



# MISSION CANYON ASSOCIATION

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

www.missioncanyon.org

Summer 2007



## An Open Letter

To Edward L. Schneider, president and CEO of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden

Dear Dr. Schneider:

*In March of this year, per my letter, I asked you to stop characterizing the Mission Canyon Association Board of Directors as having endorsed the "Santa Barbara Botanic Garden's Vital Mission Plan."*

*Contrary to your subsequent statements regarding our endorsement, the MCA Board will not take a position on the proposed expansion until after careful study of the Environmental Impact Report.*

*Fortunately, the long-awaited EIR was distributed on July 5. The Mission Canyon Association looks forward to an open discussion of the ramifications of the Garden's proposed development.*

Sincerely,

Tim Steele, President  
Mission Canyon Association

## Mission Canyon Association Officers & Directors

**Tim Steele;** President; Land Use, ABR, Fire Service Grant, Fire/Water; 687-3378 (H), 965-3888 (O), 965-3385 (fax); [tmsteale@101freeway.com](mailto:tmsteale@101freeway.com)

**Ralph Daniel;** Vice President; Evacuation Routes, Insurance\*, FS Grant, Traffic & Parking, F/W; 682-2889; [rdaniel@fambus.com](mailto:rdaniel@fambus.com)

**Bill McCullough;** Treasurer; Membership; 563-4363; [billmccsb@cox.net](mailto:billmccsb@cox.net)

**Ann M. Marshall;** Secretary; 563-9356; [annmarshall@cox.net](mailto:annmarshall@cox.net)

**Dick Axilrod;** T&P\*; 687-5296; [sbbaldy@aol.com](mailto:sbbaldy@aol.com)

**Nancy Bertelsen;** ABR; 687-5746

**Jenny Cushnie;** Land Use, Fire\*, Bylaws, Membership, FS Grant\*, F/W; 682-7038 (H), 569-6990 (fax); [dallen4191@aol.com](mailto:dallen4191@aol.com)

**Laurie Guitteau;** Membership, Newsletter; 682-4474; [guitteau@cox.net](mailto:guitteau@cox.net)

**Tom Jacobs;** ABR\*, Land Use; 898-8804; [tomejd@cox.net](mailto:tomejd@cox.net)

**Kathy Koury;** Land Use\*, Bylaws, FS Grant; 569-3873 (H), 563-1103 (O); [ccp@sbceo.org](mailto:ccp@sbceo.org)

**Milt Roselinsky;** Land Use, F/W; 563-9212; [Milt.Roselinsky@cox.net](mailto:Milt.Roselinsky@cox.net)

**Ginger Sledge;** Land Use, F/W; 898-8650; [glillybell@aol.com](mailto:glillybell@aol.com)

**Ray Smith;** Land Use, F/W\*; 682-5583 (H), 893-4709 (O); [ray@icess.ucsb.edu](mailto:ray@icess.ucsb.edu)

**Dorothy Veal;** Bylaws\*, History, T&P; 682-4654

**Jean Yamamura;** Newsletter\*, F/W; 687-3371; [marzm11@cox.net](mailto:marzm11@cox.net)

\*Chair of committee

The MCA Newsletter was prepared with the help of Randy Reetz and Ray Smith, writers; Lee Anne Dollison, graphics production and photography; and David Neels, map creation.

## Fire Focus on Mission Canyon Heights

By Laurie Guitteau

A fire too close for comfort in June. Less than three inches of rain in Los Angeles. Less than half our normal rainfall in Santa Barbara. Vegetation that has not burned since 1964. Insurance companies refusing to write fire insurance. Worrisome? You bet!

This year extreme fire danger threatens much of the nation. California expects the worst. During major fire emergencies, fire departments cooperate across the state, borrowing personnel and equipment from each other, but multiple fires quickly deplete resources. Because Santa Barbara is isolated and has limited resources, the reality is that you must be prepared to depend on yourself and your neighbors in the event of a disaster. It is imperative in this year of extreme danger that each resident of Mission Canyon accept personal responsibility for fire safety and prevention.

