



# BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Doug Moran, BPA President

### Participating in BPA Activities

Thanks to those whose work again made the May Fete such a successful event. More about the volunteers and musicians will appear in the fall newsletter. Over the past few years, the substantial work of putting on this event has been borne by a shrinking number of people, so much so that the event may have to be scaled back. And May Fete is not alone: There are similar serious concerns about dropping below the critical mass of volunteers needed to sustain some other BPA activities.

And this brings me to the topic of this column: the opportunities — and the need — for residents to participate in various BPA activities. The BPA is organized around committees focused on the basic areas. The BPA is a classic bottom-up volunteer organization: its focus and activity is largely driven by what the volunteers are interested in working on. And those volunteers choose to work through the BPA because it offers them leverage to achieve those goals.

Different committees involve different types and levels of participation. For example, for the May Fete, the core group of the committee starts meeting several months before the event to decide on and arrange the events, with more volunteers needed to help during the event, including setting up and tearing down. New things get added to May Fete when there is someone willing to handle arrangements (for example, this year there was an expanded participation by local artists). Conversely, things without support will

disappear from the event.

At the other end of the spectrum is the Traffic Committee, where most issues involve short bursts of activity spread over several years (the gaps result from the City's decision and budget cycle). The full committee may never meet, but instead operate as a collaboration of the members relevant to the issue at hand. Then there are groups like the Seniors Committee that have regular meetings. The Zoning and Land Use (ZALU) Committee deals with development issues and is a mix of periodic, short-term and long-term issues.

As an example of becoming involved, let's say there is a traffic problem on your block. You talk to the chair of the BPA Traffic Committee and help arrange a meeting for the interested neighbors. You and your neighbors define the problem and the priorities. The Traffic chair provides experience from working on related problems to help you shape how the problem and preferred solution will be presented to the City (to enhance the chance of success). You then become the champion for this project and work with the Traffic chair to push it through each step in the City's process: getting the problem recognized, prioritized, funded, planned and finally implemented. When one person had to handle multiple problems, it becomes tedious and frustrating. Spreading this over champions for each individual problem keeps this within bounds. And if none of the people most affected by the problem are willing to step up and help push it, that is a strong indication that the problem lacks support and that other vol-

unteers (such as the Traffic chair in this example) would better direct their energies to issues that do have adequate support from the community.

Most people's involvement with the BPA revolves around a single issue. However, for some, their initial involvement with an issue produces a broader interest in the area, and they quickly become part of the core group of that committee. Because there is typically more potential work than available effort, the BPA has a culture of nurturing and promoting people who have the aptitude and energy in these areas.

Notice that I haven't yet mentioned the BPA Board. The Board is a combination of a coordinating committee and a conventional corporate Board of Directors. The Board collectively embodies substantial experience with the issues affecting the neighborhood: their history, how best to approach them, and potential pitfalls. To

[ CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 ]

### BPA Board Meetings

Board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month (August and December excepted) in the Teachers' Lounge of the Barron Park Elementary School. Meetings begin at 7:15pm and run for 75-100 minutes. If you plan to attend, please contact the BPA President so that arrangements can be made to accommodate you (seating and possibly reordering of the agenda).

Agendas are posted to the BPA-news email list and on the BPA web site (under Calendar).

The membership form can be found at [http://www2.bpaonline.org/membership\\_form.pdf](http://www2.bpaonline.org/membership_form.pdf)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

facilitate interaction with the Board, committees have a Board member as chair (or co-chair). Key factors in the election of Board members are demonstrated contribution and leadership on a topic or issue plus interest in multiple issues. New board members are elected by the current Board, and can be added at any time. The size of the Board is flexible — the current size is the low end of the desired range.

Because Board members arise out of the various committees, they have diverse interests and backgrounds and hence provide a reasonable cross section of the community. This broader view helps the committees identify potentially controversial topics, and directs how they should be approached.

