

Fall 2009

## A Safer Neighborhood

By Jean Yamamura

**B**ack in 1938, Cheltenham Road meandered across the face of gently rising hills, folding back on itself as it carried motorists across the grasslands growing there then to the dozen or so houses that dotted the area. Those dozen houses could use Tunnel Road or the Cheltenham exits to reach Foothill Road, the same four exits that now serve the more than 500 houses in what has come to be called Mission Canyon Heights.

Contrary to popular opinion, the entire Heights came within a wind's breath of going up in flames on May 6, 2009. Firefighters making stands at Edgemound, Montrose, Vista Elevada, and Williams Way reported that it was only because the wind died down or changed direction that they were able to hold their ground and put out the fires burning there. We are all so lucky the fire began the day before, because May 5 lacked the 60 mph gusts that sent Jesusita's fire burning from Spyglass Ridge Road to the horseshoe turn on Montrose within 20 minutes on May 6.

What a difference 24 hours' evacuation time makes.



The upper photo shows the Heights in 1938 with four homes in the upper section (boxed) and two exits (white arrows). The lower photo was taken in 1990.

SOURCE: Dr. Thomas Cova

In that scant 20 minutes, six firefighters positioned at homes from Spyglass to Palomino wound up hospitalized, for first, second and third degree burns, smoke inhalation, eye injuries, and heat exhaustion suffered while trapped in the raging wildfire. And they were equipped with breathing apparatus, fire tents, fire engines loaded with 500 gallons of water, head to toe Nomex clothing. One memorable incident was when a fire engine trying to back

into a driveway to turn around had to stop because the driver simply couldn't see where he was going any longer. Or, in the dry firefighter lingo of CalFire's *Informational Summary Report*, "The fire activity increased." By the time that particular firestorm was over, both windshields on the engine had cracked, the lights on top had melted, the truck's tires were partially melted, and the air cleaner was burned to a crisp.

What happens when we don't have a full day to evacuate?

A scenario like that occurred in Oakland, California, in 1991. The infamous Oakland Hills Fire took out nearly 4,000 residences, but what is worse, it cost 25 people their lives in a mere 30 minutes. That fire, spurred by 65mph gusts of dry, hot wind in a hilly, densely populated area planted with eucalyptus trees, trapped 19 people at bottlenecks on narrow, winding roads choked with parked cars. Two rescuers died among them.

The State of California's increasingly stringent fire safety laws stem from incidents like that one. They don't kid around about fire, and neither does our county or the Mission Canyon Planning Advisory Committee (MCPAC).

Oakland's same hilly, densely populated condition with bottlenecks and narrow, winding roads lined with parked cars exists in Mission Canyon Heights today. The number of exits out of the area are few and



Narrow roads made it difficult for firefighters to enter and residents to leave Oakland Hills during the tragic fire of 1991.

SOURCE: City of Oakland

lined with plantings and wooden fences, all of which burn. As you will read on page 2, in *Traffic Safety Drives New Proposed On-Street Parking Rules*, the county and the MCPAC, with the Mission Canyon Association's blessing, will be trying their hardest to make the Heights and all of Mission Canyon infinitely safer by marking travel lanes on the roads wide enough for fire trucks and cars to pass in the event of a mass evacuation.

To evacuate the canyon swiftly, lanes of travel must be clear of parked cars.

Making the roads less of a corridor of fire is also up to individual property owners, and we hope everyone will reevaluate the flammability of their roadside vegetation and fencing.

Lest any of us think Jesusita was the last fire of our lifetime, remember, it stopped at the top of the hill. Between the hilltop and Foothill Road there are something like 500 homes. The lack of progress in clearing 100 feet of defensible space around homes in the Heights means there is lots of fuel to burn.

So chances are good that some night, when a Sundowner whistles through the electrical wires and everything goes wrong, we'll have to run for it again. And when we do, do we speed out? Or do we pause to let a fire engine in? That's a choice MCA hopes none of us will have to make.

# Traffic Safety Drives New Proposed On-Street Parking Rules

By Mission Canyon Parking Strategy Subcommittee

We all know that parking is not allowed in the middle of the road, but what exactly is the middle of the road? To answer this question definitively, and to definitively define where we can and cannot park, the Mission Canyon Planning Advisory Committee (MCPAC) adopted in concept a fairly simple set of policy recommendations at its September 23, 2009 meeting and has written this article to solicit feedback from the community.

