

A Short History of City Heights

On Nov. 15, 1885, the first train left San Diego on a trip over the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe tracks, which connected with eastbound transcontinental railroad lines. Six days later, the first westbound through-train brought 60 passengers to a San Diego celebration that wasn't at all dampened by pouring rain. At last, San Diego was connected to the transcontinental railroad network! With its natural harbor such an obvious place for South American and Asian countries to ship their goods and pick up American merchandise, San Diego envisioned itself as a major trade depot on the West Coast. Its citizens could taste the success—and riches—that must be just around the corner.

In Horton's Addition, also known as New Town, land values skyrocketed. Undeveloped lots soon were selling in other parts of the region, including an unincorporated area immediately to the east of San Diego's boundary line. Entrepreneurs Abraham Klauber and Samuel Steiner purchased a tract of over 240 acres that sat 400 feet above sea level and commanded a view of the soon-to-be-busy harbor and even the Coronado Islands and Mexico beyond. With great hopes, they named the area "City Heights" and one of its more elevated neighborhoods "Teralta" (High Ground). Then they set about to persuade San Diegans it was the coming place to settle.

The Park Belt Motor Line aided the process when it agreed to connect New Town San Diego (later known simply as downtown San Diego) to City Heights (known in legal papers as Steiner, Klauber, Choate & Castle's Addition). From Broadway, the tracks stretched up Sweitzer Canyon, through the area now occupied by the Balboa Park golf course, and up to University Avenue, then east to City Heights. An advertisement dating to July 1888 lauded this trolley route as "the most substantially built, the most expensive, picturesque and the cheapest ride of any motor road in San Diego." Other advertisements of the period praised City Heights as a place for "cheap homes, monthly payments, no interest."

The pace of subsequent land sales disappointed Klauber and Steiner. Winter rains across the San Diego County line in Riverside County washed out the railroad's tracks in 1890 near Temecula. The disaster cut San Diego off from the transcontinental railroad line. Surveying the damage, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe officials made a decision that caused the city's bright hopes to plummet. They decided they would not rebuild the line. Instead, San Diego would be connected to the transcontinental railroad by a spur line from Los Angeles. That meant anyone who wanted to ship goods to or from San Diego would have to go through Los Angeles. Pessimism soon ran rampant. What point was there in even using San Diego, when Los Angeles was building, and improving upon, an artificial port of its own at San Pedro? And if San Diego did not have a future as a great trade depot, what future did it have? And what about City Heights? Was there really a point to having a community that boasted a view of a harbor while being denied the opportunity to live up to its potential?

However, as it is said, hope springs eternal. On May 4, 1904, the United States began construction of the Panama Canal, reviving San Diego's trade dream on the basis of the fact that the city now would become the first important American port north of the canal. In 1905, entrepreneur John Spreckels began building the San Diego & Arizona Railroad—a determined effort to span the mountains, gorges and desert lying between San Diego and the desert of Imperial Valley to provide San Diego a direct line east to the transcontinental railroad lines.

Growth of City Heights

Such optimism encouraged firms like the Columbia Realty Company, which took over the development of City Heights, to subdivide the area into lots with the standard 50-foot frontages of the day. Although the post office had named a local branch as the Teralta Post Office, for identification purposes the Columbia Realty Company stressed the name "City Heights." It built an office and five-story tower at the intersection of University and Fairmount, inviting prospective land purchasers to climb to the top to survey the sagebrush-filled countryside destined to become a new city. With several hundred residents living in the area by 1906, another Spreckels' enterprise, the San Diego Electric Railway Company, extended the old Park Belt Motor Line route from the western border of City Heights to the intersection of University and Fairmount Avenues. Thereafter, that intersection became the acknowledged center of City Heights.

Businesses opened stores facing the elongated trolley route. An early settler, Wilbur W. Easton, later would recall that "the streets were adobe in the old days and it didn't pay to open a store on a side street because of the mud. Everything was laid out to face the avenue." Rather than build on side streets, each new business would locate a little farther down University Avenue until the thoroughfare eventually became a long, continuous stretch of business activity. The area's planners had not anticipated such a growth pattern. Alleyways intersected University Avenue instead of running parallel to it. That made it impossible for stores in the middle of a block to receive back-door deliveries. Front door deliveries therefore impeded the free flow of traffic along University Avenue. Residences meanwhile were erected behind the stores, further restricting the area where businesses could grow.

A parallel business strip, with parallel problems, would develop to the north, along El Cajon Boulevard. A photograph taken in 1910 at the intersection of El Cajon and 43rd Street showed just two vehicles, an automobile coming in one direction, a horse-and-buggy going in the other. Census figures for 1910 indicate the population of City Heights was just 400.

'East San Diego' Becomes a City

As engineers conquered the Panama isthmus, making the nation's dream of a shorter route between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans a reality, a Panama Pacific Exposition was

planned for 1915 in Balboa Park—just a short trolley ride from City Heights. Boosters believed the Exposition would undoubtedly lure many new settlers to the area. On the basis of such speculation, real estate sales boomed, so much so that by November 2, 1912, when voters decided by a margin of 288 to 219 to incorporate City Heights as the separate City of East San Diego, there were an estimated 4,000 people living in the area.

The residents of City Heights fancied themselves to be persons of exceptionally high moral character, and one reason some of them wanted to start their own city was because they thought they could exercise more control over what kinds of businesses were permitted in the area. A plan by the County Board of Supervisors to locate the “Door of Hope,” a county facility for former prostitutes, had incensed residents of the area.

Anti-incorporation forces weren’t in favor of a home for “fallen women” in City Heights either, but they foresaw many economic disadvantages in incorporation: a new city would require new salaried positions, with little money available to pay for them. El Cajon Boulevard needed improvements, which the county government—or even the City of San Diego, if the area were annexed—could better afford. The opponents also argued that it would be easier to attract settlers to the area if it shared the name San Diego, rather than having the unknown moniker of East San Diego. Furthermore, they said, there was no proof that even if incorporated, East San Diego could prohibit such an establishment as the county-sponsored Door of Hope, it “being a quasi public institution with good moral purposes.”

The East San Diego Press, established on March 21, 1912, bragged that the new city would have a lot to recommend it:

Electric street railway, double track extending to Fairmount. Two telephone systems, the locally owned home system and the Bell. Government trebled bond of postmaster. City trustees serving without salary in the community interest. One newspaper. Three churches. Twelve hundred water meters. Two graded schools. Three ‘open air’ schools. One bank. Five-cent carfare and 20 minutes from downtown San Diego. Not a pauper nor public charity subject in the city. No jail. No arrests. No hoboes. No idle rich....