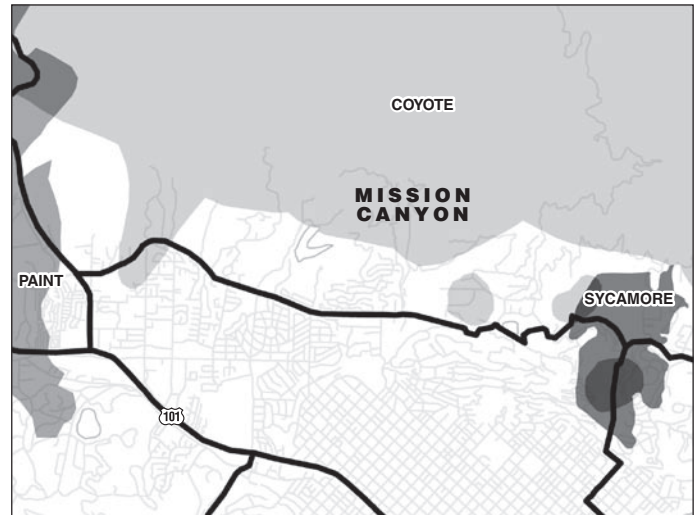
We spoke at length with David Neels, a captain with County Fire Vegetation Management about the dangers facing Mission Canyon Heights. His advice to residents was practical and on point.

What can you do?

1) BE PROACTIVE.

2) CREATE DEFENSIBLE SPACE WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS. Many property owners in Mission Canyon Heights, especially in densely populated Mission Canyon Heights, must work with their neighbors in order to comply with the 100-foot defensible space mandate. Remember that the 100 feet of cleared space is standard for flat ground. The steep slopes of Mission Canyon require even more diligence.

Meet with each neighbor whose property abuts yours to discuss what needs to be cleared or moved, which trees should be trimmed or replaced. MCA may be able



This map shows the historic footprint of fire in Mission Canyon since 1912. SOURCE: Santa Barbara County Fire Department

to help with tree removals on Cheltenham, Mission Canyon, and Tunnel roads. Call Jenny Cushnie at 682-7038. Check for piles of firewood, stacked lumber, patio furniture, and other items near your house that could ignite. Santa Barbara County Fire Department will be very aggressive this year in enforcing the defensible space principle and in issuing citations to those who do not comply. If your neighbor refuses to cooperate, call the Fire Department. It won't help during a fire if your property is clear but your neighbor's eucalyptus is hanging right over your roof!

3) CREATE A NEIGHBORHOOD FIRE SAFETY GROUP. Contact your neighbors to arrange a time when firefighters from Station 15 can come and help you decide what more you can do for protection. Make sure you have the names and phone numbers of your neighbors in case a fire starts near you. Yes, we have Reverse 911 here in Santa Barbara County, but we know from the two fire evacuation drills that the system can experience glitches.

Be prepared to take action immediately if you see a fire. Together make plans for evacuation in case of emergency. Decide

Fire Focus (cont. p.2)

## Fire Focus (cont. from p.1)

how you as a neighborhood will handle Red Flag Alert conditions.

Laurie Guitteau has volunteered to help organize and facilitate these groups. Call her at 682-4474 or email at [guitteau@cox.net](mailto:guitteau@cox.net).

4) **THINK EMBERS.** During a fire, embers travel with the wind, creating even more fires. All trees burn, even oaks, but the leaves and needles of pine, eucalyptus, and juniper capture the embers and facilitate rapid burning. Dead leaves and other debris under trees or near structures ignite quickly. As do the cushion on the chair on your deck and the canvas awning over your patio. Stacked firewood? An inferno within minutes. Look around your house and garden and remove anything that is susceptible to an ember. Usually, it is an errant ember that ignites homes lost during wildfires.

5) **PLAN.** Do you have young children or invalids in your home? What will happen if you are away when the fire starts? Do they know what to do? Have you designated a neighbor to evacuate them if you are not there? Consider moving vulnerable people out during Red Flag Alerts.

Know your evacuation routes; discuss them with all household members. Remember that during an actual fire, you might be finding your way in dense smoke. Have a primary and secondary route, if possible. Designate a safe place to go in case you are trapped and cannot exit.

Homeowners who live on intersections of major evacuation routes, especially where Foothill Road meets Tye, Cheltenham, and Glen Albyn, can help all of us by clearing the vegetation well back from the road so that people can exit these intersections safely. Each day there are near misses at these intersections because drivers cannot see without pulling onto Foothill. Can you imagine the problems during an actual emergency?

