



ZONING

A Brief Berkeley History

by Ken Hughes



The initial push for zoning in Berkeley came in 1914 when the Elmwood neighborhood petitioned the City Council for protection against a proposed creamery in their residential area. Two years later the City Council adopted Berkeley's first zoning ordinance, one of the first in the nation. This ordinance provided for varying degrees of allowable residential density with full protection against industrial or commercial uses upon petition by the neighborhood.

In 1920 the City of Berkeley adopted a zoning ordinance incorporating the 1916 ordinance and adding zones exclusively for industrial and commercial uses. Just as in the earlier Ordinance the owners of at least 50% of the frontage of all affected property within the proposed use area had to petition the Council to form a use zone. All unzoned areas of Berkeley automatically were zoned for general residential use (i.e. houses, apartments, hotels, etc.)

Hills for the Rich

This situation lasted until after World War II when the zoning ordinance was "Modernized". The City hired a consulting firm which produced a land use survey and revised zoning ordinance. The survey found that 2100 acres of Berkeley were being utilized for single family homes. The firm then logically proposed that the 1100 acres of hill-land be zoned for single family homes and the 1000 acres of flatlands, then used for houses, be zoned for 6 story apartments. The firm also proposed a "buffer" duplex zone around the hills. These proposals were adopted by the Council in 1949. Thus, the hills were preserved as a rich single family sanctuary and the rest of Berkeley was left open to what the market would bear.

During the late 50s and early 60s the flatlands became a profitable place to build ticky-tackies. Old neighborhoods were disrupted by the shoddy construction and additional population imposed by the ticky-tacky. In 1961 hill liberals gained

control of the Council for the first time. They passed a fair housing ordinance and also called for a general downzoning of the flatlands.

Struggling Flatlands

Unfortunately, a referendum in 1963 defeated the fair housing ordinance and propelled Wallace Johnson into the Mayor's seat. Since the 1963 downzoning of the flatlands was inadequate, individual neighborhoods have been struggling against the exploitative 1949 zoning designations (6 story apartments).

The proposed NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION INITIATIVE attempts to stop the destruction of neighborhoods and loss of low-rent housing. Its intention is to prevent developers from exploiting the communities of the flatlands, by imposing interim building regulations on dense and plastic apartments. At the same time the Initiative makes way for a rewrite of Berkeley's Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance, this outdated Plan was passed by Berkeley's City Council in 1955 and has not been publicly reviewed or revised in the land use sections in the 18 year interval.

The present City Council has demonstrated its inability to act in any way to relieve the serious urban environmental difficulties faced by the City's residents. Failure to pass the proposed NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION ordinance was only one more instance of political irresponsibility... Unfortunately many persons may lose their homes between now and April. Absentee owners and speculators are preparing to demolish housing on properties they have been holding for future development. The homes that are in good condition should be saved or moved, but developers want to clear the property of income producing structures... in order to press their right to develop their land at a later date before the City Council.

VOTE FOR MEASURE 2