The MCPAC is an advisory committee to the County Board of Supervisors made up of Mission Canyon residents, which has always set as a top priority the public safety of residents and visitors. As the previous article, *A Safer Neighborhood*, describes, the unobstructed passage of vehicles in two directions—necessary for ambulances and fire trucks as well as for emergency egress of residents and the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians—is vitally necessary to swiftly evacuate a residential area like ours that is prone to fast-moving wildfires.

To that end, the MCPAC approved in concept the recommendation to stripe the outer edge (called fog lines) of all the paved public roads in Mission Canyon. Where the roads are wide enough, these fog lines will mark off 20 feet of travel space (10 feet for each direction). Most roads meet this minimal

Fire Code requirement for at least part of their length. Where roads are narrower, the striping will mark the edge of the roadway, but road-widening will not be required.

Public comments in meetings, workshops, and questionnaire responses agree that problems of parking on the travel lanes—not permitted under existing laws—are most acute in the Mission Canyon Heights area. County Planning Department staff members walked each road in the course of extensive research and have prepared excellent maps (available at the Office of Long Range Planning, 30 E. Figueroa St., and online at [longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/planareas/mission\\_canyon/mcrps.php](http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/planareas/mission_canyon/mcrps.php)) that show spaces currently used for parking (both legal and illegal), and which ones will remain once parking is removed from the travel lanes.

Obviously, once the traffic lane boundaries are painted, many parking spaces currently in use illegally will be lost. Parking will still be permitted outside the fog lines in areas where parked vehicles will not interfere with visibility or block fire hydrants. “No parking” signs will, for the most part, not be necessary.

Many residents and their visitors will be affected by these changes. They will feel safer when walking and biking alongside the roads, they will not need to worry about delays when emergencies arise, and emergency evacuations can be carried out more quickly.

But, at the same time, their parking problems will be compounded.

The California Highway Patrol is responsible for enforcing parking regulations in the unincorporated areas of Mission Canyon. Their spokespeople tell us that striping will make their job easier, and that they are fully committed to their task in our area.

Before finalizing its recommendation to the County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, the MCPAC is interested to hear comments from Mission Canyon residents on the proposed new parking rules, and the goals and policies can be found below. On Tuesday, November 17, the MCPAC holds a public meeting in the Planning Commission Hearing Room at 123 E. Anapamu Street from 6–9 p.m. to review the proposed policies in detail as well as maps showing the effects on parking availability. All Mission Canyon residents are encouraged to attend to share any concerns and comments. Those who cannot attend the meeting should put their comments in writing to the Office of Long Range Planning: 30 E. Figueroa St., S.B., CA 93101; or Rosie Dyste, [rdyste@co.santa-barbara.ca.us](mailto:rdyste@co.santa-barbara.ca.us), or Peter Imhof, [pimhof@co.santa-barbara.ca.us](mailto:pimhof@co.santa-barbara.ca.us). Further opportunities for public comment will be provided at upcoming public hearings.

Full information is available at the [LongRange.SBCountyPlanning.org](http://LongRange.SBCountyPlanning.org) Website above.

## Residential Parking Strategy Subcommittee Parking Recommendations (Partial\*)

### FIRST PRIORITY GOAL

**GOAL CIRC-MC-2:** Provide an efficient and safe circulation system with adequate access for emergency vehicles and safe emergency egress for residents and visitors.

**Draft Residential Parking Strategy (RPS) Policy 1:** Parking shall be prohibited where it interferes with access for emergency vehicles or safe pedestrian and bicyclist passage.

**Draft RPS Policy 2:** All public roads in Mission Canyon shall have at least two vehicle travel lanes, each a minimum of 10 feet wide from road center line, except that existing roads less than 20 feet wide shall not be required to be widened to meet this standard. The outside perimeter of travel lanes shall be delineated by a white stripe (fog line). Outside of the fog line, parking shall be allowed provided it does not interfere with adequate sight distance, and adequate access and

safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians, when applicable. Parking areas shall not be reserved and/or posted for the sole use of the property owner and shall not be used for parking boats, trailers or recreational vehicles.

**Long Range Goal:** Create a clear zone of 4 feet from the edge of the fog line to where cars would be allowed to park for the purpose of maintaining an adequate safety zone for pedestrians, bicyclists, sight distance, and space for cars to pull over in an emergency.