Keep roads clear of obstruction. During Red Flag conditions, the Fire Department recommends that you do not park on any of our narrow roads, even if you can do so legally. Make sure emergency vehicles can quickly move up and down your road at all times.

If a fire does start, leave immediately.

6) **DO NOT TRY TO ENTER THE AREA.** This will be the hardest thing for any of us to do if a fire starts and we are not home; but Capt. Neels says the Fire Department cannot stress this enough. Exit routes in our canyon are already dangerously narrow. Imagine people leaving at the same time emergency vehicles are entering.

Add incoming traffic to that, and you can see how it would create huge bottlenecks. Many of the 25 people who died in the Oakland fire died because traffic stopped and they were trapped. Plan ahead so that nothing left at home is worth risking yours or others' lives.

Accept the fact that we live with the possibility of wildfire. Use the many resources available from the Santa Barbara County Fire Department and the Mission Canyon Association to educate yourself and your family about fire safety and fire resistant plants. Attend fire safety workshops (One is

planned for September 12 at 7 p.m. at the Natural History Museum). Assume personal responsibility for fire safety in your home and in your neighborhood. Not tomorrow or next week. Now! Yes, we have emergency personnel and a dedicated Fire Department, but each of us must be ready to help them protect our homes, our families, and our neighbors by being prepared and by being proactive.

Go to [missioncanyon.org](http://missioncanyon.org) or [sbcfire.com](http://sbcfire.com) for additional fire safety information, or call Fire Station 15 at 681-5515 (for non-emergency questions).

## Too Many Cars, Too Little Space

By Laurie Guitteau

The San Francisco Chronicle quoted an evacuee of the Oakland Hills fire who said, "This is not a place designed to get out of." Mission Canyon and especially Mission Canyon Heights are not places designed to get out of either, especially in a hurry. With street widths as narrow as 18 feet and cars parked on both sides of these winding roads, the potential for a deadly bottleneck during a fire spurred the Board of Supervisors in June to direct Public Works, law enforcement, and the Fire Department to examine the parking situation and devise a solution. First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal said that he did not want to be responsible for the loss of life that would inevitably occur if something were not done to clear these roads, especially during times of extreme fire danger.

MCA boardmember Dick Axilrod and his Traffic & Parking Committee have been besieged by complaints. As the price of homes has risen, the number of people living in them has increased, resulting in many more cars than parking spaces. Anyone who drives or walks the streets of

Mission Canyon Heights can give numerous examples of parked cars blocking the roads.

Our Traffic & Parking Committee is developing a survey to get your opinion on specific problem areas and possible solutions. Meanwhile, if you have a particularly dangerous situation in your neighborhood, document the information and send it to Axilrod at [sbbaldy@aol.com](mailto:sbbaldy@aol.com).

Safety is your responsibility, not just the county's, the Fire Department's, or the CHP's. Be sure that when you or your guests park, there is ample room (at least 16 feet) for a fire truck to drive up your street. If you see cars illegally parked, notify the CHP immediately at 967-1234 (or 477-4174 outside regular business hours). Remember to use a land-line, not cell, telephone during the weekends to get through quickly. If the CHP doesn't respond, please let Dick Axilrod know so we can document our needs.

If your neighbor obstructs the road, talk with him or her about it. Better yet, get a group of your neighbors together to discuss how best to keep your road open. It could well be a matter of life or death.



Parking congestion on Montrose Place during a Red Flag Fire Alert that saw the Rancho Fire begin.  
PHOTO: Lee Anne Dollison

## Red Flag Fire Alerts

The end of June brought billowing smoke over the canyon as firefighters fought a blaze on Paradise Road. A Red Flag Fire Alert was in effect that weekend. An Alert means intense winds and high temperatures are expected, but it can also mean that fire personnel have been pulled out of our area to fight a major fire elsewhere.

To receive notice of Red Flag Alerts by email, go to [sbcrfzone1-subscribe@googlegroups.com](mailto:sbcrfzone1-subscribe@googlegroups.com) to sign up. *SBCFire.com* features updates during fires and links to the state incident status site [incweb.org/state/5/](http://incweb.org/state/5/). When the Rancho Fire started, the U.S. Forest Service said emergency numbers were inundated with public calls making it nearly impossible to get information out to media sources and each other. Should an emergency evacuation be necessary for Mission Canyon, sheriff's deputies with bullhorns will be on every street and Reverse 911 will call all residents, County Fire said.

