

Fire Threatens the Heights

On November 23rd, a brush fire quickly scaled the slope above Hacienda Rd. toward Panchoy Pl. about 1:15 p.m.

The City determined that the fire started at the construction site on Hacienda Rd. due to a metal cutting circular saw.



City and Los Angeles County Fire Departments responded quickly.

Three Los Angeles County water-dropping helicopters rotated, dousing the flames.

There are no fire hydrants on Hacienda Rd. between Canada Sombre and Skyline Dr.

Fire hoses were run down the hill from above, and the helicopters reached the flames on the steep terrain.

The Heights Inn was threatened by flames but was not evacuated.

The fire was contained by 3:15 p.m. to about 3 acres and hand crews worked until dusk putting out hot spots.

The brush was thin and light winds did not propel the flames into the eucalyptus trees above.



Pictures and brief Videos at www.LaHabraHeights.net

December 2009

High Density Threatens the Heights Taking Open Space for Low Income Housing

Roughly every 5 years, the State imposes quotas on each City for housing units in 4 income categories; very low, low, moderate and above moderate.

The City's quota is 282 units; 85 low & very low income units, 48 moderate, and 149 above moderate. La Habra Heights is zoned single family residential with minimum one acre zoning. Most Heights homes are considered in the "above moderate income" category.

Each quota cycle closes loopholes cities have used to avoid total compliance.

The draft City Housing Element proposes 23 units per acre at the 4 acre school site next to City Hall, allowing second units on acre lots with access to sewers, legalizing existing illegal second units that meet certain criteria and are brought up to code, and allowing an emergency/homeless shelter at the Park.

A minimally noticed joint meeting of the City Council and Planning Commission was held on November 12th at 4:30 p.m..

Most residents who spoke were opposed to high density housing, the loss of the rural environment, and a change in the voting population that would hasten that decline.

Comments from City officials ranged from Mayor Howard Viperman who said, "I'm going to resist it with every fiber of my body.", to Planning Commissioner Ray Fernandez (appointed by Layne Baroldi) who said, "This is the right thing to do. We have a moral obligation to help those less fortunate." Mr Fernandez also said, "We have that land on West Rd. Why can't we rezone that to multi-family, high density?"

Several hours later during the regular Council meeting, Viperman and the Council majority, with Bergman opposed, voted for sweeping Code changes that would facilitate higher density, more building, more concrete and less ruralness.

At the December 8th follow-up meeting, City officials recommended consideration of locating all required very low, low and moderate income housing at the vacant 12 acre County lot on Harbor Blvd, which was previously considered for addition to the open space area. At both meetings, Councilmember Carl Westerhoff was dogged in his refusal to accept hedging and half-answers to important questions.

Get Involved

Mayor Howard Vipperman Files Lawsuit Against Residents for Slander

On October 29th, a lawsuit was filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, on behalf of Mayor Howard Vipperman, against 102 community members, including George Edwards, his wife Julie Ragozzino, the East Heights Volunteer Fire Department and 100 unnamed individuals.

Vipperman claims Mr Edwards slandered him, and wants radios back that were given to members of the La Habra Heights Fire Watch (LHHFW), a community non-profit organization that seeks to prevent wildfires.

Disputed is whether six public safety radios were donated or just loaned to LHHFW members. George Edwards, a current Director of LHHFW, said his understanding is that they were a donation with the donor identity never to be disclosed. He stated, that in August 2009, Karen Vipperman, a former Fire Watch executive director who resigned in March 2009, asked a Fire Watch member (a senior citizen and World War II Veteran) for his radio to be returned to her, saying she had found a "buyer" for the radio.

George Edwards intervened, stating that the radio should not be returned since it was a donation, and that the Fire Watch Board of Directors concurred.

Edwards said, "I am dismayed with Vipperman bringing costly legal action against residents that support nonprofit groups." He added, "If you are not happy with an organization that you've made a donation to, your only recourse is not to donate again. Suing to get back your donation is a disappointment to everyone involved in nonprofit fundraising efforts."

The 10 page Lawsuit Complaint alleges that the situation was created to damage Vipperman personally and politically. Mr Vipperman announced his re-election campaign at the August City Council meeting.

The slander portion of the lawsuit is over comments allegedly made in private regarding 2007 Council election campaign financing.

Edwards said he does not recall publishing any statements. He views this as an attack on residents' Constitutionally protected First Amendment right to free speech. "Everyone in the Heights should be concerned that trumped up allegations can be used to bring suit against anyone who speaks out in opposition of Howard Vipperman.", Edwards stated.

Mr. Edwards had signed Vipperman's 2007 Council candidacy nomination papers and worked to get Vipperman elected.

Record Water Board Election Turnout

The largest ever Water District Board election turnout of 1,066 voters resulted in a close race.

Brad Cooke won with 645 votes. Jeffrey Heintz won with 548 votes, and George Edwards was only 25 votes behind at 523. The hard fought election brought out important issues of emergency preparedness, infrastructure maintenance, and Board dining & drinking at public expense.

LHHIA Donations Follow-Up

At the November City Council meeting, LHHIA President Pam McVicar confirmed our October story that the Improvement Association is a 501c4 organization, not a 501c3 as they advertised. Donations to a 501c4 are not tax deductible. She said it was a "miscommunication" and they have applied for 501c3 status. Contributors should consider the status of past donations.

Ms McVicar also said there is, "No evidence of corruption in the Improvement Association", "nor is there any government investigations of the Improvement Association, the current directors, or its activities". We learned that inquiries had been made to government agencies as to their deductibility status.

In May 2009, a then LHHIA Vice President was arrested, and is still jailed, on 144 charges including identity theft and fraud. No charges appear to be related to LHHIA actions.

Community Organization Focus

www.LHHFIREWATCH.com

A valuable asset!

The recent brush fire near Hacienda Rd. was a reminder that we can never let our guard down against the threat of wildfire. The La Habra Heights Fire Watch Inc, a nonprofit 501(c3) organized to prevent and spot wildfire threats, also provides valuable information during actual emergencies. During the recent fire off Hacienda Rd., a record number of listeners tuned to the Fire Watch network using radio scanners and online, via the organization's live online streaming of the event, keeping residents informed of the firefighting progress.

Recently added 24 hour live streaming of the Fire Watch radio network allows any person, in any location, to listen in on area conditions and emergencies. The Fire Watch also provides listeners with Emergency Alert warnings (EAS) issued by State and Federal Agencies for the La Habra Valley Area.

Membership in the Fire Watch is open to all residents of La Habra and La Habra Heights. Tax deductible financial contributions are welcome and go towards the organization's operating costs, including the Red Flag Warning Program and expanding the radio network, which benefits all residents of the Heights. For more information, visit the website at: www.LHHFIREWATCH.com

**More detail on all stories can be found at
www.LaHabraHeights.net**