At various times, there have been suggestions that the BPA constitution should be changed to have the Board be elected directly by the full membership. I much prefer the current system for three reasons. First, I think the advocates of broader-based elections misunderstand the Board: Board members have "power" not because they are on the Board: there is no large corps of volunteers to command, and the discretionary budget is miniscule. Instead they are on the Board because of the energy and leadership that they bring to the committees they serve on (typically several) and the experience they have

gained from that involvement. Second, annual elections could result in the Board having vacancies for significant periods, hampering its effectiveness. Finally, I think the current scheme does a better job of selecting good candidates because decisions are made by those in the best position to evaluate the candidates. A relevant example: In the general election, I rarely feel I have the information to make an informed decision on the candidates for county judgeships: I can't distinguish great candidates from adequate ones from ones who were nominated for the wrong reasons (for example, political connections). Such uncertainty about candidates results in lower participation in the election, which in turn makes the results vulnerable to distortion, either by chance or by small voting blocks.

If you are interested enough to have read this far, I would reiterate that it is very easy to become involved in BPA activities, and that the commitment need be neither large nor long. Even small additions to established activities can have substantial impacts and be very rewarding. And if the BPA isn't involved in an activity that you think should be, contact me (or other Board member) to see if we can help you get something organized. To see a summary of the current BPA activities and contacts, go to the "Activities and Committees" web page.

**Become a Member of the Barron Park Association!**

This spring marks the beginning of the annual Barron Park Association membership drive. If you haven't already signed up for this year, you can print a copy of the form from the web site <http://www.cyberstars.com/bpa/bpa-membership-form.html>, complete it, and mail it with your check to the BPA membership chair, Don Anderson, at 4185 Alta Mesa Avenue, Palo Alto 94306.

**Why Become a BPA Member?**

Your annual dues sponsor publication and distribution of the BPA quarterly newsletter, as well as neighborhood events such as the May Fete, Home and Garden Tour, Holiday Parade and Party, and community meetings. The BPA is about building community, and each association membership makes us that much more successful. For a full description of the Barron Park Association, its purpose and activities, see the BPA web site: <http://www.cyberstars.com/bpa/>

**Membership Categories (Amounts are per household)**

- Fellow \$100 ■ Patron \$50 ■ Sponsor \$35 ■ Member \$20 ■ Senior (65+) \$10
- Business \$50

Questions? Contact Don Anderson at (650) 494-8672, [donand@pacbell.net](mailto:donand@pacbell.net)

**BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

\*Doug Moran, President

\*Maryanne Welton, Vice President

\*Christian Kalar, Secretary

\*Ken Tani, Treasurer

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Neighborhood Businesses:

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May Fete: Doug Graham

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Newsletter: Nancy Hamilton

Parks: Doug Graham

School Liaison: Will Beckett, acting

Seniors: Mary Jane Leon

Traffic & Streets: Will Beckett

Zoning & Land Use: Maryanne Welton

BPA meetings are held the 3rd

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

Call Doug Moran for location: 494-6922



## BARRON PARK HISTORY

by Doug Graham, Barron Park Historian

**Barron Park Pioneers**

(PART THREE OF A SIX-PART ARTICLE)

**Juana Briones—  
A Fascinating Character**

Juana Briones was an extraordinary woman of her culture, in the times when she lived. When she purchased Rancho la Purisima Concepcion from its grantee owners in 1844 or 1845 for \$300, she was locally famous in Yerba Buena, the village that was to become San Francisco in 1846. Her personality can be glimpsed in the many comments written about her by visitors to California (neither she nor her children were literate—very few Californios of their generations were). She learned herbal medicine and was regularly sought out to treat the ailments of travelers and neighbors, as there were no doctors or hospitals. She was much sought after as a midwife. She aided runaway sailors who ‘jumped ship’ in Yerba Buena, developing life-long friendships with some.

Juana was born during the last decade of the eighteenth century in Monterey or Carmel, the first European child to be born in that vicinity, according to family tradition. Her family moved to Santa Clara Mission and then to the Presidio of San Francisco. In 1819 or 1820 she married Apolinario Miranda, the Lieutenant of Cavalry at the post. During their stormy 27-year marriage, seven children were born.