Although citizens favoring incorporation prevailed, opponents to a separate city would work tirelessly over the next 11 years to undo the decision. In the meantime, attracting new residents became the order of the day. The same year that East San Diego became a city, one brochure announced that citizens and members of the new government “are working like beavers to establish a healthy, well-governed community from which every citizen may receive equal benefit and share the same pride.” With its 4,000 residents, East San Diego commanded some respect as the “second largest city in the county.” And, as its residents never seemed to tire of saying, East San Diego was also the largest city for its age in the United States.

As its city motto, East San Diego adopted the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would that they do unto you.” The city became known as the Golden Rule City. Trustees, who met temporarily at the Fern Drug Store, prohibited liquor sales, gambling

and dance halls, gun-toting, driving a car faster than 15-miles per hour, or hitching one's horse on University Avenue.

The newly minted East San Diego Chamber of Commerce grew quickly, attracting 60 members in its first three months of existence, and distributing 10,000 booklets about the city's prospects at a nearby promotional fair. The Santa Fe Railroad printed up 5,000 postcards, which East San Diego residents mailed to their friends and relatives in other parts of the country to promote settlement. The Pacific Building Company leased a lot at a nominal sum for the new city's very own amateur baseball team. The city government leased a building for \$1 from George B. Keith & Company for East San Diego's first city hall. It was located on Van Dyke Street, south of University Avenue. The Christian Church dedicated a building at the corner of Colonial and Klauber Streets in May. Surely, the city was moving in the right direction.

The Brat Street Raid and Other Scandals

That East San Diego citizens did not always live up to the city's professed high standards was made evident in the May 2, 1913 edition of the East San Diego Press under the headline: "Brat Street House Raided." Four days before, "after the Trustees meeting was over, President Holleman, City Attorney Welch, Trustees Hobson and Mayer, accompanied by Marshall Hyatt and Deputy Marshal De Barlow, and some interested citizens, made a raid on an alleged house of ill repute on Brat Avenue and arrested three women and five men." Neither the men nor was a maid employed at the house were charged, but the remaining two women caught in the raid were charged with violating the city's "dry" ordinance forbidding liquor sales. They were charged with serving intoxicating liquor. Ultimately, the fledgling city was perhaps more embarrassed by the incident than the women. The East San Diego Improvement Club held a tumultuous meeting to protest the way the raid had been advertised in advance to the news media, saying the resultant publicity had been bad for the city's image.

Harvey M. Holleman, president of the Board of Trustees, resigned in the week between the raid and the angry protest meeting, and so did trustee Mayer, who pleaded that business would be taking him out of the city. To replace Holleman, voters in a special election chose Henry Brockmeir who confessed, "I stand in a peculiar position as I was not in favor of civic incorporation, but I never put any hindrance in the way of this. And I am willing to abide by the wishes of a majority..."

There were other "scandals" to keep the East San Diego Improvement Club worrying about the new city's image. Notwithstanding the local protests, the Door of Hope had opened in East San Diego. This prompted a citizen, William Ward, to send a formal letter of protest to the board of trustees' police committee. He said the institution should be shut down as a menace to the welfare and morals of the younger generation. While he had no specific evidence of this charge, The Press reported his assertions that "the institution was constantly being referred to in the San Diego papers in connection with

our city, that this excited the curiosity of the youth and would naturally lead to demoralizing results.”

Of even greater moment , the city which once had advertised itself as having no crime, witnessed a cold-blooded attempted murder of the dentist, H.S. Welch, as he alighted from a trolley at the corner of University and Pauly. Herman Bergstadt, who recently had been laid off as an assistant at the Painless Parker Dental Parlor, shot him.

The First Disincorporation Battle

As the new city readied itself in 1913 for its first Fourth of July celebration, one of the town’s leading dissidents, C. J. Noel, circulated petitions calling for a vote on disincorporation. The Independence Day celebration featured races in or on automobiles, bicycles, wheelbarrows and sacks, as well as contests to climb a greased poll, duck for coins, box, wrestle, masquerade, and tug of war. Special contests included nail-driving for women, a race for fat women, a race for fat men, and a race requiring participants to carry an egg without dropping it. Some of the contests offered first place prize money of \$1, with second-place finishers earning 50 cents. Another effort, apparently, was signature-gathering. A week after the celebration, Noel presented a petition with 20 pages of signatures demanding an election be scheduled to determine whether East San Diego should remain a city.

The City Attorney scrutinized the petitions and found some legal defects, so therefore rejected it. Noel promptly brought suit in local court, and the case took a surprise turn when the City Attorney contended that Carlos J. Noel was not really an American citizen and therefore not entitled to bring the suit. When he was naturalized in New Jersey, Noel used the name “Charles” instead of its Spanish equivalent, Carlos. A judge found the City Attorney’s case to be without merit, and ordered the trustees to set a date for the election. They picked Jan. 20, 1914.

Fearfully, the East San Diego Press editorialized that “if the disincorporationists should carry the election, it means for us to tell the world that we have failed, and it will further mean that the city will cease to exist and the now thriving community together with all uncompleted public improvements will be placed under the jurisdiction of the county board supervisors...It would also mean that the community had decided to step backward and one step backwards leads to another.” .

The Golden Rule city clearly was split over self-rule. One thousand voters turned out to decide the question, with 566 favoring remaining a city and 434 calling for disincorporation.

A ‘Union Council’

Notwithstanding its political battles, the city continued to grow. At the end of the 1912-1913 school year, it was reported that school attendance had increased by 89 percent. In the 1911-12 school year, there had been five teachers and 182 pupils; just a year later that was up to 10 teachers and 344 pupils. In February of 1914, the city Board of Trustees established a volunteer fire department, and in March it was decided on the basis of balloting by students to name the new school on Wilson Avenue after Thomas Alva Edison, and the new school on Highland Avenue after Alexander Hamilton.

Advertising the city's merits to potential settlers, the East San Diego Press trumpeted the fact that there were "no saloons in East San Diego! This means no street brawls. No insulting of women if they are forced out after dark. It means safety for our wives and daughters. East San Diego has six churches, through our population is but 6,000. Our ministers, one and all, are spiritual, not commercial. We have two schoolhouses, with plans drawn for two more. These figures show that we are progressive people in religion and education."

Furthermore, the newspaper contended, "East San Diego has no bridge whist clubs. No gossip corners. No dinners given where cocktails and cigarettes are served to men and women. Our women are too busy with homes for such idling, but they find time for clubs of all kinds here—artists, musicians and literary personages are not missing. The moral standard in East San Diego is high." In a personal note, the writer—presumably the editor added—"Though I have lived amongst the people ever since the city began, I have never heard of a marital scandal or otherwise in fact heard of anything which would put a blot on the escutcheon of our city beautiful."

