



Rising together to make things happen....

North Hills Phoenix Association

NEWS

Vol. 9 No. 2 July 2000

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NHPA President Glenn Hammonds

I'd like to thank all the NHPA members who have responded to our efforts to bring unsatisfactory neighborhood conditions to the attention of our city representative with suggestions and problem reports. You all should know that when we bring problems to the attention of the right people, things happen. A case in point is the property on Buckingham drive which has been subject to sliding to an extent that soil was piling up on the street, and a lamp post was threatened. After bringing this to the attention of Bielle Moore, assistant to our City Council representative Jane Brunner, we heard back that the street had been cleared, and the property owners notified. Geotechnical engineers have been retained by the property owners. Only a little later I learned from nearby neighbors that the property was sliding into the road again (and this is hardly the rainy season!). Again, Jane Brunner's office was responsive and again the road will be cleared. It will take persistence and patience to make progress on the many issues like this in the North Hills, but we remain committed to that end. Please keep sending in reports on problems in your area. Send information by E-mail to info@nhphoenix.org or by regular mail to NHPA, P.O. Box 20784, Oakland CA, 94620.

Jane Brunner's office has informed us that Fire Station #7 will be staffed year around permanently.

– Glenn Hammonds
President, NHPA

Erosion Control

I am a research geomorphologist at UCB and after reading the Blight Report in the last NHPA newsletter I volunteered to write an article about erosion control. In the mean time, issues regarding development and its potential effects on the Vicente Creek watershed suggest I look at the bigger picture. All of these problems are directly related to what we do as individual property owners and, in many respects, the issues are inter-related, so bear with me.

As homeowners our primary concern tends to be fire safety. The Oakland Firestorm has reinforced the need for maintaining a fire safe environment within our urban-wildland neighborhoods. For many the fire has provided the additional benefit of greatly enhancing the views from our hill homes and homeowners are now more demanding in having those views maintained. Maintaining views combined with increased urbanization has resulted in the removal and thinning of trees on a scale not seen anywhere else in the Bay Area. As homeowners many of us see this as a positive step in the direction of creating a fire-safe environment while enhancing property values. However, many of us may not have anticipated the cumulative effects of tree removal and the potential for increasing erosion due to landsliding and the higher flows expected from the continued urbanization of our watersheds.

Following the 1991 fire one very obvious landscape feature was the great number of landslide scars seen on newly exposed hillslopes. Formerly hidden by vegetation, these scars provided testimony of a time when the hills were used as ranch lands and were more sparsely vegetated. Vegetation (primarily trees and shrubs rather than grasses) plays a major role in mitigating the potential for landslides as roots bind the soil and plants use soil water.

Simplistically, landslides occur when the forces of

Erosion Control – Fred Booker

friction (the weight of soil against bedrock) and cohesion (roots anchoring the soil to the hillslope) are exceeded by the force of gravity (stuff wants to move downhill) and the loss of cohesion as soils become saturated from winter rains (water particles force formerly locked soil particles apart). As slopes become steeper, less water is needed to initiate failure. Several styles of landsliding can occur here in the hills: deep-seated, cohesive blocks, moving slowly downhill such as the Drury Road slide (for which there is no mitigation short of an engineering solution); or shallow earth flows such as the slowly moving semi-solid mass of soil and water on lower Buckingham or as a quickly moving liquid mass of soil and water known as a mud or debris flow which can have devastating consequences for those caught in its path. An example of the latter would be the landslide that occurred near Grizzly Peak and Marlborough in the winter of '92-'93 which traveled all the way down to the intersection of Buckingham and Tunnel Road, taking everything in its path. A more recent example of a mud flow was the landslide caused by a leaking water pipe on Besito Avenue this spring. This last failure illustrates a problem that some of us are possibly not aware of; there can be severe downhill consequences to introducing a lot of water from an uphill source such as runoff from our properties. In my walks throughout the fire area I have noticed that many homeowners pipe their runoff to their property line. In one case a pipe ended on a steep hillslope where there already existed a small failure. This failure increased in size with the addition of this urban runoff water until the homeowner moved his pipe to another location on the lot. In another case, poorly managed runoff from an abandoned dirt road caused the failure of the road fill resulting in a flow of mud down Norfolk Rd. Other dirt roads which failed this past winter are located at the end of Perth Place in Vicente Canyon, above the Caldecott Tunnel, and one just south of the Caldecott Tunnel (covered by a blue tarp). Yet, in another case several homeowners have piped their runoff to the inboard edge of the abandoned portion of Dartmouth Drive below their homes. This road has partially failed in the past and the increased runoff and poor drainage will most likely lead to further saturation and failure at some point in the future which in time could propagate uphill towards their homes.