**The Second or Third Settler in Yerba Buena**

Juana moved out of Miranda’s house in 1836 or 1837, pioneering a plot of ground in North Beach near the present corner of Powell and Filbert Streets. She did well in farming and ranching, and perhaps did some tailoring, too. She was one of the first settlers outside of the Presidio or the Mission Dolores, and thus qualifies as the one of first residents of the Pueblo of Yerba Buena.

She soon became well-known as ‘the Widow Briones, and was very popular for her aid to the sick and homeless. Thus, when more trouble with her husband arose



**There are no known pictures of Juana Briones; this is an artist's conception, based on a description and a picture of a niece.**

in 1842 and 1843, she prevailed with the Alcalde (Justice of the Peace), and Apolinario was ordered to leave her alone. At one point his property was seized for ‘not living harmoniously with his wife’. In another hearing he was referred to as ‘Senora Briones’ husband’.

Gaiety and hospitality marked Juana’s home. One American Sailor described a party during pre-Lenten Carnival in 1841, when he called upon Juana’s nineteen-year-old daughter Presentacion, a sprightly and pretty girl. They played a game trying to break eggshells filled with confetti or tinsel on each other’s heads, but Presentacion was too skillful and quick for him.

The Briones de Miranda family was still living in Yerba Buena in 1846 when the American flag went up over the Alcaaldia, but soon after that, Juana took the children on horseback and loaded their furniture and possessions on oxcarts for the three-day journey to the rancho.

**The Old Adobe House is Still Standing**

Part of Juana’s adobe ranch house is believed to be incorporated into the present-day ‘Briones Adobe’ on the knoll at 4155 Old Trace Road, just off Arastradero

Road in the Palo Alto Hills. The house, much of which was built in the Twentieth Century, includes a portion built of ‘encajando’ construction, with large redwood corner posts and walls of tamped adobe soil between redwood boards. It was built in 1846 or 1847 and was the main house on the rancho. When it was built, there was no other building in this end of the county except for a few temporary herder’s huts. It is the oldest surviving structure this side of Santa Clara Mission.

Juana lived there, on her hilltop above a spring area (one of the sources of Barron Creek) until 1885 when she moved to a small house at the corner of Washington (now Oregon Expressway) and Birch in Mayfield. The ranch house and 40 surrounding acres were sold in 1900 to Charles Nott, a Stanford botanist, who renovated it, added two wings, and lived there until 1925. The next owners were the Eaton-Cox family, who finished the second floor and modernized. Marjorie Eaton willed the property to her grandniece Susan Bethiaume, who held and protected the property until 1993. Unfortunately, the house, including the packed-adobe portion, was badly damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

Bethiaume sold to the present owner, neurosurgeon Dan Maub, who lived there until moving his family out in October, 1996. Allegedly, during Maub’s occupation, illegal modifications were made to the house, mostly to the 1910-era wings. Since 1988, the property has been covered by the Mills Act, which has preserved the historic building in exchange for a 75% reduction in property taxes. Maub now wants to sell the property and has tried to obtain a demolition permit to facilitate the sale. Palo Alto Stanford Heritage (PAST) and the City’s Historic Resources Board have both been involved in trying to assure continuing preservation of this unique house.

Juana Briones has been honored by the naming of one each of the two parks and schools in the Barron Park neighborhood. Although our land was not part of her rancho, her name is one of the most prominent in our historical heritage.

# 2002 SURVEY RESULTS

By Mary Jane Leon

The neighborhood survey conducted annually by the Barron Park Association was changed in content this year. Because Caltrans has selected Palo Alto for a pilot project on improving El Camino Real, the Board thought it was important to survey the neighborhood specifically on issues related to that project. Focus of survey was anticipating likely topics of the June 1 Workshop on the El Camino Design Study (see article in newsletter),

and the phrasing of questions and responses was shaped by earlier surveys and meetings. The results of the survey, described in this article, were very useful to the Board members who attended the June 1 meeting.

At the date of this writing, we have received 151 surveys, representing 10% of the Barron Park households.

