

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Doug Moran, BPA President

This column will provide an overview of how the BPA, especially the Board and the committees, approach issues affecting the neighborhood. That role is to help ensure that the neighborhood's concerns and views are represented, rather than to be the neighborhood's representative. This small difference in wording corresponds to a huge difference in practice, which can be seen in the following examples.

However, first I would like to thank Will Beckett for his many years of service as BPA President and to point you to Doug Graham's article on his achievements.

Highlighting Facts Early

One of the most important activities of the BPA is interacting with the various groups that make decisions affecting our neighborhood, informing them of local circumstances and concerns during the early stages of their considerations. Without this early involvement, good options for the neighborhood can be eliminated during these early stages, leaving a final choice between unpalatable alternatives, the proverbial choice of lesser evils.

Although many people are aware that Barron Park has a "special character," they often fail to appreciate the scope of those differences and then underestimate the impact of a seemingly small difference on what are normally routine matters. My involvement in the BPA stems in large part from several situations where the decision makers had failed to check their assumptions against the reality in Barron Park. Note, this is not just a BP problem: In fact, my sense is that we actually fare better than most other neighborhoods because of our history of constructive participation.

Encouraging Coordination between City Departments

Barron Park's "special character" often requires non-standard interactions between city departments, and the BPA pushes to get these interactions started early. For example, street resurfacing traditionally involves only asphalt, but our streets are being upgraded to include gutters, and gutters are handled by another group (they are concrete and hence have different maintenance schedules and different contractors).

Surveys

The BPA Board is committed to conducting formal surveys on important issues affecting the neighborhood. These surveys typically have a very high response rate, producing a credible picture of the views of the residents. Some surveys are conducted directly by the BPA, such as the one in this newsletter that goes to all residents. When special issues arise, there is often a government body involved that plans to, or can be persuaded to, conduct a survey. The BPA then makes suggestions about what are likely to be the controversial issues and choices so that the survey can accurately gauge resident opinion.

For example, as part of the planning for the renovation of Bol Park, the City's project manager met with the BPA Board and then a subcommittee to determine what the key issues were and then sent out a survey (to a subset of the neighborhood because of budgetary constraints). At the subsequent public meeting, there was an issue where the attendees seemed evenly split. However, the survey showed residents favoring one choice by a 2-to-1 margin, a choice that was taken to represent the preference of

the neighborhood because of the high response rate to the survey.

A Tale of Two Meetings

Public meetings are commonly used by government bodies to determine public opinion on proposals and on contentious issues. An important role for the BPA is to help residents effectively present their opinions and positions at these meetings.

In summer 1997, the Water District discovered that Matadero Creek provided less flood protection than they calculated. Their initial plan was to severely limit the diversion of water from Barron Creek, effectively deactivating much of the flood protection for the neighborhood. If this plan had been implemented, many believe that there would have been substantial flooding from the creek in the big storm of February 1998.

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COMMUNITY EVENT



May Fete in Juana Briones Park

May 5th, 12:00 to 4:00

May Pole dance about 2:00

Gary Breitbard providing music

Food for sale at Senior Taco booth

Drinks for sale at BPA booth

Some artists will be showing their work

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Instead, an unconventional plan was adopted and it allowed far more of the water in Barron Creek to be safely diverted to Matadero, resulting in Barron only briefly overflowing its banks, with no known damage.

Just prior to publicly announcing the problem, the Water District staff met with the BPA Board to outline the problem and their plan. We objected strenuously to the plan on two grounds. First, that it was based on assumptions that would have Barron Park bear a disproportionate share of the risk of flooding. Second, that the plan failed to take into account the fact that Barron and Matadero Creeks rose and fell on different timetables during a storm. As residents, we were well aware of this, but the Water District staff wasn't because they are normally concerned only with maximum flows of individual creeks.

The Water District's public meetings on this issue were going to be critical in determining what measures they were going to take. The BPA Board used email and the web to inform the neighborhood of the Water District's plan and to present our critique and alternatives.

There were two public meetings: The first targeted people in the Barron Park neighborhood and the second people along lower Matadero. Both had substantial turnouts, but the discussions could not have been more different. At the first meeting, residents made good use of the advance information and the time to think about the issues: The comments focused on how best to distribute risk and on the absolute desirability of exploiting the differences in the creeks' timetables.

The second meeting was dominated by finger-pointing and people going off on tangents. The issue of sharing the risk was barely touched, and then mostly as "not me." After the second meeting, several key Water District officials remarked appreciatively of how much better and more productive the first meeting had been. Although the Water District did not change its official criteria on how risk was to be apportioned, I firmly believe that the input of residents at the first meeting, especially in contrast to the conduct of the second, strongly influenced the Water District to leave the Barron Creek diversion channel open to the very last possible moment, thereby averting flooding.

These "interim measures" on flood control are still with us because the fixes to Matadero Creek proved to be far more difficult than originally estimated.

Follow-up

Public meetings are typically followed by a period where the results are considered and used to fine-tune the proposal under consideration before a final decision is made. It is not uncommon for this to stretch on for months, sometimes years. During this interval, the BPA sends representatives to meetings to monitor the changes and to remind the officials of what public sentiment was.