In April of 1914, the city had another election, in which Brockmeier assured the voters that besides favoring more physical improvements to the city, he was steadfast in his opposition to saloons and in no manner would countenance the sale of intoxicating liquors in the City of East San Diego."

Brockmeier was defeated for reelection; Ira H. Markwith became the board's next president. One power behind Markwith and other trustees elected to the board turned out to be the East San Diego Women's Assembly, whose female members constitutionally could not vote but could persuade. Additionally, "labor is well represented on the board," reported The Press. "Four of the new officials are members of labor organizations. Plainly speaking it is a union council and organized labor is proud of being so well represented on the board. "The Carpenters Union, No. 810 of San Diego, sent a special committee to present the board with a large basket of flowers. Promised Markwith: "As long as this board is in office, we will give a square deal. There will be no railroading proceedings. We want all to come to us with their complaints. We will give each and all a fair hearing..."

Troubles at Edison and Hamilton Schools

The city reacted with pride in May of 1914 when Thomas Alva Edison, himself, sent a letter to school trustee George M. Kaltschmidt and the children who had voted to name a school for him. "Allow me express to the trustees and to the children my appreciation of the honor they have...conferred upon me and thank you all for the sentiment implied in the compliment thus paid me," wrote the great inventor.

But that pride turned to embarrassment in September when W.J. Kirkwood, chair of a citizen's committee, reported "the school building was not the building planned by the architect. From parts that I could examine and the information I received from those who witnessed the construction of said building, the specifications have not been complied with, making the building unsafe in certain parts for school purposes. ... Main entrance landings and steps are weak and insufficiently supported, the Hamilton entrance floor particularly being defective. Those entrances are subject to serious loads and the floors should have a new system of support...In the Edison School, one floor girder end under the auditorium (east end) is defectively supported and should be improved by additional post and footing."

Angry citizens demanded a recall of the school trustees, and even a grand jury investigation into the conduct of the affair of the school district, which by August of 1914 had grown to 431 children. Cooler heads prevailed and Trustees Kaltschmidt and Joseph Clegg ultimately survived the election.

Wet—In More Ways Than One

Construction problems not only plagued the schools; the city's roadways were a constant source of aggravation. "The San Diego Electric Railway Company as well as East San Diego has its daily troubles which are caused by the old leaky water main on University Avenue," the Press editorialized on Sept. 4, 1914. "Not only has the main held up paving of the avenue, but nearly every day of the week, a heavy wagon or truck sinks up to its hub in some section of the city, causing the street car service to be blocked for hours at a time...It is hoped that John D. Spreckels will get tired of having his car service interfered with and that he will use his influence with the San Diego City Council and cause some quick action to be taken by that body for the removal of the old leaky main..."

In the Nov. 6, 1914 election, the unthinkable happened. East San Diego, the Golden Rule City, "Morality Heights," voted to go "wet," that is, to exercise its local option to license liquor stores, if not saloons.

And just in time, thought some residents—with the Panama-Pacific Exposition to be held in Balboa Park through the entire year of 1915, there were plenty of tourists who could be expected to want something stronger than water to quench their thirst.

The Golden Rule might still apply in East San Diego, but the East San Diego Press suggested local residents would do well to adopt a supplemental credo: "I am a citizen of East San Diego, of California and of the United States. It is my right and my duty to

make an honest living and to be comfortable and happy. It is my privilege and my duty to help others to secure these benefits. I will work hard and play fair. I will be kind to all, especially to little children, to old people, to the unfortunate and to animals. I will help to make East San Diego a clean, beautiful and law-abiding city. These are the best services I can render to my city, my state and my country.”

Carnegie Offers a Library

Besides the Exposition in Balboa Park, one item of big news for East San Diego in 1915 was an offer from James Bertram, secretary of the Carnegie Library Corporation of New York, to grant \$7,500 to East San Diego for construction of a library, provided the city obtained suitable land for it and agreed to appropriate \$750 annually for its maintenance.

Bertram explained that the building would be of the same design as Carnegie libraries in other cities: a rectangular structure with one story at street level and a basement. A vestibule would afford access to the street-level floor, which could be subdivided with bookcases. A large lecture hall, suitable for use as a community meeting room, would be the most prominent feature of the basement.

East San Diego’s Progress and Prosperity Club agreed to form a committee to find a suitable site for the library and to fundraise for books and staffing.

Trolleys, Tipplers and Trees

A hint from the San Diego Electric Railway that it might have to drop its service to East San Diego was the basis of a controversy, which preoccupied the city’s leadership for several months. William Clayton, the trolley line’s manager, commented in July of 1915 that between the city’s demands for more trolley company-funded paving on University Avenue and competition from jitney operations for passengers in East San Diego, the company was so financially pressed that it might be better off if its franchise in East San Diego were cancelled.

“So keenly do we feel the situation that I can say to you frankly if it be possible for us to abandon or agreeable to your body to cancel our franchise, we would welcome its abandonment or cancellation with relief,” Clayton elaborated in a letter to city trustees in September.

Rather than eliciting sympathy, Clayton’s comments caused quite a bit of anger in East San Diego, with residents complaining at one meeting of the board of trustees that Clayton’s implied threat had caused “thousands and thousands of dollars worth of damage to East San Diego,” and even prompted scores of families to leave East San Diego in fear of being stranded without transportation.

The board of trustees passed a resolution suggesting that the only way Clayton could undo the damage would be by extending the trolley another eight blocks along University Avenue—as had some time ago been promised. Eventually, the terminus of the University Avenue line was moved east from Fairmount Avenue to Euclid Street.

The “wet” versus “dry” controversy erupted again in November of 1915 when the Board of Trustees voted to make the sale or gift of alcoholic beverages illegal. Petitions promptly were circulated to force an election on the question. By a 2-1 margin, in January of 1916, the voters repealed the “dry” ordinance. But as a compromise, it remained illegal to sell liquor in the downtown section of East San Diego.

In March of 1916, the Progress and Prosperity Club set about planting 400 acacia trees along University Avenue, from East San Diego’s boundary with San Diego on the west to the La Mesa city limit on the east. Mayor Capps of San Diego and William Pfahler, president of the East San Diego Board of Trustees, each had a tree named after them in ceremonies. Capps said the action in East San Diego might set an example for his own city. “Trees thrive in San Diego,” he said. “Our beautiful park and Exposition grounds are fine proof of it. They should be thriving the same way today on all the residence streets of our city. I hope that this movement, started by the boosters of East San Diego, will force San Diego to see the light. This Progress and Prosperity Club is about the liveliest organization I ever saw. It seems that you boys are behind almost every really big movement in your city.”