Responses to the individual questions break out as follows:

How frequently do you walk for at least one block along El Camino Real? Only four people said that they walk it every day or almost every day. About 50 each said they walked it between several times a month and never. Comments included "I bike," "for newspaper," and "why?"

What are your reasons for not visiting El Camino locations more often? The overwhelming majority (106) said it was because of lack of useful types of stores, but there was heavy response to all the reasons:

uninviting environment, poor pedestrian access from neighborhood, difficulty parking, easier to drive to other locations. Of the 68 people who said that they feel uncomfortable walking along the street, most picked more than one of the following reasons: traffic noise, closeness of traffic, wind,

dirtiness. Those who checked "Other" gave similar reasons, like safety, ugly, very unattractive, exhaust fumes, broken-down feeling, speed of vehicles, and homeless.

One person commented that he/she visits stores like Block Buster, Hollywood Video, Jamba Juice and Green Mail, but drives to them, and another noted "I do use El Camino locations, but usually in conjunction with other places by car."

How comfortable do you feel crossing El Camino Real as a pedestrian? Fifty said that they feel comfortable and confident crossing El Camino Real. More than 50 said that they find crossing the street somewhat uncomfortable or difficult, or that they avoid crossing the street as a pedestrian because they feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Only three said that they frequently have to cross the street, even though feeling uncomfortable and unsafe.

I feel comfortable letting my children (older than 8) cross El Camino Real by themselves. Yes got 23 responses, and No got 35. Many people wrote in n/a or marked "don't know." One commented "OK at 11 or older," another said "older than 10," and three mentioned that crossing guards make a difference.

Where do you predominately shop for groceries? There were a total of 224 responses

to this question. Many people checked more than one option. The same number, 72, said they shop at mega-store in neighboring community or at a nearby Palo Alto store. The other options were liberally represented: Shop at store that is on my way home from work or other errand, 24; shop at local specialty food store, 15; shop at non-Palo Alto specialty food store, 14; shop periodically at mega-store with many intervening trips to smaller stores, 27.

Have you adapted when you commute/go shopping/run errands to avoid peak traffic times on El Camino? Occasionally, 26; often, 69; traffic not a serious problem, 16; traffic less of problem than rescheduling, 22.

## General Comments

General comments fell into three main categories: traffic, shops, and appearance.

Traffic comments were:

Do not make El Camino Real in Palo Alto as bad as it is in Menlo Park.

Traffic has influenced my travels greatly (this from a senior).

Traffic problems need to be resolved regionally with more mass transit.

No more traffic lights!

I have learned all the ways to avoid El Camino—side streets, or take Alma.

Any improvements to El Camino must not impede traffic. El Camino is our main route to anywhere else.

Crossing El Camino can be problematical in a car because of red-light runners including VTA busses!

Traffic is a problem.

Traffic is lousy!

El Camino SUCKS!!!!!!

Several people took the





# DONKEY NEWS

By Edith Smith

opportunity to comment on other problem streets than El Camino. For example:

We need a grade separation at Alma.

Arastradero is a big problem \_ it should be part of BPA scope. I hear rumors of multi housing for that street—represents more traffic.

El Camino to Whitsell on Barron is getting to be one way, with parking on both sides. We try to avoid by using Matadero.

Speeding on Maybell also during school hours.

**Comments about shopping were:**

Fred’s Deli, Happy donuts, Walgreens are fine.

I miss Service Auto Parts, Future Fantasy. Basically, lack of useful or attractive stores and shops.

El Camino is simply ugly and there are few appealing businesses. We do need a nice grocery store closer / within walking distance, such as the old All American.

We need a grocery market within walking distance. This driving everywhere is for the birds.

Would like to have stores within walking distance to BP to fill basic needs: groceries, environmental cleaners, Post Office.

We need a grocery store. At lease a bakery would help us with shopping and meeting our neighbors in BP.

We still need a grocery store in BP, not just a small store like Driftwood Deli.

Even if there was a store that we would go to, parking is difficult. Too far to walk home, especially with packages. We live almost 1 mile from ECR, deep into Barron Park.

