

Once Upon a Time in North Park

A Brief History of the North Park Community Association

By Steve Hon

The North Park Community Association (NPCA) was formed in March 1984 by a group of concerned North Park residents who wanted a forum for discussion and resolution of issues that concerned North Park. The initial issues identified by the founders of NPCA were related to the quality of life in North Park and included: crime; revitalization of the North Park Business District; compatibility of new and existing development in residential neighborhoods; adequacy of public facilities such as schools, parks, streets, and water/sewer lines; increased parking problems; the need for a new North Park library; and protection of canyons.

The first officers of NPCA were Mary Ann Moore as Acting President and Alan Smith as Secretary Treasurer. The initial Board of Directors included John Hartley, Kathy Nadler, Carol Landsman, Ann Nussbaum, Ann Hix and Mike Hix. The first newsletter was issued in July 1984. Carol Landsman was the first newsletter editor and would remain so for the first 20 issues. Initially, NPCA requested \$3 annually to receive the monthly newsletter. One of the first NPCA sponsored activities was a “North Park Cleanup” in August 1984 co-sponsored by I Love A Clean San Diego.

One of the first major initiatives of NPCA in terms of community advocacy was land use planning. In the mid 1980s, there was increased concern that additional, potentially historic single family homes in North Park were going to be bought by developers and demolished to be replaced with apartments and multiple-family housing units. There were fears that a second wave of “Huffman” type development would take place in North Park similar to what happened in the 1960s when many single family homes were replaced with 8 to 10 unit apartment buildings. The City of San Diego was in the process of updating the Park Northeast Community Plan that covered North Park. The existing plan had been written in the early 1970s and allowed apartment development in most of the community. In September 1984, NPCA created a Land Use Committee to be a vehicle for providing additional community input to the City on the Plan, primarily by younger home buyers moving into the area. The official community planning group favored redevelopment of North Park to provide housing for the growing employment in Mission Valley and downtown. The NPCA Land Use committee would remain a very active and involved committee throughout the development of the community plan for North Park and had a key role in the development of the plan to preserve more single family homes and restrict high density development to the major transportation corridors. Many of the early NPCA leaders later went on to play key roles in the Greater North Park Planning Group through the years.

In addition to Land Use, some of the other major activities of NPCA in the first few years included on-going sponsorships of “Dumpster Days” to help clean up the neighborhoods, co-sponsorship with the North Park Business Association for the resumption of the North

Park Toyland Parade in 1985 after it had been dormant for 20 years, and sponsorships of numerous community forums enabling North Park residents to meet with elected officials and others to express their concerns. In January 1988, the NPCA History Committee held its first meeting and set out four initial goals as it was organized over the next few months: bringing back the North Park sign at 30th and University; establishing guided walking tours of North Park; and recording North Park's past with the ultimate goal of publishing a book on the history of North Park. As part of the book project, the History Committee began submitting monthly articles to the NPCA newsletter called "Once Upon a Time in North Park." In 2002, NPCA started the summer concerts in Bird Park as a way of encouraging residents to come together in a fun, low-key setting.

As NPCA enters its third decade, its contributions to the quality of life in North Park have been significant, and the credit goes to all of the volunteers who have given so much to the success of the projects over the years.