Dr. H.S. Welch, long recovered from his gunshot wounds, purchased one of the trees for 50 cents, and more acacias were purchased by the Marston Company, Pacific Building Company, East San Diego State Bank, United States National Bank and the Simon Levi Company.

A Case of Anti-Semitism

The East San Diego Press showed its bigoted side on April 7, 1916, with a story headlined “Shafer Pulls Jew Stunt on Attorney.” Pretending to compliment Shafer, the story began “When it comes to playing the Jew in regard to saving the city money, the people of San Diego have to raise their hats to City Trustee Ira Shafer, chairman of the city finance committee.”

The story went on to explain that warrants issued by the city had been cashed at discount by various banks, including the Security Savings Bank of San Diego, which then went to the City of East San Diego to demand full payment on a warrant for \$292.24. When the bank’s representative finished talking, “Shafer spoke up and asked him if he was willing to settle for \$250. The compromise did not meet favorably with the attorney and he again commenced to argue how his clients had been holding the warrants for the past 2 ½ years and was entitled to interest on them. Shafer was settled in his opinion that the warrants should be discounted to the city and when the attorney realized that the board was with Shafer, he offered to make settlement for \$275 and his proposition was accepted by the Trustees... The city just saved \$17.24 on the settlement.”

In a city then almost entirely white and Christian, the “Jew Stunt” headline had a devastating effect on Shafer’s candidacy for reelection. He came in sixth in a contest for which only five trustees positions were available. Two non-Jewish incumbents were also defeated.

Another Disincorporation Battle

The new Board of Trustees was divided between adherents of two groups with laudable names: the Civic League, which wanted the city to become “dry” again, and the Efficient Government Club, which favored continued permission for the sale of liquor in East San Diego. The factions got into an unrelated argument about whether trustees meetings should be held during the day or in the evening, and ended up getting so mad at each other that those who favored continuing having meetings at night boycotted the new daytime meetings favored by the slim majority. Amid the ruckus, someone wondered what the City Charter might have to say on the subject. The document couldn’t be found. “Some believe that former City Attorney Lester D. Welch had the paper and he had taken it to Honduras with him, or that H.M. Holleman, who was the first president of the board of trustees, may know something about it. Holleman is back in Virginia,” reported The Press.

Political controversy in East San Diego had a predictable result: another voter petition for disincorporation. Filed in November of 1916, the petition was scrutinized by the Board of Trustees for possible instances of signature fraud—a process that delayed the election to the following August, when voters again decided that East San Diego should remain a separate city.

The offer by the Carnegie Library Corporation to provide \$10,000 for construction of a library – up from the initial \$7,500 offer – proved a factor in that election. The East San Diego Press reported in May of 1917 that “the Carnegie Corporation will not build a library anywhere but within the city limits of an incorporated city, neither will they appropriate any money for a building in this section should the people decide to annex to San Diego.”

The library committee of the Progress and Prosperity Club, in the meantime, had finally found a site for the library at the southeast corner of Fairmount and Anna Streets. With the latest disincorporation effort safely defeated, City Trustees on Sept. 4, 1917 approved an annual appropriation of \$1,000 for maintenance—a figure that had been increased from \$750 as part of the deal with the Carnegie Library Corporation for a \$10,000 grant. The 100-foot wide lot was purchased for \$1,400.

Although the rhythm of life in East San Diego appeared to have a certain normalcy—with boosters and those wishing to disincorporate engaged in political jousting—the declaration of war by President Woodrow Wilson on April 4, 1917 soon focused the city’s energies on a struggle far more important.

World War I

On Nov. 2, 1917, The Press reported that in response to a national call for economies, local housewives signed a pledge to save on every meal prepared at home. “Many of the women have pledged themselves to exclude from the table all pastry and preserves; this will greatly help to save sugar,” the newspaper said. “The ban in some homes has also been clamped down on fruits. In other homes, they have gone to the full extent of Hoover’s plea to save wheat by substitution of corn in its place, corn bread being the principal bread now used in homes.” Future President Herbert Hoover then was serving as head of the newly created Food Administration.

A headline in the April 26, 1918 edition announced “East San Diego Has Honor Flag,” an honor signifying the city had exceeded its quota in purchasing liberty bonds. On May 17, the paper reported “East San Diego to Have Own Ambulance at Front,” explaining that local businesses had contributed enough funds to purchase and equip an ambulance for duty in Europe. On Oct. 25, 1918, the paper reported “Two Stars Added to Our Liberty Loan Flag” – an honor bestowed on the city because it had raised \$50,300, more than double its \$22,500 allocation. The most welcome headline of all came Nov. 15, 1918: “Allies Victors in World War, Peace Pact Signed.”

Local concerns did not stop during the war, of course; they just seemed less pressing. In 1918, businesses continued to try to attract new residents, with one advertisement—decorated with a border of swastikas, which had not yet become a symbol of Germany’s Nazi party—describing East San Diego in particularly glowing terms:

East San Diego, the city of homes, is situated between the mountains and the sea, five miles from the heart of San Diego proper. On three sides are hills and mountains, and on a clear day one can see range after range, one vast panorama of grandeur. On the southwest are the marine views in the vicinity of Imperial Beach and National City; the eye observed on traveling further westward, the harbor proper and Coronado Islands and Point Loma. When you consider these natural advantages, can you blame the citizens of this fast-growing community for being boosters? From sagebrush land to a city of 6,000 population is the record made by East San Diego in six years time. The city is connected with San Diego proper by electric railway with 25-cents carfare. It is the home city of the working men of San Diego. East San Diego has no saloons or jails; maintains the best of public schools, and churches of all denominations are represented here. Practically all kinds of commercial houses are represented in the business district of the city. In East San Diego practically eight out of every ten families own their own homes, hence the name, or slogan “residential city.” The assessed valuation of East San Diego is \$3 million, and the city has not one cent of bonded indebtedness. The city was incorporated in 1912, and comprises an area of six square miles. Since being incorporated over \$600,000 has been spent on street improvement work and today it has more miles of improved streets than any other city its size in the world. Only last year the citizens expended \$100,000 in paving the main thoroughfare of the city with asphaltum. Roughly figured East San Diego has improved over thirty miles of streets within the past three years. The United States government is today completing work on the world’s most powerful wireless station, right on the southeast boundary of the city. This station when completed will be capable of flashing a message to any part of the world, both day and night. The citizens of East San Diego have recently built a road leading from the main thoroughfare of the city to the station. The money expended on the road was raised by popular subscription. East San Diego’s elevation is 400 foot above the sea, and this makes the city practically free from the fogs, which so often visit coast cities. It is the climate of East San Diego which has induced hundreds to locate here

within the past three years. And that is what will make hundreds of others come to East San Diego to spend their declining years in peace and happiness. The Progress and Prosperity Club, or Chamber of Commerce, has been instrumental in starting the following improvements: Road to the radio station and the planting of black acacia trees along University Avenue.