**Comments about appearance were:**

Just cleaning up weeds would help. Driftwood / Creekside landscaping should be the model.

The El Camino Barron Park strip is very unattractive. The city of Palo Alto has abandoned any planning or any interest.

Would like to promote median of trees and plants on El Camino like Mt. View & Menlo Park. Our area of El Camino looks terrible.

More landscaping. Two liquor stores side by side??

Filthy street! Poor maintenance.



**P**erry and Niner, Barron Park’s very special donkeys, continue to greet children and adults alike in newly-renovated Bol Park each Sunday morning (weather permitting) 9:30 to 10:30. The “new” park contains some references to our donkey friends: see if you can find them!

The donkeys look forward to their annual check-up and shots, with their very special vet, Dr. Gary Hanes, who not only takes time to instruct our volunteer donkey handlers, but is very knowledgeable about this species, as he owns a donkey himself!

If you can afford to help support the donkeys, please mail a check to “Palo Alto Donkey Project, Acterra”, 3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, CA 94303. No gift is too small. This non-profit environmental group, formerly called Peninsula Conservation Center Foundation, houses the Sierra Club and other Nature organizations. Acterra pays the donkeys’ bills — for feed, farrier, etc., carries their insurance, as well as an interest-earning endowment fund.



**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!*



# 2002 May Fete, May 5th



**Left: Finding the place.**



**Right: Piping in the maypole.**



**Placing the pole in the ground.**

**Raising it up.**





# in Juana Briones Park



**Gary Breitbard put together an orchestra, composed of his group, Harmon's Peak and Broceliande, for the May Pole Dance.**



**Doug Graham's history display gets a lot of attention.**



**Food service: soft drinks, burritos from Seno Taco, and the PTA bake sale.**





# Art at the May Fete



**Emmy Lou Miller selling her one-of-a-kind handmade quilted vests.**



**A potential buyer views some of the art.**



**Christine Heegaard teaching children how to make mosaics.**



**There is always a long line at the face painting tent.**



# SENIOR UPDATE

By Mary Jane Leon



## Are You Ready for Lunch in the Park?

Coming up, late July, a catered lunch in our new Bol Park. If you would like to attend, and are not already on our calling list, please phone Julie or Mary Jane and get yourselves on the "lunch bunch" list (our phone numbers are at the end of this column).

Our most recent lunch was way back in March, again at Al Fresco. Charles and Romeo have been good to us there, but several people asked if we couldn't branch out a bit to some other local restaurants, so Gee Gee Lenhart and Mary Jane visited a few in May: Dinah's, Hugo's, the Cabana, Driftwood Deli, Compadres. We ruled out the Cabana right away, since they couldn't possibly do anything for less than \$18 a person. (We are trying to keep the cost under \$12, less if possible.) The people at Dinah's were really nice, offering us a deal at \$10 (that includes tax and tip), so we are going (went) there in June. More about that in our next column.

Sorry there is such a lag time in reporting on lunches. This column has to be written four to six weeks before the newsletter comes out, and one of our lunches always seems to happen between writing and reading. Then it is three months until the next newsletter.

But back to restaurants. The maitre de at Hugo's went out of his way to get his price down to \$13. That is a little out of our range, but the private rooms he showed us are lovely. Perhaps for a holiday lunch? We will ask the group when they are together for lunch at Dinah's.

Steve at Driftwood Deli was helpful and accommodating. They will cater our lunch in the park, for about \$7. (Do you ever go

into the Deli? That place smells heavenly!)

Compadres were also friendly and helpful. They can give us that charming patio, at \$10 or under. The question is whether all of us like Mexican food. We'll find out.

## May Fete in Juana Briones Park

The weather was perfect and the crowd large. Many of the neighborhood seniors dropped by our canopy for a chat and a rest in the shade. Thanks to Julie Spengler and Ralph Leon, with some help from Don Anderson, for putting up the canopy and bringing in the chairs. Julie also provides the canopy.

## Our Services for Seniors

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.