Because this follow-up can extend over years, the BPA provides the institutional memory for the neighborhood. The committees and the Board provide the mechanism for people to become knowledgeable on the issues, their history and the politics. As we go along, we are attempting to collect and organize documents on our web site so that they are readily accessible by everyone interested in the issues.

Upcoming Issues

Managing development and traffic on El Camino are becoming hot issues (see other articles in this newsletter). They have a major impact on our neighborhood and we need to have an active presence in the various workshops and other meetings on these topics. And this requires us to have enough people to "share the load:" please contact relevant Board members to become involved.

Summary

The BPA is a voluntary organization and its role on policy issues reflects that status: The Board, committees and other volunteers work to provide residents with the opportunity to have a more effective voice in decisions. We do this in part by working with elected officials and their staffs, advising them of local issues, concerns and unusual conditions that they need to address in developing and presenting proposals, and in part by providing residents with information to help them be more effectively in presenting their positions to public officials.

Additional info at <http://www2.bpaonline.org/BP-News/2002-spring/additional.html>

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION

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Newsletter: Nancy Hamilton

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BPA meetings are held the 3rd

Tuesday of every month at 7:15 p.m.

Call Doug Moran for location: 494-6922

DONKEY NEWS

By Edith Smith

Perry and Niner have weathered a cold winter happily and in good health. Their long "winter hair" is starting to shed; soon they'll resemble sleek horses.

We've been digitizing old photos of former Barron Park donkeys. Here's a 1965 shot of Negrita, with two donkey friends, right at the pointed North wedge of the pasture, where the Barron Park kiosk now stands. Their beautiful pasture became our cherished Bol Park — now temporarily closed for restoration. Bol Park will again host the donkeys, 9:30 – 10:30 Sunday morning, for grooming, petting and picture-taking — after the Park work is completed. IN THE MEANTIME, please come visit the donkeys at this hour each Sunday morning in the depicted area, just north of the Park, toward Matadero Ave. The donkeys, with their handlers, should be visible from both the bike path and from Laguna Ave. Niner and Perry like munching on the long grass there. It seems to be tastier, perhaps more natural, than the mowed lawn of the park.

Back to the 2 photos: Publicity about Perry's role as the model for "DONKEY" in the famous "SHREK" movie (San Mateo Co. Times, San Jose Mercury, Oakland Tribune) has brought many visitors from



other cities to see them. The photo below shows fans from Belmont. In the 1960's Negrita (shown above) became mascot of the Gunn High Titans football team and also a member of the Los Altos Trail Club. She also jumped hurdles and followed many difficult commands.

The donkeys will visit with the combined Juana Briones School Kindergarten classes in March. More about this event in the next BP Newsletter.

If you often walk the bike path and could give a few minutes once a week to donkey feeding (and checking) please phone Don Anderson, 494-8672, or Leland Smith, 493-9386, to become a donkey volunteer.



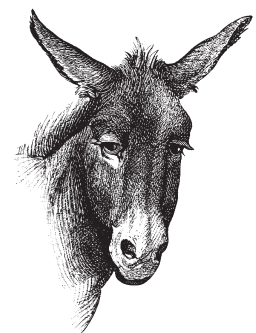
Harmony Bakery is Back

After 10 months of building a 5,000 sq. ft. FDA certified kitchen, the prize-winning Harmony Bakery is open for business at 2865 Park Blvd., Palo Alto. That is near Fry's Electronics, across the street from Agilent Technologies.

Harmony is a wholesale facility, but open to the public. You can deal directly with Harmony Bakery by becoming a club member and opening an account—it's that simple. Wholesale prices and the thrill of purchasing your fresh bread just feet away from the oven it was baked in are the perks afforded Harmony Bakery Club Members.

There are always free samples of their breads and pastries, and everybody is welcome to come in and have a bite. Try the Irish Soda Bread studded with caraway or the fluffy Challah, or maybe there will be a taste of Cranberry Walnut Cake or Almond Muffin.

This is "The Little Bakery That Could," so come visit natives Phil and Nickie Nasr and support real Palo Alto culture today.



SEE THE DONKEYS

Every Sunday morning, weather permitting, the donkeys visit with people of all ages from 9:30 until 10:30 in Bol Park.

Bring your kids and dogs!

THE FETES IN BOL PARK

by Doug Graham

Paul Edwards originated the fetes

Barron Park residents who enjoy the May Fetes have many volunteers to thank, but above all, Paul Edwards (Manzana Lane). Paul became interested in the English Maypole dance tradition in the early 1950s when he participated as a boy in maypole dances at Rinconada Park. By the mid-Seventies, Paul lived on Roble Ridge, near the then-brand-new Bol Park. Entranced by the possibilities of the park as a site for community celebrations, he organized several small, informal springtime events with maypoles for friends and acquaintances.