As we can see, runoff can effect slope stability if it is piped or directed to an inappropriate location on the

hillside. Perhaps less obvious are the effects to our creeks of increasing runoff through vegetation removal and urbanization. Vegetation helps to reduce high flows in our creeks by intercepting and storing rainfall and by providing pathways (via roots) for water to percolate deep into bedrock for its eventual slow release into the channel. Urbanization increases runoff by introducing a lot of water to the system in a short period of time. As in the case of Vicente Canyon the creek system might not be prepared to pass the increased flows due to urbanization of the upper watershed without an increase in downstream erosion. Hypothetically, faced with the potential for increased erosion the creek side homeowner's first impulse is to protect his or her property. However, the simple act of protecting one homeowner's property along an eroding creek bank can mean increased erosion for downstream property owners because as we change the way water flows in the channel so do we change the distribution of forces acting on the channel banks. So, please take heed, every project that directly involves the channel should be preceded by thought and done with care.

It is obvious that the relationship between slope, vegetation, and water is a critical one and needs to be properly managed. As homeowners, what can we do to make our neighborhood a safer one? On one hand, too much vegetation can be a fire hazard, yet on the other hand removing too much vegetation and mis-managing the runoff from our properties increases the potential for erosion. As property owners we owe it to our neighbors to manage our land in a safe and prudent fashion and as neighbors we should cooperate with each other whenever possible. If at all possible property owners should pipe their runoff to a channel or a paved road that provides drainage to the storm drain system. New multi-home developments (particularly where no homes previously existed) should consider constructing retention basins to release urban runoff at a slower rate than direct piping to the channel. On the other hand, the City should pay particular attention to emptying the sediment storage basins that were built to accommodate the expected increase in post-fire erosion (the basin at Grand View & Gravatt has been full since a landslide occurred below Devon a couple of years ago). I would think that with a little bit of common sense and cooperation we as a community can go a long way towards making our hillside neighborhoods safer.

Potluck Block Party Review

Perhaps you saw the flyer or the signs publicizing this event. Upwards of 150 neighbors made a dish and came out to spend the afternoon of June 25, pronouncing the event a success. We all agreed it was a misnomer and will call it the “Potluck Hill Party” in the future.

We want to thank all those who contributed their time and efforts, especially: Holly & Ronnie Rogers, Cassie & Steve, Elise & Andrew Olding, Dennis Hayes, Jeff Moraes, Theresa Havton, Jennifer Dorman, our firemen, and the many others whom I may have missed but gave their support in many ways.

The firemen from our fire station #7 (at Amito and Gravatt) came (some) on their days off! They also brought one of the fire trucks and parked it near the barbecue where they took digital pictures of the neighbors in front of the truck. Inside of 3 hours the firemen brought the color pictures back with peoples’ names and the date printed on the picture! The kids young and old were invited to get in the truck for an experience of a lifetime.

We also awarded prizes for the best dishes. I got to be one of the judges and, boy, was it tough making the decisions. Finally we awarded the Chef’s Hat to the brownies with Ghirardelli chocolate morsels. The Barbeque Mitts went to the firemen for the best tossed green salad with a charming raspberry vinaigrette. The Apron went to the blueberry cobbler that was absolutely to die for!! The Grand Prize was dinner for two at Jordan’s in the Claremont Resort & Spa (a five star restaurant) which went to the spinach lasagna with incredible cheeses. Another neighbor, Dennis Hayes, who owns Ten Speed Press, (a publishing company) donated 60-70 cookbooks which we gave away to neighbors who had volunteered their time and resources. These weren’t just any cookbooks either, titles included southwestern cooking from the Coyote Cafe to Julia Child, and ranged from Margaritas to Muffins.