The Library and the Flu

At the end of February, 1918, ground was finally broken for the Carnegie Library and Anna and Fairmount Avenues. Various citizens took turns turning shovels-full of earth, as photographers took pictures to memorialize the occasion. "The building, which will have a foundation of concrete, will be built of yellow tile, with red brick cornice and will be set back from Fairmount Avenue about twenty five feet and facing this street," The Press reported.

So important to the city's self-image was the library, that, in the April, 1918 election for the Board of Trustees was Donald B. Goldsmith, the member of the Progress and Prosperity Club who had spearheaded the successful negotiations with the Carnegie Library commission. The newspaper noted that Goldsmith, at 26, was the youngest of the candidates for the City Council. Only a day before the election, he had celebrated both his birthday and his wedding anniversary, "so you can readily see why Donald B. was the happiest man in town."

With World War I over, a major celebration was planned Dec. 3, 1918, to dedicate the Carnegie Library. The Press relayed the information that "everyone is requested to bring a book to be donated to the library on that evening. There will be many speakers of note from San Diego and a splendid ceremony is assured."

Between the publication of the newspaper on Friday and the planned Tuesday celebration, however, disaster in the form of a major flu epidemic intervened. The city's Health Board on Sunday clamped a quarantine on the city, requiring even churches to forego mass meetings. Masks were issued to residents, to be worn particularly in the part of the city bounded by Anna, Highland, Klauber and Sisson Avenues. The threat did not abate until just before Christmas, 1918.

The Impossible Railroad

The San Diego and Arizona Railroad, called the "Impossible Railroad" because of the rugged terrain it had to cross, at last was completed in 1919, with John D. Spreckels driving the golden spike. But the long-dreamed business, which San Diego had counted upon with the linkage of San Diego Bay to the transcontinental railroad lines, did not materialize in any great volume, for a variety of reasons. Floods on more than one occasion washed out the tracks. Spreckels' decision to build part of the line in Mexico held the railroad hostage to political upheaval in that country. Perhaps most important, was the fact that shipping patterns between Los Angeles and the rest of the continental United States already had been established.

On the horizon, was a major competitor for the nation's railroads: large trucks, capable of delivering goods from the door of a factory to the door of a store, almost anywhere in the country. Spreckels died in 1926, his great San Diego dream unrealized. His family sold his railroad in 1932 to the Southern Pacific, which renamed it the San Diego and Arizona Eastern. It never became the factor in trade that had fueled speculators' dreams and much of San Diego's development.

Anti-Asian Prejudice

Following the end of World War I, some of the city residents' old prejudices against people who were "different" began to reassert themselves. In particular, there was angry debate about whether Asians ought to be prohibited from immigrating to the United States, with The Press leaving no doubt about its bigoted view of the matter. Here is how it reported a debate staged in June of 1920 by the Progress and Prosperity Club:

E.F. Hastings, president of the Anti-Asiatic Association, was present and presented many interesting statements and figures that showed what a menace the brown race is and the need of legislation, either state or national to control and eliminate the ever-increasing numbers of Asiatics that are coming into this country. One fact that was brought out and that was rather startling was that nearly thirty thousand Japs have been born in this country since 1906 and that while these American-born people have all the rights of citizenship in America they are still citizens of Japan, and as such owe their allegiance to the Mikado....

An article in a similar vein in July of 1920 concluded with the plea: "Anyone who has not signed the petition being circulated on the Jap question should attend to this duty at once."

High School Controversy

Attention turned to controversies closer to home in 1921 when a dispute erupted between the East San Diego School District and the San Diego School District over the fate of 150 high school students. Because East San Diego had no high school of its own, students attended classes in neighboring San Diego, with the East San Diego School District transferring tax money for that purpose. The San Diego School District estimated that the annual payment of \$10,500 was only half of what was required, and threatened that unless another \$10,500 was paid, the students might be expelled from classes.

This prompted an understandable outcry in East San Diego, with some suggesting that the suburban city would be better off building its own high school than submitting to such high-handedness. An examination of East San Diego's strapped finances soon made clear that equipping a high school and paying its teachers would be far more expensive, and the two sides sat down for discussions. Eventually a compromise was worked out, with San Diego School Board President Jacob Weinberger—who later would become a revered federal judge in San Diego—participating in the reconciliation session.

Water, Water Needed Everywhere

Longer lasting, and in the end far more consequential, was the dispute that erupted in 1922 over East San Diego's water supply situation. Originally the private Fairmount Water Company supplied the city's needs. That institution became the subject of increasing complaints, however, as East San Diego's population reached, and later exceeded, 10,000. Water lines did not stretch to some new parts of the city. In older parts of the city, pipes often needed repair. Fires gave dramatic evidence that something needed to be done. Volunteer firemen complained that they would arrive at the burning buildings in sufficient time to fight the fires, only to find the water pressure was insufficient to put out the blazes.

City trustees decided that it would be more efficient to build a new water distribution system than to acquire and repair the system owned by the Fairmount Water Company. So they voted to put a \$260,000 bond issue on the ballot. The East San Diego Press kept up a drumfire of favorable publicity about a new water system. It reported that the Cuyamaca Water Company, owned by Col. Ed Fletcher, had promised to supply the city's water needs at "reasonable rates." It also reported that the water bonds had the support both of the venerable Progress and Prosperity Club and the new East San Diego Chamber of Commerce, which the older club's members had fostered. While a majority of the voters were persuaded, the vote total fell 142 votes short of the two-thirds margin required for the bonds to be approved.

Noting that 60 percent of the electorate had favored the bonds, the trustees directed the city engineer to devise a methodology to construct the new water system without use of bonds. Fletcher, wanting to sell water to the city, offered as a "neutral party" to help negotiate the sale of the Fairmount Water Company to the city at a reasonable price. Eventually the beleaguered owners agreed to sell the company for \$31,000. To expedite the sale, Fletcher offered to purchase the Fairmount Water Company, and then turn around and lease it to the city. But eventually it was decided the city itself should be the purchaser. Voters were asked to approve the deal in a November election, which also placed before them a \$17,000 school bond measure. Once again, a majority of voters—850 in favor, 751 opposed—supported the water bonds, but that was far less than the two-thirds majority required. School bonds, on the other hand, were approved by the requisite margin, with 418 voters in favor and 175 opposed.