Barron Park's Bicentennial celebration

In 1976, the Barron Park Association asked Paul to help arrange for music and games at the planned Bicentennial Celebration. Besides wanting to participate in the nationwide upsurge of patriotic feeling that swelled across the U.S. that year, the BPA wanted to begin a tradition of community gatherings in the park. They felt that to have a site for neighborhood parties was one of the reasons why the neighborhood had taxed itself to establish Bol Park. The Bicentennial seemed a golden opportunity to kick-start a tradition. The party was a tremendous success, but might have been a one-shot affair except for Paul's ongoing interest in organizing maypole parties.

First "official" May Fete

Paul married Patty Farr in May 1977 and moved to Menlo Park, but continued his interest in maypole events in Bol Park. He approached the BPA Board in the winter of 1977 with a proposal to provide a maypole and music if the Board would handle refreshments, publicity, porta-potty and park cleanup. Such a deal! The Board said "Yes" and the first "official" May Fete was held May 7, 1978. There were three maypoles, games, strolling musicians and a large contingent (including members Paul and Patty) from the Los Trancos Marching Band and Chowder Society, led by drum major Orville Pitney. Many of Paul's and Patty's personal friends added to the comradery, among them maypole dancer



The Drum Major leads us in patriotic song

Martha Blackman ("the white witch"), Bob Frahley who brought dancers and Gary Breitbard who provided much of the live music, including Sweet Rosemary (which included Paul). Two of the bands were made up of folks from St. Michael's Alley.

Ken Arutunian (of upper Matadero Avenue) organized portable charcoal grills and made Armenian shish-kabobs for sale. Ken was the current BPA President and was the landscape architect who designed Bol Park. The Barron Park School PTA had a bake sale. There was face painting and games for the kids. About 300 people attended, and it was, in the lingo of those days, "a real blast!"

May Fetes, 1979-81

The first May Fete was such a success that the BPA enthusiastically began planning for a bigger and better one in 1979. Over the next three years, the same mix of music and games continued. Artists were invited to the fetes. John Kennedy demonstrated metal sculpture, making seagulls out of scrapped automobile hoods to the amazement of Barron Park kids. Rick Shirley set up a pottery studio in the park for kids on fete day. Paul's parents and sisters worked

with Patty many hours every year decorating the maypoles with ribbons and flowers. Enid Schreiber made flower garland crowns for people to wear. Sue Lyttle and her friends beguiled the children every year with face painting in the shade of a parachute canopy (a tradition since taken up by a succession of volunteers). Peter Van Zant and Mary de Wit managed the sound systems each year. Ken Arutunian continued to provide Armenian shish-kabobs to the delight of fete-goers.

Fourth Fetes, 1982-84

By 1982, Paul and Patty were in the midst of moving back to Barron Park. Their non-availability to put on a May Fete that year, disappointing attendance at the 1981 fete (a cool, cloudy day, threatening rain), combined with the remembered success of the Bicentennial Celebration led to a decision by the BPA Board to hold a park festival on Independence Day. We called it Fourth Fete. The first Fourth Fete was designed to be an old-fashioned 4th of July celebration with many innovative touches. Several portable structures, including the modular gazebo, were built by BPA volunteers under the direction of Will Beckett (Baker Avenue). The base of the gazebo has



Left: Maypole dance 2001

Paul Edwards and maypole 2001

Below: Overall view of May Fete 1984



served ever since as the stage for musicians. There was a ticket booth where food and drink tickets were sold under the supervision of BPA Treasurer Bob Moss (Orme Street). The gazebo, food and membership tables and ticket booth were all decorated in bright red, white and blue ribbons by Clara Sharpless (La Para Avenue) and there was a row of American flags flying along Laguna Avenue.

Patriotic speakers, organized by BPA President Sam Sparck (Laguna Way), included Congressman Tom Lantos and Mayor Mike Cobb. More than 50 volunteers worked at the 1982 Fete under the general guidance of Fete Chair Doug Graham (Ilima Way). We enjoyed warm, perfect weather and attendance was about 350. One of the high points of the day was the raising of a "liberty pole" in the maypole slot.

Jeff and Janet Rulifson (El Centro Avenue) provided a copy of the popular Barron Park History exhibit they had put together for the Bicentennial Celebration and Doug and Verna Graham augmented this with historic photos and maps of Barron Park and an exhibit on BPA activities. For the 1982 Fete, temporary display boards were nailed together by Doug and the exhibit was placed in a prominent position near Laguna Avenue. It was so well received that the BPA decided to have a better structure constructed. In the spring of 1983, Bert Graf (La Para Avenue) built the 8-sided portable exhibit board that the BPA has used at fetes and public meetings ever since. The 1983 fete was notable for high attendance, about 400 people, boosted by more than 100 volunteers working on or

for the Fete Committee.

The committee organized a third Fourth Fete in 1984. Besides all the traditional features, a "Cub Scout Olympics" was held, the best-yet musical program was arranged, and State Assemblyman Byron Sher was the Keynote Speaker. BPA Chairman Doug Graham organized a twenty-minute program celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the Bol Park Dedication, featuring Dick Placone (former BPA President), Edgar McDowell (S. P. Railroad) and Mayor Larry Klein.

However, attendance at the 1984 Fourth Fete was off greatly, due partly to an unpleasant heat wave (close to 100 degrees) and partly to competition with the Blue Angels exhibition at the Moffett Field Air Show. In 1985, Paul and the BPA Board were ready to resume regular May Fetes and we decided that the chance of rain in early May was less than the chance of a heat wave on the 4th of July.