Fold-over signs at canyon intersections will announce Red Flag Alert periods and state that all parking restrictions will be strictly enforced. Should a fire evacuation begin, the roads must be clear of parked cars so that emergency equipment can rush in and imperiled residents can rush out.

All major fires in our area have occurred during Red Flag conditions. All residents should be prepared for an extremely dry and dangerous year. The Forest Service advises you decide for yourself when to leave the canyon, as information services are slow to gear up and likely to be jammed.

## Design Guidelines Drafted

For the first time, Mission Canyon residents have a direct role in shaping the future of development in our community. Workshop participants and MCPAC meeting attendees will find recommendations made at those meetings in the draft Residential Design Guidelines, released May 23. (Link to the 88-page document at [missioncanyon.org](http://missioncanyon.org).)

For anyone interested in Mission Canyon's watershed, flammable or invasive plants, second-story rooflines, or fences and walls, just to name a few of the topics in the Guidelines, the draft is a real page-turner with short discussions of desirable and undesirable elements of these design issues.

The draft will now wend its way through various levels of local government, beginning with the South County Board of Architectural Review. Then county staff and the Mission Canyon Planning Advisory Committee

(MCPAC) turn their attention to the Specific Plan. Many changes to the documents will undoubtedly occur during the lengthy review processes involved, and public input is encouraged at every stage. Derek Johnson, who leads the Specific Plan process for the county, urges residents to write in with comments ([djohnson@co.santa-barbara.ca.us](mailto:djohnson@co.santa-barbara.ca.us) or 30 E. Figueroa St., S.B., 93101) if they aren't able to attend the MCPAC meetings. It may be another 20 years before residents have this chance again. (See the Calendar on page 4 for meeting information.)

## Friends in the Canyon

Environmental attorney Marc Chytilo appeared at MCA's Annual Meeting in April on behalf of a new advocacy group, Friends of Mission Canyon. Comprised of canyon residents and visitors, FOMC is committed to protecting the area's nature, ambiance, and safety. Its largest concern now is the Botanic Garden's 10-year development project.

Based on the preliminary plans, FOMC finds the project will have serious adverse environmental effects and endanger the safety of canyon residents and visitors. FOMC has suggested reducing the impacts of the Garden's project by locating some educational facilities and administrative offices downtown. This would spare Garden visitors and staff from the canyon's fire hazard, reduce transportation impacts, save dozens of oak trees, and reduce the vehicles involved in an emergency evacuation.

While FOMC and MCA share many common concerns, the two groups are not affiliated. For those concerned about the Garden's proposed development, FOMC's website is [friendsofmissioncanyon.org](http://friendsofmissioncanyon.org).

## MCA Turns 50 in July

The Mission Canyon Association traces its origins back to an improvement and protective organization formed by residents early in the 1900s. In 1918, it was reactivated and became the Upper Mission Canyon Improvement Association. Because of increased concerns about the threat of wild-fire, that Association disbanded on March 1, 1948, and in its place the Mission Cañon (original spelling) Association was organized, including all canyon residents north of the Mission. In July 1957, the Mission Canyon Association was incorporated under the non-profit laws of the State of California. The Association's territory encompasses 1,140 acres in the County of Santa Barbara, as described in the Mission Canyon

Specific Plan (1984), a plan that is currently being updated (details on MCA's web site). The area encompassed is generally north of the Old Mission, east of Alamar, south of the National Forest, and west of the City boundaries extending along Foothill Lane.

For more than a century, the primary objectives of the Association have been to preserve, maintain, and improve Mission Canyon as a primarily residential area of beauty and charm. We continue to be one of Santa Barbara's most vigilant, progressive, and active community citizens' groups.

## Water Rates

Did you know that the City of Santa Barbara charges Mission Canyon residents 30 percent more for our water services? As county residents, we don't pay the 6 percent utility tax tacked on to city residents' water and sewer bills. Instead, that 6 percent is incorporated into the 30 percent surcharge, with the remaining 24 percent going toward capital investments and pumping water up and down and around the canyon, according to Bill Ferguson, city water resources supervisor. The city anticipates that rates will rise by 3½ percent in the coming year.