Disincorporation: The Final Vote

A month before the election, there was another ominous development. Citizens favoring the disincorporation of the city and its annexation to San Diego again presented to the city a petition demanding a vote on the matter. As had been the pattern in East San Diego politics, the trustees found that the petitions had certain legal deficiencies, and therefore, the issue could not be put on the ballot. The disincorporationists decided to challenge their decision in court.

As 1923 dawned, there was a confluence of the two controversies. The same board of trustees that refused to permit citizens to vote on whether East San Diego should be annexed to San Diego now was trying desperately to come up with some sort of solution

to the water crisis. The board proposed creating an assessment district, which would impose fees sufficient to raise the \$31,000 necessary to purchase the Fairmount Water Company. Forces favoring disincorporation went to court to get an injunction against the plan. Recall petitions were circulated successfully against members of the Board of Trustees. Meanwhile, the court case over the annexation petitions dragged on for months, with the court not deciding for the annexationist cause until May 24th. Hence, both a recall election and an election on annexation were scheduled within a short time of each other.

Goldsmith, whose political career had begun so brightly in the wake of his success in obtaining the Carnegie Library for East San Diego, now was among those facing recall. In a long letter to the San Diego Sun, he said even if he were defeated, and the city came under the control of his political adversaries, he would vote against annexation in the election that would quickly follow. He explained that East San Diego, with all its problems, enjoyed a lower tax rate than San Diego, had lower bonded indebtedness, lower water rates (even with the acquisition), and, politics aside, had a unique sense of community spirit which expressed itself in support for a municipal band, a community Christmas tree, food baskets for the needy and, he couldn't resist adding, "the best branch library in San Diego County."

Nearly to the eve of the recall election, the political stew kept boiling. Two women who had circulated recall petitions were charged with submitting false affidavits, while charges against a third woman were dismissed for lack of evidence. Despite evidence of political trickery in the petition drive, the fate of the city's five trustees was sealed. According to the semi-official vote tally, all five were recalled: Goldsmith by a vote of 1,043 to 1,004; William Martin by just three votes, 1,028 to 1,025; Daniel J. Martin; 1,026 to 1,009; John L. McCurdy, 1,044 to 1,010, and Ray Sauer Jr., 1,044 to 981. Voters simultaneously chose Oliver Hansbrough, Clator E. Shepherd, Dr. Montrose W. Clare, Frank A. Thomas and John M. Valleau to replace the defeated trustees.

But the battle was far from over. At the end of May, the recalled trustees refused to order an official canvass of the election results, once again citing possible irregularities. They referred the matter to the City Attorney for investigation. A group called the Citizens Protective League of East San Diego, contending that the voters' franchise was being threatened, promptly vowed, "We're going to court to find out about this." Superior Court Judge C.N. Andrews issued a writ of mandamus directing the trustees to perform the canvass, and directed that thereafter "each of you vacate your office as trustees aforesaid and cease to act as such, or that you show cause before the court June 6, why you have not done so." Unrepentant, the trustees filed an appeal to his decision, and the judge delayed its effective date pending a hearing before a Los Angeles appeals court.

The case still was pending before the appeals court on June 26, when East San Diego voters went to the polls to decide the annexation issue. By a margin of 1,344 to 1,109, voters decided to consolidate with San Diego. But there still was more controversy to endure before the matter could be settled. Inasmuch as annexing East San Diego would have financial consequences for the City of San Diego, officials in the latter city decided

a referendum would be required to determine whether to go forward with the consolidation.

This gave hope to such annexation opponents in East San Diego as Roy O. Akers, publisher of the East San Diego Press who filed a suit to have the courts declare the election illegal. In documents he contended that the petitions that forced the election did not have the requisite 25 percent of the registered voters in East San Diego. Furthermore, he argued, some of the signatures that were turned in were “rank forgeries.”

Realtors in San Diego, meanwhile, inaugurated a campaign on behalf of annexation. J. P. Hymer of the realty board explained: “if we annex East San Diego, we can easily bring in Normal Heights, Kensington Park, and other districts that should be in the city.”

Continuing in their refusal to resign, the old trustees of East San Diego attempted to govern the city as if nothing had happened. In August, they voted to pave 150 blocks in the city on a “district-wide” plan, upsetting some residents who believed the paving contracts should be let block-by-block, with a local option for paving specifications. Petitions were signed urging the trustees to reconsider.

San Diego Takes Over

At last, in October, San Diego voters approved the annexation, but even then, the East San Diego trustees still were not persuaded. Through the courts, they continued to seek a ruling that the annexation election had been illegal. They launched at least eleven court cases over a two-year time span in an effort to reverse the annexation, but all were turned down. Nevertheless, though the City of East San Diego was supposed to pass out of existence on Dec. 31, 1923, the situation remained in limbo through the first half of 1924.

Eventually, East San Diego’s trustees capitulated rather than see services deteriorate for lack of funding. Pending resolution of the dispute, San Diego had allocated only a token \$15 per month to support East San Diego’s volunteer fire department – not enough to cover the costs of maintenance, fuel for the truck, and chemical retardants to fight fires. Members of the fire department, who included some of the recalled officials of East San Diego, decided in May to disband on June 1, 1924. This prompted the City of San Diego to add a new fire department division for East San Diego. It also authorized the assignment to the area of a new 375-gallon fire engine, and okayed the promotion of officers to command the new squad. Little by little, adequate services were returning to East San Diego.

On June 9, the San Diego City Council decided to approve funds for the East San Diego library to prevent it from being forced to close. Before annexation, the County of San Diego and the city of East San Diego had an arrangement by which the city provided maintenance for the building, the county provided the reading material, and both governmental units shared the cost of salaries. With East San Diego now unable to pay its share of the salaries, the county threatened to pull out of the arrangement. The City of

San Diego agreed to pick up those expenses until Jan. 1, 1925, long enough to pay the costs of replacing the county-provided books. Meanwhile, the final court to hear the annexation matter decided consolidation of the two cities must take effect by late February, 1925.

Building Boom

Amid all the political and legal squabbling, there were some other important developments in the history of East San Diego. On Aug. 11, 1923, the Bank of East San Diego opened its doors in what The Press described as “bright new and commodious” quarters of brick and hollow tile construction at the corner of University and Van Dyke avenues. Among the officers was John L. McCurdy, one of the city’s recalled trustees. Architect Frank P. Allen Jr. designed another bank building in City Heights in 1926, which attracted architectural notice: the two-story, Spanish Renaissance-style First Trust and Savings Bank at the corner of Fairmount and University.