Evolution of the May Fetes

For several years in the mid-1980s, the fetes were coordinated with the Barron Park Boy Scout Troop's annual pancake

breakfast fund-raiser in Bol Park. During the mid-1980s, music was often provided by Heartspace. The Los Trancos marching band continued to participate, but the number of its members attending dwindled over the years. The Mayfield Morris Dancing Troupe, led by Jody McGeen, first appeared at the 1986 Fete and have returned many times over the years since. Gary Breitbard arranged for a variety of Barron Park musicians to lend their talents to the Fetes. In 1995, Derek Kidd appeared (guitar and vocals).

The fetes evolved slowly, with a long-term tendency towards simplification and slenderization to accommodate an aging and shrinking volunteer group. In 1987 and most succeeding years, the Juana Briones PTA held a bake sale. Shish-kabobs were dropped when Ken Arutunian could no longer provide the service. Beer was dumped by vote of the Board to set an example, out of concern for the national problem of increasing teenage drinking. In 1995, Kosher hot dogs were provided, and received rave notices. After 1996, ticket sales were dispensed with in favor of direct cash handling by the food servers. Ulti-

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[MAY FETES CONTINUED
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mately, in the late nineties, the grills were dropped and Maryanne Welton arranged the purchase of tacos from *Senor Taco*.

The Ninth Annual May Fete in 1990 was rained out on May 20 and rescheduled for June 10. The 1985 time capsule was dug up and a new one substituted. The Eleventh Annual May Fete on May 21, 1992, featured *Café Boeuf* (Gary Breitbart's group that later became "Friends of French Country Dancing") and *Grass Menagerie* (bluegrass). The 1997 Fete was kicked off by a pet parade and a bicycle parade on the reopened bike path (see below). It included a Spring Hat contest, origami contest, paper airplane contest, and a demonstration by the Palo Alto Police K-9 unit. Will Beckett arranged a display of electric cars.

Rededication of the Park in 1997

The 1997 Fete included the rededication of Bol Park after the completion of the Santa Clara Valley Water District's flood control project. The project had involved installing an 8-foot square diversion culvert under the bike path from the Barron Creek Settling Basin at Gunn High School to Matadero Creek, and a 12-foot square bypass culvert from there to El Camino. The bike path was torn up for the better part of three years for this 16-million dollar project to prevent routine flooding in Barron Park. Speakers at the dedication ceremony included Jim Lenihan, District Director, and Will Beckett, BPA President.

The Millennium May Fetes

By the time of the Millennium May Fete in 2000 and 2001, the Barron Park donkeys, Niner and Perry had become regular guests. Gary Breitbart and his merry musicians were back again with Celtic and Appalachian tunes. Bagpipers Ian Rawlinson (2000) and Alan Keith (2001) led the maypole parades. Broceliande provided Celtic and Renaissance music. At the 2001 Fete, Barron Park artists were out in force with displays of their works, many of which were available for purchase. Innovations included a shaded "pavilion" with chairs for seniors. A new musical group, *Crossroads*, appeared for the first time. *Crossroads* included Heather Beckett, who grew up attending May Fetes in Bol Park—we are moving into the second generation now!

WILL BECKETT

A man who responds to challenges

By Doug Graham

How Will got involved in the neighborhood

Will Beckett is a man who responds to challenges. For example, he originally became involved in community affairs when he was challenged to do something about the problem he was complaining about. Will's doorbell rang one day in 1974, and on the threshold was a neighbor and BPA Board Member, Jane Grubgeld. She was going door-to-door with leaflets announcing one of the community meetings the BPA was then sponsoring to discuss the latest annexation proposal (readers of this newsletter may remember that Barron Park annexed to Palo Alto in 1975). Will vented to Jane his frustration about drivers speeding on Maybell Avenue near his home, and Jane challenged him to come to a board meeting to discuss the issue. He went to the meeting and ended up volunteering to research the issue and come up with proposals for the board. With that commitment, Will began a 27-year career of volunteer service to Barron Park and Palo Alto that is still continuing today.

The BPA was busy fighting "the bad guys"

When Will joined the board in the mid-Seventies, the BPA was an organization that had developed a hostile and reactive mode to perceived threats and problems. This was partly a reflection of the times—the neighborhood was being threatened—even assaulted—on all sides by the forces of development. Muffler shops, massage parlors and bars frequented by raucous and pugnacious male groups from outside Palo Alto characterized the Barron Park strip of El Camino. Apartment complexes and new condominium developments crowded the R-1 housing. Noise and other esthetic and environmental pollution came over (and under) the back fence, or down

the creeks from the ever-growing Stanford Research Park and the VA Hospital. It's no wonder that BPA meetings usually focused on the opponents (developers and their allies) and, as Will says, "on how to get them."