## Sewer Facts

Mission Canyon didn't have a sewer system before 1988, which is when county Public Works began laying 12 miles of pipeline and installing two lift stations. The cost of construction came from a bond, payment for which showed up on our property taxes until the bond was paid off in 2003. The following year, facing shortages in its reserve funds and red ink in the previous three years, Public Works' Waste Management Division doubled the charge for sewer service. Marty Wilder, civil engineer manager with Waste Management, explained that the jump was necessary because bills from the City of Santa Barbara—which treats Mission Canyon's wastewater—had been steadily increasing. It turns out that during the 17 years the bond was being paid down, Waste Management had kept its sewer charges at \$270, despite rising rates from the city, and paying for those increases out of its reserves. It doubled the charge in 2004 and increased it by another one-fourth in 2005 in order to get back in the black and start putting money into its capital and operating fund reserves. Those reserves are now on a 10-year track to full health, and, barring unexpected changes, sewer charge increases should be 4-6 percent annually.

- July 4** S.B. Botanic Garden development draft EIR released. Available online at [sbcountyplanning.org/projects/02NEW-00138/index.cfm](http://sbcountyplanning.org/projects/02NEW-00138/index.cfm).
- July 18** CAL FIRE public comment meeting for Fire Hazard Severity Zone mapping update for state building requirements. 3 p.m. County Building, Fourth Floor, 105 E. Anapamu St. Contact David Neels for info at 686-5068.
- July 25** MCPAC/Specific Plan Update overview, review process, outline. 6-9 p.m. County Board of Supervisors (BOS) Hearing Rm., 4th floor.
- July 26** Botanic Garden Expansion Plan public hearing and comment. 6 p.m. Planning Commission Hearing Rm, 123 E. Anapamu St.
- August** The Botanic Garden will be testing its emergency siren sometime this month. Plans are still being finalized, and residents will receive information about the test in the mail.
- Aug. 6** MCPAC/City Architectural Board of Review of draft Guidelines. Time TBD. 630 Garden St., David Gebhard Public Meeting Room. (See "Meeting Dates" at [http://countyofsb.org/plandev/comp/planareas/mission\\_canyon](http://countyofsb.org/plandev/comp/planareas/mission_canyon) or call Rosie Dyste at 568-3532 for most recent info.)
- Aug. 7** MCA Board meeting. 7:30 p.m. McVeigh House, Natural History Museum.
- Aug. 18** Botanic Garden Expansion: Written comments on draft EIR must be submitted by 5 p.m. to Alex Tuttle, 123 E. Anapamu St., 93101, 884-6844.

- Aug. 22** MCPAC/Specific Plan Update mtg. Review ABR comments. Discuss current conditions. 6-9 p.m. BOS Hearing Room.
- Aug. 23** Fourth Annual Neighborhood BBQ, Natural History Museum. Delicious BBQ along the creek, Butterfly and Grossology exhibits, behind-the-scenes tours, meet curators. 5-8 p.m. \$10. Call 682-4711 x110 or email [jill.johnson@sbnature2.org](mailto:jill.johnson@sbnature2.org) to reserve tickets.
- Sept. 4** MCA Board meeting. 7:30 p.m. McVeigh House.
- Sept. 6** MCPAC/Specific Plan, Special Problems Area Review Committee mtg. and staff presentation. Time TBD. County Engr. Bldg., 123 E. Anapamu, Rm. 17.
- Sept. 8** MCPAC/Specific Plan Workshop. Opportunities and threats discussion, small group discussions, feedback. 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Location TBD.
- Sept. 12** MCA Fire Safety Workshop. Informational meeting with presentation by County Fire Captain David Neels and time for questions. 7 p.m. Museum of Natural History, Fleischmann Auditorium.
- Sept. 26** MCPAC/Specific Plan Update. Discuss issues and policy, formulate goals and zoning ordinance changes. 6-9 p.m. BOS Hearing Room.
- Oct. 2** MCA Board meeting. 7:30 p.m. McVeigh House.
- Oct. 10** MCPAC/Specific Plan Update. Continue discussion of issues and goals. 6-9 p.m. Planning Commission Hearing Room.

NOTE: Please verify all dates, times, and locations at [missioncanyon.org](http://missioncanyon.org).



Mission Canyon Association  
 P.O. Box 401  
 Santa Barbara, CA 93102

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## Your MCA Newsletter Summer 2007

Fire Season Comes Early  
 Parking Problems  
 and more

MCA 2007 dues of \$25 can be paid online  
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