Not far away, at the corner of Euclid and University, a substation which had been erected to feed power to the streetcar tracks, was made obsolete by the installation of overhead electrical lines. David H. Ryan, a paving contractor, purchased the building and remodeled it into the Egyptian Garage – which with its pilasters topped with pharaoh heads became a familiar landmark. To the roofline of an addition, Ryan added a semi-obelisk with a bas relief of the Egyptian moon god, Thoth. Several years later, Ryan built the best-known landmark of the City Heights area, the whimsical tower at 4757 University Avenue. Originally, the tower had eight sides, with swinging double doors providing entry through five sides. On the second floor was a glassed-in observation deck. Above that rose a 110-foot high tower of zigzag modern design, which in the view of many aped the architecture of the Empire State Building. Alas, the tower’s four clocks proved to be irresistible targets to youths with slingshots, who regularly shot out the clock faces. A great believer in East San Diego, Ryan owned three of the five corners where Euclid, University and Reno avenues come together, and he was able to stretch a sign proclaiming the intersection to be the Euclid Center. To celebrate the opening of the Tower, traffic was banned from the intersection to permit a great public dance and picnic.

Hoover High School

Ground was broken in 1929 for the new Herbert Hoover High School, which the San Diego school district named after America’s new president. The school opened Sept. 2, 1930. Initially, the teams that played for the high school at 4474 El Cajon Blvd were known as the Presidents, but quite quickly they were renamed the Cardinals. The school’s colors became cardinal and white – the same as those at Stanford University, which had been President Hoover’s alma mater. In an early school publication, students described their new high school enthusiastically:

The three story administration building in a buff colored stucco is solid and durable, yet it is built along peaceful lines. In many ways it resembles Spanish architecture. From the wide halls one enters well-lighted classrooms. The large windows, extra high ceiling, and cool breeze make the rooms pleasant for study. The woodwork, which is colored a soft green, is pleasing and restful to the eye. The new type of student desks, which are made of dark wood, are comfortable and practical. The library is the pride of the school. The light flickers through amber tinted windows into a picturesque room with a delightful balcony. The gymnasiums are so attractively arranged that they make exercise a joy. The new auditorium, though not completed, is sure to reveal beauty and comfort. The fact that the drinking fountains enable two students to drink at the same time is very agreeable to everyone.

The Coming of the Highway Era

Perhaps San Diego's dreams to become a great railroad terminus had come to naught, but the coming of steady truck and automobile traffic on the great American highway revived San Diego's belief that it had a date with destiny. Nowhere was this more true than in East San Diego, where the business community, led by George Kerrigan, focused during the early 1930s on ways to make their area more accessible to motorists. In particular, Kerrigan pushed the county Board of Supervisors to pave various roadways between East San Diego and the Kearny Mesa area. The Press reported in January, 1932, that the "completion of the Fairmount-Murphy Canyon road project will mean much to East San Diego ... as the highway will link the eastern, southern and northern ends of the county and give a modern paved road to the Mexican border. The paving will start at the northern end of Fairmount Avenue, then proceed through Mahogany Canyon, Mission Valley along a portion of the Del Rio road, and Murphy Canyon to connect with the Inland Highway at Camp Kearny Mesa." When the paving was finished in September of 1932, The Press exulted "the newly paved route has already been declared a portion of the secondary highway system of the state."

That only whetted East San Diego's appetite for more highways. "A hub is being made slowly but surely of East San Diego by the gradual construction of better roads leading into it," The Press reported in December. "Since the paving of the Murphy-Fairmount Canyon to the north, business interests in this section have already noticed considerably more travel through this section... (W)ith the construction of Home Avenue, East San Diego continues to become more of a hub. Brushing out of this new outlet to points south as well as to the downtown section is well underway as steam shovels are expected to be on the job with the grading almost any day."

In February, 1933, the Fairmount-Murphy Canyon route was among 425 miles of secondary road in San Diego eligible for state maintenance funds—an appropriation which could free up local funds for other highway projects. The area's highway mania found expression in July in a proposal to incorporate University Avenue into U.S. Highway 80, as well as in a proud report, published in August of 1933, that East San Diego officially had become part of State Highway 77—the number for the route that led from the coast highway at Torrey Pines inland to Kearny Mesa and then down Murphy Canyon to Mission Valley and Fairmount Avenue. Six years later, the area's attention was turning south. Businesses in the area won a promise from state Senator Ed Fletcher

that he would support extending the secondary highway system from East San Diego down Euclid Avenue to the Navy destroyer base at 24th Street.

Depression and War

There were other matters that East San Diegans worried about during the 1930s, the Great Depression and the growing likelihood of war with Nazi Germany high among them. In November of 1933, residents of East San Diego—whose \$250,000 in deposits had been frozen--sent an urgent petition to President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

We the undersigned depositors of the closed Bank of East San Diego, California, respectfully petition you to have the present status of this bank investigated with the view of getting some immediate relief through Federal Aid. This bank has never opened its doors for regular business since you declared the Bank Holiday in March, and was placed in the hands of the State Banking Department for liquidation. There are some 1,500 citizen depositors of this little community who stand to lose all they have, not only in money but also property they have and which they cannot hope to hold much longer, unless relief can be had as above requested and these same citizens are facing the poor farm or starvation. We feel that there is something that you can do to safeguard our interest in this matter which will help to ease the situation as shown above.

Even token relief, however, was not quick in coming either from the federal government or the state government, which had chartered the bank. In such circumstances, East San Diegans did the best they could to improve their financial situations and to help each other. The Hoover High School PTA held a “White Elephant Party” to raise money for the student aid fund, “so badly needed.” On June 7, 1934, Hoover High School graduated its first adult education class – which The Press reported “for the most part is composed of men and women who because of work unemployment, sickness or added responsibilities were forced to give up their earlier education.”

With economic hard times came stresses on family life. Children were left unsupervised by parents trying to eke out a living or simply to find jobs. Vern Stanfield of the “character building department” of the YMCA lamented that of 1,800 boys in East San Diego, only 500 were associated with character building organizations while another 500 were, in one manner or another, subject to supervision by the juvenile court. This “deplorable situation reflect(s) directly upon the parents and the home surroundings and conditions,” he declared in early 1934.

There also was growing awareness that Adolph Hitler in Germany represented not only a threat to Europe but possibly to the world. The Race Relations Society, meeting at the Mexican Presbyterian Church on 30th Street, invited Rabbi H. Cerf Straus of Temple Beth Israel to lecture on the danger posed by such local Nazi sympathizers as the Ku Klux Klan and the Silver Legion. “Hitler is not content to keep his ideas in his own country, but they are being spread all over the world and even here in San Diego,” warned the rabbi. “They are against any race except the Aryan, yet there is no race of that name, which merely signifies a language...”