A legacy of Street Improvements

Will's work with traffic and streets issues over the 25 years he has been on the BPA board has led to several important improvements in the neighborhood. Will was instrumental in getting the city to work with CalTrans to get us a traffic light on El Camino at Matadero Avenue. This solved the problem of making safe left turns onto the boulevard and eased traffic on Kendall, Barron and Los Robles. He was involved with the city on the placement and design of the traffic islands on El Camino along the entire Barron Park strip from Lambert to Charleston, which improved safety and helped traffic flow more smoothly.

But his proudest achievement was the resolution of a long-standing problem—how to keep our "rural"-looking streets from appearing run down and trashy. The answer was the design for the valley gutters that have been installed in recent years on Los Robles, La Para, and several other streets. They give a sharp definition to the side of the road and provide protection against deterioration and damage to the pavement, while providing solid footing for pedestrians and channeling local runoff.

Will promoted the design to city staff, even developing draft guidelines and concept drawings. He saw the valley gutter idea as a healing concept that would end the long-standing arguments over sidewalks, curbs and gutters that tore Barron Park apart during the annexation movements of the Sixties and Seventies. He talked the city

into ending their knee-jerk reaction of requiring full sidewalks, curbs and gutters every time there was a new small development in Barron Park. Their first reaction was to walk away from the problem, but Will pointed out that Barron Park people paid the same taxes as everyone else for maintaining curbs and gutters, and we were receiving no benefit for that money. The valley gutters are a compromise that seems to be catching on as the wave of the future to preserve the semi-rural look of our streets while presenting a pleasingly tidy and "finished" appearance.

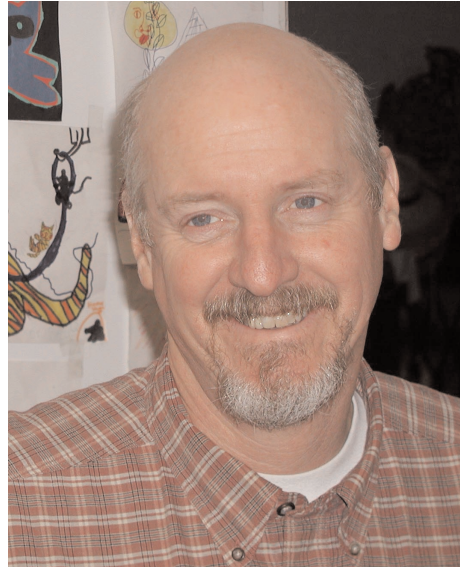
Honoring the Peacemaker

This month, the Barron Park Association is honoring Will for nine years' service as BPA President. He took over leadership of the association from Dave Chalton in 1993. Dave had held the office for a year, having filled a leadership gap left by the withdrawal of John Joynt, who had led the BPA for about 8 years in the late 80s and early 90s. During the last two years of Joynt's tenure, fractious personalities on the Board had made it difficult to reach consensus decisions on controversial problems facing the community. Constant dissonance made for longer meetings and some board members resigned rather than put up with the contentious atmosphere. As Will puts it, one of his first tasks was to "get people to be civil to each other." This was no small task and took a number of years to accomplish.

Will's vision for the BPA

Will's vision for the BPA included refocusing the organization on positive, proactive neighborhood-building activities. As he puts it, "parties are as important as issues." He was one of the early proponents of Paul Edward's ideas for neighborhood parties in the park (see this issue's article on the history of the fetes in Bol Park). During Will's tenure as President, the BPA reached beyond the Fetes to facilitate the donkey activities, started the Home and Garden Tours and Shows, and most recently initiated the Winter Holiday Parades and Song-Fests.

Another of Will's goals was to continue



Will Beckett, BPA President 1993-2002

and improve the committee structure begun by Doug Graham in 1983 and expanded by John Joynt. Finally, in the late 90s and the millenium years, the Board was able to attract new blood and Will achieved his goal of tightly focused, brief and consensus-oriented board meetings. This is now making it noticeably easier to attract committed volunteers, as the board continues to reach out to the community for renewal and growth.

Participation in the wider community

Being so involved in Barron Park affairs did not stop Will from participating in the wider community. One of his first major activities for the BPA after joining the board in 1976 was to involve our neighborhood in a pilot program of curbside recycling. Barron Park was one of the first areas in the nation to test this idea, which is now catching on coast-to-coast. The program was such a success in Barron Park that the City Council decided to make it permanent and expand it throughout Palo Alto.

In 1992, Mayor Gary Fazzino appointed Will Beckett and Micki Schneider (now a council member) as Co-Chairs of the Comprehensive Plan committee. During the next several years, Will took the lead in managing citizen input to the city's general planning process, as Schneider left the

committee to join the council and Sandy Eakins (also a current council member) took her place as Co-Chair. The contacts he developed during the mid-Nineties, with council members, planning commissioners, city staff, other neighborhood associations and developers have been invaluable to our neighborhood in ensuring that our voice is heard loud and clear at city hall.

The most important question facing us

Will feels that the future of our El Camino strip is still one of the most important—maybe the single most important—question facing the neighborhood today. As you drive on El Camino today, you cannot help but notice that, compared to Menlo Park, Mountain View and Los Altos, Palo Alto has done relatively little in the past thirty years to improve the economic health, liveability and especially the visual appearance of El Camino. Putting it bluntly, our share of the strip is tawdry, run-down and downright unattractive looking in comparison to our neighboring cities. There are lots of reasons for this, the first one being the original haphazard subdivisions that created lots too small to serve as the basis for healthy businesses in our automobile-oriented times. Secondly, our well-meaning attempts to preserve a neighborhood character to the retail businesses by applying some creative zoning laws, have, in retrospect, been a dismal failure.