The basics were provided including outdoor speakers playing easy going jazz, tables and chairs. One neighbor barbecued 60 pounds of ribs. Another neighbor painted two Welcome signs that were 4’ x 12’. Other donated items included: name badges, 10 gallons of water, all the plates, utensils, cups & ice. Tables & ice chests were on-site for all to use including a huge hot barbeque grill and Chef Chuck to grill for you if you chose.

What created the relaxed Sunday afternoon mood was a combination of the fact that so many people helped and we kept in mind that whatever we did was good enough, no pressure. Our lives are all so busy it’s nice to just slow down and visit with good neighbors over good food and drinks. The tempo was as easy as the soft jazz in the warm 72 degree afternoon air. The slightest breeze came up at the 8:00PM hour signaling the conclusion of an event we will all savor. Next time you drive down the street you may just recognize the neighbors a little

better. Thank you to all of you for making this a memorable event. If you are interested in being involved next year call 510-665-3131 or write me at 317 Gravatt, Berkeley, CA 94705.

– Cathy Van Sickle

Storm Drain Wrap-up

We have learned that overdoing vegetation management can result in equally disastrous erosion and landslide vulnerability. We currently see many new homes being built as well, which will increase the amount of run-off and change flow patterns. The ability of our cities to help manage storm runoff under these conditions is of especially vital concern. Failure of city systems to handle runoff once it leaves private property can result in great damage to homes and roadways, and polluting our creeks and the Bay.

The Oakland Storm Drain Task Force worked for two years and presented a program (including a strategy to address Oakland’s drainage needs, and a proposed service fee to finance it) to the City Council. The Council accepted the report, and following the dictates of Prop. 218, submitted the program to a ‘majority protest’ procedure. At the Public Hearing held to consider adoption of the program, much opposition was manifested to both the fee structure proposed, and to the ‘majority protest’ process, which was further compromised by the absence of return envelopes. None of the criticism was directed at the program of repairs, however, and numerous speakers underlined the need to repair the system and clean up Oakland’s runoff.

The Council decided that it would find money in the General Fund to finance the development of a master plan for drainage, which was a priority of the Task Force report. They further decided that financing of new equipment, and dedication of a revenue stream for maintenance were also appropriately financed from the General Fund. Public Works and CEDA staff were asked to study possible sources of revenue to help pay for drainage needs. After hearing about those possibilities, the Council will look to consider various strategies to finance the \$40+ million in needed improvements, and perhaps further expenses determined by the new master plan.

What is most important from our point of view is that the City Council has recognized that storm drainage is an important City responsibility, and that after decades of neglect, we are finally going to do something about the badly deteriorated system. We can help our neighborhood avoid washed out roads, landslides and endangered homes by supporting the City Council’s resolution to use our tax dollars for these essential needs. We must also make sure that the recommendations of the Task Force to spend money to keep our creeks healthy and to make sure Oakland’s storm water discharge meets Federal Clean Water standards (and thereby keep San Francisco Bay healthy) are not forgotten.

- David Kessler
(member, Storm Drain Task Force)

Sadly, We Say Goodbye to Dear Friends

This message is a tribute and expression of our gratitude to Betty and Milton Soldz, two of our most valuable and cherished members of the North Hills Phoenix Association, who have decided to move back east to be closer to their children and grandchildren.

Betty and Milton have served as more than community leaders over the years. Since the Oakland firestorm of 1991, they have often been our conscience, offering the voice of rectitude and decency, during times of despair and confusion, confrontation and growth. For many of us in the NHPA, our relationship with Betty and Milton began following the firestorm of '91 when we were seeking leadership and direction. They provided us a vision of the future — their passion and conviction inspired us to look ahead with optimism, and believe that we could rebuild a community that was better and stronger than before.

Betty and Milton served on numerous committees, led the charge on many other initiatives, and were early members of and the primary hosts for the NHPA Steering Committee meetings over many years. Betty also served for two years as the NHPA Co-President, raising awareness levels and championing our issues and needs to the greater community and the Oakland City Council.