### OTHER GOALS

**GOAL CIRC-MC-1:** Achieve safe roadways and improve pedestrian and bicycle passage, while maintaining the community character and aesthetic qualities of Mission Canyon.

**Draft RPS Policy 3:** Long Range Planning staff shall work with Public Works to

revise Mission Canyon Community Plan Policy CIRC-MC-7 regarding active abatement of illegal encroachments in order to clarify circumstances when and how abatement should occur.

**GOAL CIRC-MC-3:** Development shall provide adequate on-site parking for occupants and guests, with mitigation of drainage impacts, to reduce on-street parking to the maximum extent feasible.

**Draft RPS Policy 4:** Parking shall be prohibited on roads with a pavement width less than 20 feet or where insufficient space exists outside the pavement width for parking or where other factors interfere with safe ingress or egress as determined by County Public Works or the Fire Department.

\* September 15, 2009. Full text at [http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/planareas/mission\\_canyon/mcrps.php](http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/planareas/mission_canyon/mcrps.php)



N E W S I N B R I E F

## El Niño Update

The weather phenomenon known as El Niño Southern Oscillation has been a topic of study for meteorologists since the 1950s, and for South Coast residents it can be something of an obsession, especially for surfers, bringing as it does big swells and storms. But like any weather prediction, an El Niño forecast can be as variable as the wind, with El Niños from the past decade delivering between 37 and 13 inches of rain per season.

This winter, however, a moderate El Niño is forecast, delivering perhaps 19 inches of rain. Eric Boldt with the National Weather Service (NWS) gave us this news at the city's winter preparedness meeting at Rockwood on October 15.

For those who want to get their weather warning firsthand, Boldt suggests a NOAA Weather Radio, available at electronics stores, which is activated by certain weather warnings. The NWS Website is another go-to site for up-to-date weather information ([weather.gov/losangeles](http://weather.gov/losangeles)). Residents interested in providing on-the-spot climate info by becoming a weather spotter are asked to contact Boldt at (805) 988-6623.

In a normal year, with vegetation in place, it takes about 10 inches of rain before the creeks begin to run, County Flood Control's Tom Fayram told us, but Rattlesnake and Mission creeks ran for several days after only six inches fell from mid-October's typhoon. Fayram's staff and crews remain busy keeping debris dams and stream channels clear, and have been since the summer's fires.

As October's storm demonstrated, the fire-denuded slopes will increase run-off to above normal levels, even if we get an average winter rainfall. The aerial hydromulching has helped to hold hillsides in place, but along with increases in run-off we can expect greater-than-normal rock fall, mud flow, and flooding from this year's storms.

Residents along the creeks observing creek flows out of the channel or blockages such as down trees can inform the county at 568-3440. We should all help ourselves with sandbags at the ready and a copy of the *Homeowners Guide for Flood Prevention and Response*, available through County Flood Control (123 E. Anapamu St.). Sandbag stations continue to be stocked at the top of Tunnel Road and at the Botanic Garden parking lot.

Just as residents have prepared for fire and earthquake, now is the time to be prepared for impassable roads. Though Reverse 911 will be activated for evacuation warnings,

residents know their terrain better than the county does. If you feel threatened, don't wait for an evacuation warning. At [sbsheriff.org](http://sbsheriff.org), cell phones can be registered with Reverse 911, and you will soon be able to add email addresses and text messaging.

The winter rains meetings repeat Nov. 12 at the Franklin Neighborhood Center and Dec. 10 at the downtown library. More information, including links to 100-year flood maps, is at [SantaBarbaraCA.gov/OES/](http://SantaBarbaraCA.gov/OES/).—JY

## Rebuilding Reminders

The canyon has been a busy place since the fire with lots of extra traffic, especially large trucks. We all need to be mindful of safety during the rebuilding process. As people start construction, please think of your neighbors when you schedule projects. This is becoming a very noisy place, and we all need some periods of tranquility.—Laurie Guitteau

## Stay Informed

MCA has sponsored well-attended meetings on everything from insurance to rebuilding to flood and erosion control since the fire. Look for a meeting on mortgage issues in the near future as well as more info on insurance issues. Be sure that we have your email address, so that you can get up-to-date email blasts. Check the Website [missioncanyon.org](http://missioncanyon.org) for information or contact Bill McCullough, 448-9688 or [billmccsb@cox.net](mailto:billmccsb@cox.net).—LG

## Veg Cutting Continues

The Jesusita Fire altered the priorities for MCA's work to be done using its Forest Service Grants. Efforts are now focused on trimming vegetation along the major roads in Mission Canyon Heights. The Fire Committee is working with residents to clear, ideally, 10 feet on either side of the road and to be sure that there is a minimum height clearance of 13'6" as required by law. Also, the goats returned to do a 50 percent fuel reduction on the north side of Arriba Way, and work will continue by hand to create a fuel break. For more information, contact Milt Roselinsky, [milt.roselinsky@cox.net](mailto:milt.roselinsky@cox.net) or 563-9212.—LG

## After-Effects

Eucalyptus sprouts following fire. Be sure to uproot the new seedlings while it's easy to do so.