A vision for El Camino Real

Will has a new concept to offer, honed in the rigorous debates and fact-rich atmosphere of the comprehensive planning process. Will envisions the strip becoming a series of "pockets" of neighborhood-oriented retail, maybe a quarter-mile apart, alternating with other developments that support a visually attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment. Implemented in the right way, this concept could help turn our part of El Camino into a strip that Palo Alto could be proud of. Barron Park needs a better gateway, one that we can feel is an appropriate introduction for the traveler entering our neighborhood. That's Will Beckett's vision.

HOUSING ELEMENT: ISSUE BACKGROUND

By Doug Moran

The State of California requires that cities develop specific plans to provide their unmet housing needs and then submit those plans for approval. Because Palo Alto has few good sites for additional housing, developing this plan has been highly contentious. This plan is part of the City's Comprehensive Plan called the Housing Element. A draft by city staff was presented to the City Council on October 9, 2001, and a subsequent draft was presented on February 4, 2002. There was strong objection to this draft because of the likely cumulative impact of the sites identified for high-density housing: 10 of the 21 sites were in the El Camino corridor from Page Mill south. The Council decided to forward this draft to the state for review and comment, but expressed strong reservations about the Site Inventory (lots designated as prime candidates for high-density housing).

This is likely to be a hot issue in the coming months. Here is some background information that may help you better understand the various arguments. One of the problems with the summary report (CMR 136-02: available on the City's web site) was that it presented a simplistic treatment of the impacts of the various sites.

Impact of Traffic

The first red flag is that the report presented traffic congestion only as a regional (freeway) problem, ignoring the local aspects. Commutes within a city can add significantly to congestion. In trying to estimate commute directions, a rough metric is that the typical Palo Alto resident is twice as likely to work outside the city as inside. The intuition is that people choose to live in Palo Alto for reasons other than close proximity to their job (for example, for the schools), people change jobs,

and the locations of jobs change (for example, a company reorganization).

Different locations for housing can have very different impacts on traffic. For example, the Sun campus on San Antonio Road (between 101 and Charleston) is a candidate for high-density housing. Commutes from there to the Stanford Research Park would pass through the already badly congested Charleston/Meadow school corridor. In contrast, commutes to the office complexes just across 101 (stretching through Mt. View) or elsewhere along 101 have a very low impact on Palo Alto. However, for most of the potential housing sites along El Camino, most of the expected commutes pass through congested areas.

El Camino Study

A long-overdue study of El Camino is just beginning, and it should provide an assessment of what can be done to improve traffic flows, and hence provide a basis for estimating how much additional development the corridor can support.

Viewing traffic levels in terms of only commutes to work is overly simplistic: A rule of thumb is to estimate 6 to 10 trips per day per household. As the peak traffic periods get longer, more of these trips fall into those peak times. The impact of these trips can be reduced if the most common destinations, such as grocery stores, are located

closer to where people live. This has long been recognized and incorporated into urban design philosophy, under terms such as walkable neighborhoods and neighborhood-serving retail. Note: "retail" is too narrow a term for these common destinations, which include commercial services as well as schools, recreation, etc.

The second red flag in the City staff report was that it ignored this established approach and instead lumped neighborhood serving retail and similar services in the same category with other non-residential uses, and then argued that replacing non-residential uses with housing would reduce traffic. In fact, it would increase traffic by putting more people in an area where they now had to drive further for basic needs, such as groceries.

Zoning Changes

Part of the reason given for selecting so many sites along El Camino for high-density housing is that El Camino has been designated a transit corridor. Many, including at least one City Council member, have argued that current ridership does not support this designation, and that El Camino should be treated no different from other streets that have bus routes along them. In a development proposal, if the availability of mass transit is cited as

reducing impact on traffic, ask if the projected ridership is extrapolated from actual experience, or if it is just wishful thinking.

One of the major problems in bringing more neighborhood-serving retail to El Camino is that too many of the available lots have sizes and configurations that are not practical for such uses. This is a reminder that just because something is zoned for a particular use does not mean it



will actually get used that way — witness the vacant lots. Hence, in discussions about providing a suitable balance between housing and related retail and services, be very wary of presentations that do not go beyond number of lots and square footage and consider the likelihood that particular lots will actually be developed for that use.

A major reason that these issues are so contentious is that errors are so hard to correct. For example, the SW corner of Los Robles and El Camino used to be Rudolfo's Restaurant. Under the City's first Comprehensive Plan, the zoning of this site was changed to residential. It was subsequently recognized that this decision was a mistake and that this site was a prime location for a neighborhood-serving business. The City's second (current) Comprehensive Plan would have changed the zoning back, but the first change was phased in before the new change could take effect. With the new change pending and with the strong support of the neighborhood, Rudolfo's owners would probably have gotten an extension of the original zoning. Instead, they chose to not even try, and the site was converted to housing. A lesson from the Rudolfo's episode is to not put much weight on mechanisms for handling exceptions. Despite the best intentions and efforts of city officials, the process can be so complex, long and uncertain as to discourage most people from even attempting it, in effect, being a "poison pill" rather than a remedy.

