database be searchable on the descriptive terms supplied by the businesses as part of their application.

The Business Tax is distinct from the Business License. When compared to neighboring cities, Palo Alto gets an astoundingly small amount of sales tax in the “Business&Industry” segment (discussed in my Summer 2004 President’s Column on retail and tax revenues). Recapping: Although there is some flexibility in apportioning credit for sales, and hence which cities receive which portion of the sales tax, most companies assign credit to the sales offices, which are under-represented in Palo Alto, and give no credit to headquarters and R&D operations, which are over-represented here. Palo Alto also has a large segment

of professional services companies—lawyers, consultants, financial services—that tend to generate very small amounts of direct sales tax revenue. The indirect sales tax revenue—from restaurants and local retail purchases—is likely not that much different from that produced by companies with direct sales tax generation.

Consequently, the City is starting to consider a Business Tax with the goal of generating more revenue from businesses that generate little sales tax. Recapping again from my previous column, the City gets only 8% of the property tax and many of these companies are renters on properties that are paying tax on assessed values that are far below current values because of the Proposition 13 caps.

My reading of various discussions is that the Business License proposal might be dealt with this fall, and that the Business Tax debate is still in its formative stages.

BPA ON-LINE!

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BPA Web Newsletters archive:
<http://www.bpaonline.org>

Donkeys’ Home Page:
[http://www.rosetastoneinc.com/
california/donkeys](http://www.rosetastoneinc.com/california/donkeys)

AOL problems continue

The problems with e-mail from the BPA lists to AOL subscribers being intermittently blocked continue. There are stretches of several days where all messages are blocked and then periods where most messages are accepted. The problem was outlined in the Spring issue of the BPA Newsletter and is available online (go to www.bpaonline.org, select “BPA email lists” and then select “For AOL customers ...”).

This seems to be a widespread problem—I have heard “me too” from around the world (People who Google’d to see if anyone had similar problems). From a soccer coach in Maryland with five players who are AOL subscribers: “even more ironic, a top aol exec [next door] offered to help. ... no help yet.”

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER

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