The Holly Road Association planted rows of vetiver grass to stabilize the steep western slope below the road. It's green and about three feet tall. We'll keep you updated.

Andrew Wyatt, the Botanic Garden's horticulturalist, has been researching native plants, hoping to locate deep-rooting, quick-sprouting varieties. He reports that native plants as a whole tend to grow slowly, but suggests this annual seed mix, which he developed with S&S Seed in Carpinteria: *Vulpia microstachys*, 8 lbs; *Eschscholzia californica*, 4 lbs; *Bromus carinatus* 'Cucamonga,' 20lbs, for 32 lbs total. S&S blends a chaparral mixture, which is also a good option if you want to go totally native.—JY

## Speed Limit Debate

After a couple days' debating with county officials and staff members in October, MCA learned that staff would recommend that the speed limit on Mission Canyon Road, between Foothill and Los Olivos roads, remain at 35 mph, instead of rising to 40 mph. A 2006 state rule has set different conditions for interpreting traffic speed surveys, and this is causing the county to review speed limits on several roads throughout the county. Conditions along the road such as bicyclists and pedestrians helped the argument for keeping the speed low, though the Board of Supervisors will ultimately vote on the issue in November. The CHP is aware of the passing problem on that road and will be keeping an eye out for speeders as well.—JY

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The MCA Newsletter was prepared with the help of Lee Anne Dollison, graphics, production and photography.



# MISSION CANYON ASSOCIATION

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## Your MCA Newsletter Fall 2009

Parking in Mission  
Canyon Heights  
El Niño Update

### Mission Creek Live Webcam

Mission Canyon residents can soon view current water flow of Mission Creek using a webcam looking downstream near the confluence of Rattlesnake and Mission creeks. The webcam is a result of our U.S. Forest Service Grant and the perseverance of board member Ralph Daniel through numerous setbacks. The U.S. Geological Survey will soon install another webcam to monitor the debris dam below upper Tunnel Road. The links to these webcams will be added to the MCA Website when they become available.—LG

### Rebuilding Guidance

Home rebuilders are encouraged to submit their plans to the Mission Canyon Architectural Development Review Committee for practical and creative input from professionals who live right here in the canyon. The normal fee of \$145 is waived for Jesusita Fire victims rebuilding within 10 percent of the original structure. Contact Tom Jacobs, 898-8004 or [tomejd@cox.net](mailto:tomejd@cox.net), for more information.

County fee clarification: The Planning Department delays the collection of the permit fee until the issuance of the actual building permit when all fees must be paid.—LG

## C A L E N D A R

- Oct. 3–Nov. 3** **Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Plant Sale**
- Nov. 3** **MCA Board Meeting**, Open to the public. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History, 7:30 p.m.
- Nov. 7** **Fall Flowers, Fruits, and Foliage** at Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, 2-3 p.m.
- Nov. 12** **Winter Readiness Meeting**, Franklin Neighborhood Center, 1136 E. Montecito St., 6 p.m.
- Nov. 17** **Mission Canyon Planning Advisory Committee meeting**. Presentation of parking strategy recommendations for providing efficient and safe circulation for emergency vehicles and egress for residents. Planning Commission room, ground floor, 123 E. Anapamu St., 6 p.m.
- Nov.** **Dealing with Mortgage Issues After the Fire**. Date, time, and place to be announced.
- Dec. 1** **MCA Board Meeting**, Open to the public. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History, 7:30 p.m..
- Dec. 4-9** **Folk & Tribal Arts Marketplace** at S.B. Museum of Natural History, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Dec. 10** **Winter Readiness Meeting**, Faulkner Gallery, downtown library, 40 E. Anapamu St., 6 p.m.
- Jan. 5** **MCA Board Meeting**, Open to the public. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History, 7:30 p.m.