Finally, in the discussion of the Site Inventory, you will likely be hearing concerns about momentum: some lots were placed on the list as placeholders to meet the deadlines but that people will come to treat those selections as if they resulted from a careful evaluation and review.

Additional information can be found at <http://www2.bpaonline.org/BP-News/2002-spring/additional.html>

Neighborhood Meeting Summary

by Marianne Welton

On March 10th, the BPA sponsored a neighborhood meeting at Barron Park Elementary School. The goal of the meeting was to present updates on City projects and improvements, either planned or implemented in the neighborhood, and to allow residents an opportunity to voice their concerns or questions to the BPA board and City officials and staff. The topics that were discussed will be shared with City staff and will help guide the BPA's efforts during the year.

Similarly to last year's meeting, the Sunday afternoon event brought together about 100 community members. In addition, City staff was represented by members of the Planning, Transportation, and Auditor's departments. Seven City council members also attended and listened to the neighborhood discussion. Several of the City staff and officials commented on the great turnout, especially on a sunny Sunday afternoon.

City Well Represented

Mayor Vic Ojikian and City Manager Frank Benest presented a short video on the City's public facilities, such as the Junior Zoo and Museum, libraries, art center, community centers and public safety center. While the City uses existing funds to maintain basic infrastructure, such as streets, power and parks, they are considering including some of these public facilities in a bond measure next fall to fund their expansion and renovation. Since a two-thirds majority is needed to pass this type of bond measure, they are asking the community to work together to help make a bond measure possible. Contact the City Manager's office if you are interested.

Questions and Answers

A question and answer period followed, and participants turned in completed cards that began "A key issue or concern for the Barron Park neighborhood is" The main issues that were brought up include:

- Traffic and speeding and how that impacts the safety of people walking and biking through the neighborhood
- The impacts on the neighborhood from development of large single family houses, multi-family housing, and businesses along El Camino
- The need for more neighborhood-serving retail, especially a market
- Questions about the management of traffic and the physical appearance of businesses and public areas along El Camino
- A commitment for maintaining infrastructure
- A concern about the management of process and costs for a potential bond measure for public facilities

While many of these issues were brought up at last year's meeting, there was more focus this year on public facilities, infrastructure and El Camino.

Your Interest Welcomed

The BPA Board appreciates the involvement of everyone who attended the meeting. We will work with City staff to address these issues and will update you as things progress. If you were unable to attend the meeting and want to share your

thoughts, feel free to contact any of the board members. We welcome your input on ways the BPA can serve the community. Be sure to let us know if you are interested in helping shape our community by taking part in BPA activities.



ZONING & LAND USE

By Maryanne Welton, Committee Chair

The development climate has changed during the last year in both Palo Alto and the entire Bay Area. Empty office buildings and a slow-down in the residential market have impacted everyone who lives and works here with reduced traffic and construction. The number and types of projects proposed for the Barron Park neighborhood have also changed. Here's an update on projects in our community during the last year:

Children's International School

A Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application has been submitted for a new school on the 1.7-acre former orchard located on Clemo Street, across from Briones Park. This private, non-profit school for grades kindergarten through eighth, now located at Cubberly Community Center, would have a maximum of 135 to 150 students.

The lot is currently zoned RM-30, which allows multi-family housing and a school as a conditional use. If the school is unsuccessful in obtaining the CUP, a residential developer will most likely build multi-family housing on the property. The site had been designated by city staff as a component in the Housing Element, but it was later removed from the list by City Council.

The BPA sponsored two neighborhood meetings last year to present the architect's conceptual plans and solicit community input. The major concerns voiced by community members were the impact of additional cars on existing traffic congestion; access for the fire department, neighbors, and school families; parking; size and height of the buildings; and use of the park by the school. Pre-

serving the site for multifamily housing, possibly affordable housing, was also mentioned—housing advocates are reluctant to see any of the few remaining undeveloped multifamily housing sites used for other purposes.

Various City departments will evaluate the application and hold a public hearing so all interested parties can respond to the proposal. Watch the BPA news email list for further information about public meetings concerning this project.

South El Camino Real Design Study

A planning study is underway to look at transportation, urban design, land use and economic factors that affect development along El Camino. A draft of new design guidelines to help create a pedestrian-oriented, neighborhood-serving retail district will be presented to the community Advisory Committee (where I represent the BPA) and Architectural Review Board this month for review and comment. In addition, a new Advisory Committee is being formed to work with planning and urban design consultants as part of a \$280,000 Caltrans grant. This study will look at the entire length of El Camino through Palo Alto and propose alternative standards to encourage improvements in the public

right-of-way that enhance the streetscape. Community members can take part at design workshops and public hearings during the next year. These two sets of guidelines will impact the look and feel of all new and renovated structures along El Camino as well as the public areas, sidewalks and plantings.