Throughout, Betty and Milton rebuilt their own lives as well, pursuing areas of personal interest and growth. It is this next chapter of their lives that brings them out of our community and closer to their families. And so, with our deepest appreciation for their leadership, service and friendship, we on the NHPA Steering Committee say good-bye, and extend our best wishes for continued peace and success.

– Linda Strovink

And Welcome New Ones

Much of what we all move to “The Hills” for is the peace and quiet we find here. However along with the peace and quiet can come virtual isolation from neighbors. Most of us have realized that in order to get to know neighbors we have to make forming our community a priority. The purpose of this column is to spotlight and warmly welcome new neighbors.

In this first column I want to introduce you to Mark Lemley and Rose Hagan, my new neighbors at 484 Gravatt. Mark grew up in St. Louis while Rose's roots are further east in Philadelphia and Connecticut. They both attended Stanford at the same time and after Stanford they both chose to study law. Rose went to Harvard, while Mark went to Berkeley. After graduation, as the fates have it, they finally met – as new employees of the same Palo Alto law firm on the first day of work at the welcoming luncheon. Rose was practicing trademark law while Mark's interest was in Internet law. After marriage and a few years in Palo Alto, Mark changed his focus to the academic world, and began teaching Business Law at the University of Texas at Austin. Rose in the meantime easily changed positions and moved with Mark. While both loved Austin, the Bay Area still called. In the spring when Mark was offered the position at UC Berkeley they began house hunting. In August at their

realtor's call, “I've found the perfect house for you but you have to come tomorrow”, Mark left Rose and his visiting in-laws behind for a very quick trip. He met the realtor, agreed the house was just what they had been hoping for, made an offer and flew back the same day. The offer was accepted before he arrived home and Rose had the message, “we own a house.” A house Rose had never seen but she she knew that Mark could be trusted to buy a house they would both like. They moved in December and are ecstatic with their home.

Given that there are many beautiful places to live in the Bay Area I asked why they chose to locate here on the Hill. Readily, Rose and Mark said it was because it is “architecturally interesting”, has a more urban feel, even the shopping feels international. These are all particularly important attributes to Mark and Rose since Rose's hobby is drawing with pastels and Mark's is cooking, specializing in Italian and French cuisine.

I enjoyed the opportunity to get to know Mark and Rose just a little better. If you would like to be our next featured new neighbor, please call me at 510-841-2389.

– Anne Seasons

Skyline Swale Project

Many area residents have seen the immense earthworks underway just south of the intersection of Tunnel Road and Skyline Blvd. Here is an update on these two projects. The project above Skyline is being conducted by Fakir Popal and Mahmood Karzi. The Skyline and Grizzly Peak Blvd Associations have worked extensively with these developers, attempting to bring their project in line with local zoning ordinances. However, we have discovered a curious inability to communicate, however. The gap between us began when Karzi/Popal made a series of illegal cuts and grades and expanded when they began insisting that three equals seven. The developers insist on a right to build seven houses in an area unambiguously zoned for three, as that will afford them greater profits. Despite intense efforts, they have been unable to concede that their profits are not the neighborhoods' primary interest. Most recently, Dr. Bermak and I had a lengthy discussion with Mr. Karzi, during which he promised to revert to a 3 house project. However, they then presented a seven house appeal and proposal to the Planning Commission.

This appeal was rejected by the Planning Commission on July 5th, in a meeting well attended by many neighbors. Our position was strongly supported by the Planning Staff and the City Attorney's office. At this time the project cannot legally proceed, and the developers have been issued a cleanup order by the City. Whether they will comply or not remains to be seen.

Skyline Estates Joint Ventures/Latin Development Co

This project is on the downslope side of Skyline (i.e. the West side) and has been hampered by problems of scale and the State Water Resources Board. The project, originally approved in the early '90s, called for 8 homes. Reviewed at the time, their scale and fit with the neighborhood seemed to be excellent. So far the developer has been diligent about building within envelopes and careful in the building of their road. However, the massive scale of the required road building project has caused the developers to seek an expansion of the development in order to recover their costs. While we are sympathetic to their plight, they are seeking to dramatically expand the project beyond the reasonable carrying capacity of the area.