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

## BPA BULLETIN BOARD

[www.cyberstars.com/bpa/bulletin-board](http://www.cyberstars.com/bpa/bulletin-board)

We have a Bulletin Board, free to Barron Park residents! This is a community bulletin board and is not to be used as advertising for businesses.

We have a separate listing on the BPA Website for Barron Park businesses: [www.cyberstars.com/bpa](http://www.cyberstars.com/bpa)

Listings will be accepted only via email, as part of your email message (not as attachments) to: [njh@cyberstars.com](mailto:njh@cyberstars.com)

HTML coding will be appreciated, but not necessary. What is necessary, is a date on your ad. Phone numbers and email addresses are OK, and you must include your Barron Park address. **Your address will not be published!**

Ads will be added, and automatically deleted about every two weeks, or whenever we have time to do it. You can resubmit your listing up to three times.

# Gunn Principal Scott Laurence Meets With BP Board

By Don Anderson

Scott Laurence, Principal of Henry M. Gunn High School, met with the Barron Park Board at its May 21 meeting at Barron Park School. Scott is finishing his second year as principal at Gunn, but he is no stranger to Palo Alto. He graduated from Stanford, started full-time teaching at Palo Alto High in 1984, and moved to Gunn as principal at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year.. Scott initiated this meeting with the Board in order to introduce himself, and to listen to any neighborhood concerns about Gunn or Gunn students. Board members mentioned several issues: Cut through traffic commuting to and from Gunn; young people loitering and/or leaving trash in and around Bol Park and at the other entrances to Gunn from Barron Park; dumping by PAUSD on the Strawberry Hill side of the open space area.

Scott told the Board that a community group (GO-FAST - the Gunn Organization for Alternative Safe Transportation) based at Gunn has been formed this year. GO-FAST is a group of Gunn staff, students, parents, neighbors, and city/school officials, dedicated to reducing traffic and enhancing availability, use, and safety of alternative modes of transportation at Gunn. GO-FAST advocated this year successfully for a new free shuttle route to transport Gunn and JLS students safely to the two schools. Other projects have included redesign of the Gunn parking lot to provide for safe bicycle access, instituting a car pool incentive program to reduce the number of cars commuting to Gunn, working with neighbors on Georgia to improve safety and reduce Gunn-generated congestion in their neighborhood, and designing a "car pool central" information clearing house, to be initiated online next fall - making it easier for potential car poolers to Gunn to find each other.

On the subject of Gunn students causing



problems for the neighborhood, Scott mentioned that some neighbors have already adopted the practice of taking photographs of students causing problems. These photos can be forwarded directly to Larry Buck, the Palo Alto Police Department school resource officer, along with a note describing the problem. Larry has been very good at following up on complaints, and photos are a great resource for him in identifying the kids who may be causing problems. Larry can be reached by phone at 329-2637 or by email at larry\_buck@city.palo-alto.ca.us

PAUSD dumping in the open space is a problem that dismayed Scott himself when he first arrived at Gunn. He was under the impression that he had effected a halt to such dumping as of last year, but a tour of the area by Scott and Don Anderson the day after the Board meeting revealed evidence that some dumping is continuing. Scott promised to follow up with PAUSD to stop the dumping, and to ask for removal of the debris already

dumped. Scott also has a long term plan to reclaim some of the area where dumping has occurred in order to create an additional playing field for Gunn. Such a field might intrude 50 feet or so beyond the current bike path into the open space area, but would not extend as far as Strawberry Hill. In any case, action on these plans is unlikely to occur sooner than two or three years out; Scott has pledged to give plenty of notice, and to provide plenty of opportunity for community input, before any plans are finalized.

Scott asked that Barron Park neighbors with issues about Gunn contact Don Anderson, BPA School Liaison, so he can discuss the problems with Scott before they become critical (Don can be reached by phone at 494-5672, or by email at donand@pacbell.net). Scott and the Board agreed that Scott will meet with the Board at least once a year henceforth. Board meeting agendas will have a standing item for updates on any Gunn issues from now on as well.