Old Blockbuster Site

A nine-unit condominium project was proposed for the site of the old Blockbuster Video store on the corner of El Camino and Vista. Preliminary review by the Planning Department and Architectural Review Board recommended design changes to encourage a more pedestrian-friendly street frontage. Revised plans have not yet been submitted.

Subdivision at 797 Matadero

City Planning staff informed the property owners that their plans to subdivide a large parcel on Matadero into five single family house lots would not likely be approved. Revised plans have not been resubmitted.

4131 El Camino

This three-story, mixed-use project including retail, office, and residential units received City approval and construction has begun. The developer is looking for a

tenant for a cafe or other retail use on the ground floor.

The Goodwill Trailer Site

An application to the City for a new hotel has been withdrawn after negative reviews by the Architectural Review Board and community. A new developer is exploring the possibility of a mixed-use project to include a neighborhood market.



Preservation of Ground Floor Retail along El Camino

Last fall the City Council approved a city-wide amendment to the Ground Floor Retail Ordinance that says that any existing retail, personal service, restaurant, auto service or housing use cannot convert to office use in any Commercial Neighborhood (CN) or Commercial Service (CS) zone (which is the zoning for most of El Camino through Barron Park). Any existing office use can stay as office or convert to another type of office use within those zones. This prevents new office uses taking over existing retail spaces and enhances the possibilities of neighborhood serving retail uses in our community.

Albertson's at Alma Plaza

Albertson's presented plans three years ago to the City for the demolition of the existing 13,300-square foot market and the other retail buildings and construction of a new 37,000-s.f. market. They are currently proposing a new 29,000-s.f. market which would include a grocery store and pharmacy. In addition, they would build a new retail building to replace the existing shops and provide affordable apartments above. This project has generated intense community scrutiny by residents who support or oppose the size of the project. More public meetings will be held as the project goes through the City's approval process.

3924 El Camino

The former Armando's was closed two years ago due to code violations and has been vacant since then. Last year a developer proposed converting the former bar and restaurant into offices and renovating and retaining the house on the alley as a residence. After the required review and approval by the Architectural Review Board, an appeal was filed protesting the project's use. The original proposal has now been withdrawn and plans for renovating and leasing it are uncertain.

If you are interested in zoning and land use issues, any of the projects listed above, or want to participate on our committee, you can contact me at 493-3035 or quigleynor@aol.com.

SENIOR UPDATE

By Mary Jane Leon

Seniors Continue Lunch Get-Togethers

The Barron Park Seniors got together for lunch at al Fresco on January 15. We had about 20 people attend. A smaller group than usual, but we caught a great many people in the throes of their winter colds. By the time of our March lunch, we should all be healthy and enjoying our usual early Bay Area Spring. Don't we have the best weather in the world? I'm an Iowa girl, and I do occasionally miss warm summer rain, but I surely don't miss the winters or the summer humidity and heat that are typical of the Midwest.

We try to have the lunches about every six weeks, and we would be happy to have you join us. They are a good way to renew old acquaintances and get acquainted with new friends in our unique neighborhood. Phone Julie or Mary Jane (see end of this column) to be put on our calling list for lunches if you are not already on it.

Come to the May Fete!

Enjoy an afternoon out in the fine Spring air. Watch the fantastic May Pole dance! If you haven't seen or participated in this event, you have a treat in store. Also, see what Barron Park artists are creating. Hear some fine music by local musicians. We will be in Juana Briones Park this year, as we can't be sure they will finish repairing Bol Park by May 5.

The May Fete will take the place of our next seniors lunch, so stop by and say hello. We will have some chairs, some shade, some good company. Hope you can join us.

Our next lunch after the May Fete will be in late June.

Our Services for Seniors

It is probably worth doing to occasionally remind ourselves and our community of the reason we formed the seniors committee. So here it is: The purpose of the senior committee is to identify the needs of the Barron Park senior community and, in so far as we are able, to address those needs by locating existing services or developing

the services ourselves.

To that end, we continue to offer services for seniors. If you would like to find out more, please phone. We could

- 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.
- Find information that you might need about any specific service available to local seniors.

By the way, we could use another Mac person in our group of volunteers. If you use a Mac or Imac and would like to help out, let us know. You could spend as little as an occasional hour a week helping a neighbor learn to use e-mail.

Transportation Services for Seniors

A couple of transportation services are worthy of note.

El Camino Hospital Auxiliary offers a volunteer taxi service, called Road Runners, within a ten mile radius of the hospital. That covers Palo Alto and Menlo Park, as well as Mt. View and Sunnyvale. They need advance reservations, and they have a sliding fee scale starting as low as \$3 and up per ride. Phone 650 940-7016 for information.

Avenidas, the Palo Alto Senior Center, is considering starting their own transportation service using volunteers driving their own cars. A great opportunity for active seniors who want to get more involved, to do some transporting. If you can volunteer, or if you could use the service, let Avenidas know. There was a survey in the March newsletter about this possible service, but they still want to hear from people who are interested. Phone 327-2811 and ask to talk with the person in charge of the transportation survey.

You can reach Julie Spengler at 493-9151 or Mary Jane Leon at 493-5248.

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