Just as significantly, the developers accidentally buried a seasonal creek last year. This resulted in a "stop work order" from the State and some education for City Staff. At this time, the developers are considering their options as to how to accommodate the creek and their needs to make the project cost effective.

- Steve Renten

NOHASP Wins This One

The Skyline/Grizzly Peak property where a proposed 7 homes were planned for by developers, went before the Planning Commission on July 5. (For detailed information on this project see Miles Englehart's article in the NHPA News dated April, 2000.)

The developers needed to have NOHASP (North Oakland Hills Area Specific Plan) amended to allow them to build 7 houses rather than the NOHASP mandated 3. Neighbors and surrounding homeowners' association members rallied by writing to the Planning Department and/or attending Planning Commission meeting of July 5 to speak against the amendment. Reason: hill is too steep off of Grizzly and has been a slide area in the past. It was felt by the neighbors that these novice developers should be limited to building three substantial houses with all the open space protections afforded under the 1986 NOHASP ruling.

(Watch this publication for a detailed article on the benefits of NOHASP)

The Planning Commission did not know of the existence of the NOHASP law, but they were enlightened by Willie Yee, Zoning Administrator, and the representative from the City Attorney's office. Appeal by the developers was denied. It was suggested by the Commission Chairman that an engineering report be prepared showing the feasibility of amending NOHASP and building 7 houses. It was further recommended that the developers have the legal right to go before City Council and ask for an amendment to NOHASP.

One positive outcome of the meeting was that the developers in the meantime have to restore the hillside.

More to come...

- Dolores Bermak

Oakland City Council E-Mail Addresses and Telephone Numbers

City Manager Robert Bobb:

rbobb@oaklandnet.com, 510- 238-3301

City Council Members: (area code 510)

Nate Miley: namiley@oaklandnet.com, 238-7006

Henry Chang: chang@oaklandnet.com, 238-7008

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Larry Reid: lreid@oaklandnet.com, 238-7007

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Jane Brunner: jbrunner@oaklandnet.com, 238-7001

Ignacio de la Fuente: idelafuente@oaklandnet.com,

District One Meetings

Councilmember Jane Brunner holds meetings on the first Saturday of every month to discuss issues relevant to District One. Everyone is welcome.

10 AM until noon
Peralta Elementary School
460 - 63rd St., Oakland

For more information call District One offices:
510-238-7001
NHPA web site - <http://www.nhphoenix.org>

COMMUNICATING WITH THE NHPA

The NHPA is a community-based organization. We like and need to hear from you. There are several ways to contact us. Call the hotline to leave messages and receive recorded information. (510) 273-9111.

E-Mail: Use **info@nhphoenix.org** if you have questions, ideas, suggestions etc. For membership inquiries use **membership@nhphoenix.org**. To contact the newsletter use **newsletter@nhphoenix.org**. The newsletter is always looking for article suggestions and for writers.

<http://www.nhphoenix.org>, our web page, is our newest communication tool. This is a great source for information about the NHPA, activities and links to other sites of interest to Oakland residents.

Postal address is NHPA P.O. Box 20784, Oakland, CA 94620

Dues: Dues for the NHPA are \$35.00 per calendar year. Enclosed in this newsletter is an envelope to help make this an easy process. Since we are a lobbying organization the dues are not tax deductible. We thank you for your support.

Yes! I want to join/renew with the North Hills Phoenix Association. I have enclosed my annual membership fee of \$35 payable to the North Hills Phoenix Association. New _____ Renew _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone –Home _____ Office _____

Fax: _____ E-Mail _____

North Hills Phoenix Association, P.O. Box 20784, Oakland CA 94620

Phone: 510-273-9111

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NHPA Newsletter editors – Marc and Vallery Feldman

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Calling all aspiring writers! The next newsletter is scheduled for October of this year. It is also the ninth anniversary of the fire. I invite anyone to submit articles dealing with items concerning the fire area. These can be serious, such as problems with development, or light, see Pot Luck article this issue. I would also like articles from new neighbors, people who have moved in since the fire, describing the issues they think NHPA should be concerned with. Please send articles to vallerose@aol.com, membership@phoenix.org or by mail to Vallery Feldman at 11 Strathmoor Dr. Berkeley, CA 94705.