## ZONING & LAND USE

By Maryanne Welton, Committee Chair

There is little new news on the Zoning and Land Use front this spring with the exception of the Children's International School's proposal for the vacant lot on Clemo between Maybell and Amaranta. They have withdrawn their Conditional Use Permit application from the City and have decided to not purchase the property. At this time, there is no new project proposed for development on the site. I will keep you updated in future issues of the newsletter.



# EL CAMINO REAL DESIGN STUDY WORKSHOP

by Ned Farquhar and Doug Moran

El Camino is typical of what has happened in many cities: With population and traffic growth, thoroughfares turned from main streets into barriers separating sections of cities, in large part because the engineering of those streets focused almost exclusively on moving traffic. An alternative approach has developed, labeled "*Context Sensitive Design*", that has replaced the *one-size-fits-all* design templates used by traffic engineers with flexibility to accommodate local situations and requirements. Successes of this approach in a number of cities across the country led CalTrans (California's Department of Transportation) to explore its use, and Palo Alto won one of the initial grants. However, El Camino's traffic is two-thirds larger than any other street on which this approach has been tried (50,000 vehicles per day vs. 30,000).

City staff and the traffic engineers have been meeting with an Advisory Committee composed of representatives of various civic groups, including neighborhood associations. The first public meeting was held on Saturday June 1 and was advertised as a "workshop" but was more a presentation with Q&A. A second public meeting will be held in September.

The order of the various components of a potential redesign and the amount of time spent on them in the meeting was not representative of their true importance. The basic requirement is that the ability to handle traffic must be maintained or improved (relative to current levels). The Engineering firm hired as consultants has a traffic simulator that they demo'ed. For some of the intersections we are very familiar with, it did an excellent job, and for others, it showed the problems, but understated the severity (for example, on north-bound El Camino at Page Mill, the backup never extended to Olive, much less

past it). The engineers were very interested in this information about the accuracy of their model.

A major concern of the study is making El Camino more *pedestrian-friendly*. One measure would be to make the islands wider, providing *pedestrian refuges*. Another would be to make the sidewalks wider. This could be done by narrowing the traffic lanes—they are wider than current standards call for.

Wider islands and sidewalks provide opportunities for improved landscaping. However, many businesses along El Camino are already largely invisible to passing traffic and improvements to landscaping should not worsen this situation. One of the controversial issues is that some participants see improved aesthetics as a top-level goal of the study, others (such as us) see it as a method for implementing other goals (and hence subordinate to those goals).

A major goal of the BPA and other neighborhood associations on the Advisory Group is to make El Camino a much more conducive environment for neighborhood-serving businesses, but currently this is only implicit in one of the Study's original objectives. However, one side-effect of this Study has been to heighten City staff's

awareness of the problems faced by these businesses.

Some of the designs under consideration would narrow El Camino from 6 lanes to 4 in various stretches. The traffic simulations show that this should be possible with better management of traffic flows (intelligent control of traffic lights). However, this has been met with a lot healthy skepticism from both residents and City staff (as have several other parts of the proposals). Multiple groups, including the BPA, are advocating an incremental, *show-me/try-before-you-buy* approach: for example, implement the improvements for traffic flow and use the resulting observations and data to determine whether lane reductions are feasible.

Bike lanes and mass transit are areas of contention. Most of the current designs provide for bike lanes, but there are questions about whether it would be better to encourage bicyclists to use the parallel bikeways (Park Blvd in this area). Light rail is provided for in one of the designs, but light rail is well over 10 years away (if then) and many argue that the CalTrain corridor is the proper location for non-local services (beyond express buses).

The City is hoping to put a wealth of background information on the Web in a month or so. At that time, we will provide a more extensive summary and a critique on the BPA-News@bpaonline.org e-mail list.

Although some of the ideas coming from this study will not be implemented for years, one of the study's goals is to identify improvements that can be implemented economically in the short-term. Remember, the City is likely to prioritize items that have the most visible support from residents, so it is important to respond when the City asks for public participation.





BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION  
NEWSLETTER

Barron Park Association  
696 Barron Avenue  
Palo Alto, California 94306

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- outdoor seating -  
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