In the August 31, 1939 edition of The Press, literally only hours before the onset of the all-European phase of World War II, columnist George Ellis wondered “Does anyone know of a good cave if war comes?” The newspaper also recounted the life of German Jewish refugee Moritz Lichtenstein, a shoemaker who had been forbidden to practice any

trade except manual labor prior to his immigration in 1938 to East San Diego. “After talking to him it is our firm belief that the United States has gained a loyal and patriotic citizen,” The Press said. On Oct. 5, 1939, Assemblyman Paul Ritchie wrote a column expressing his belief that “patriotism demands that we stay out” of the war. But, like it or not, signs of the coming war were being seen in East San Diego. In November 1939, the proposed swimming pool for Hoover High School was scrapped; instead the area was set aside for an ROTC armory. On March 15, 1940, the Press carried a story reflecting a trend all across the country: “Three ESD Boys Enlist in Navy.” In March of 1942, three months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, The Press’s own co-editors Bob Wade and H. Billy Miller celebrated the newspaper’s 30th anniversary by enlisting in the Army. Although assigned to different theatres of the war, the two would hone their writing skills in their correspondence, and in peacetime collaborated on mystery novels under the pseudonym Wade Miller.

Vendors and Batters

Although the Depression and the War were heavy times, they were not without humor. The “great fruit vendor war” amused residents briefly in August of 1932. Trying to earn a living, some vendors sold fruit from stands on University Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard – causing complaints from passersby who said the stands blocked their way, and from storeowners who said the stands were unfair competition for merchants who rented their stores. San Diego Police Chief Arthur H. Hill ordered the vendors to find some place besides the public sidewalks for their enterprises, an order which some vendors decided to defy. After being arrested twice in ten days by the police, vendors Sam Kahn, Jacqueline Shapiro, Herman Sarfan, Andy Hogan, Bert Strauss and George Wilkinson agreed to “hoist the white flag,” according to The Press. “And thus ended the curb display war which raged exactly six days,” the newspaper added.

East San Diego also had a case of ongoing pride and fascination with an alumnus of Hoover High School. Ted Williams was truly a “local boy made good” – he had made it all the way to baseball’s American League. In 1939, he was fast becoming a legendary player for the Boston Red Sox and the scourge of opposing pitchers. Only in East San Diego, the powerful batter wasn’t called “Ted” Williams. He was and remained “Teddy” Williams, to the local folks who watched him come up through high school. Incidentally, his alma mater had grown from the 960 students who had enrolled in 1930 to 2,200 students. In those same 12 years in 1942 the corps of 40 teachers had grown to 88 – all a reflection of what had been a remarkable growth spurt for East San Diego in the preceding decade.

A promotional piece for the area appearing in The San Diego Union in 1936 noted proudly:

Since 1932, population of East San Diego had doubled...East San Diego now has its own branch city hall on University Ave at Van Dyke. Here too is a police substation, a branch of the water department and a fire station. There is a second fire station at El Cajon and College Way. East San Diego has its own bank, department and variety stores, specialty shops, millinery shops, two theatres—in fact every type of business house... ‘A child can enter the first grade in grammar

school and go through college, all within the East San Diego,' said Carl Meeker, president and one of the organizers of the East San Diego Chamber of Commerce....

The Seven-Point Plan

Good as this was, a new activist publisher of the East San Diego Press, decided in 1938 to set out on a civic improvement campaign that envisioned the added benefit of building a large circulation for his newspaper. Publisher Francis R. Gleeson published in February a list of seven improvements for the East San Diego area, for which his newspaper would campaign. They were: 1) a gymnasium for Herbert Hoover High School; 2) improvement of Home Avenue; 3) establishment of crosstown bus service; 4) a municipal swimming pool; 5) an adult recreation center; 6) 16 new tennis courts; and 7) establishment of a Boys Club under supervision of the City Recreation Department.

A lover of politics, Gleeson followed up his announcement with news about several important endorsements for East San Diego's civic improvement program. Under a photograph of each politician, and a friendly headline, Gleeson gave editorial space to every officeholder who pledged support for the improvements. Congressman Ed Izac set the tone for the others: "It is with great pleasure that I add my hearty encouragement and extend my assurance of support to the splendid civic improvement program being sponsored by the Press," the congressman wrote. "It is a welcome change to see a real, live community-building newspaper in East San Diego." Nearby on page 1 was a picture of State Sen. Ed Fletcher, and his message: "I will be pleased to help in any way I can and am particularly interested in the gymnasium and swimming pool." Yet another message of fealty came from Assemblyman Paul Ritchie: "You may count on me to be of any assistance possible."

For the most part, the improvements sought were the province of local officials, though members of the state Legislature and members of Congress could be of assistance in securing grants from their respective levels of government. Important as their future financial help might be, Gleeson also understood the psychology of creating a political bandwagon. Soon other officeholders were climbing aboard the publicity train. County Supervisor John D. Faddis, in the newspaper's March 18 issue, was happy to be quoted as saying: "Your efforts to assist in checking this alarming increase in delinquency by backing a recreational and educational program will surely meet with wide approval. While such a constructive program is within the jurisdiction of city administrative officials, I feel certain that the county is willing to offer all possible assistance."

San Diego School Board President Jacob Weinberger, who soon would run unsuccessfully for mayor of San Diego, became the first official with any say-so to pledge his support for the civic improvement program, although like many politicians he tried to leave himself some wriggle room.

"I believe the necessity for these facilities is of paramount importance to the city as a whole and provision should be made to get the gymnasium under way as soon as he

budget can be approved,” Weinberger declared to The Press. “The only problem confronting us is the working out of the amount of money to be allocated for this purpose. I am in favor of putting aside sufficient money to complete the plan, if the amount asked for is not out of proportion to actual needs, or at least enough to cover the first unit of a big plant.”

On April 22, the happy publisher had two big stories to trumpet on his front page. In one, he relayed an announcement from Congressman Izak that the Public Works Administration had approved a grant of \$122,000 for construction of gymnasiums at Hoover High School and Point Loma High School. The gymnasium had been Gleeson’s “first priority,” and the speed with which the appropriation was announced leads one to suspect that it already been in the Federal works, even before Gleeson had announced the campaign. If this all had been a bit of political theatre on the part of Gleeson and Izak, it nevertheless was effective. Elsewhere on the front page, he announced that the San Diego City Council had approved a small Works Project Administration project, open air structure to serve as an adult recreation center, to be built for a price of \$983.

The specifications provide for a project 40 feet wide by 42 feet deep adjoining the American Legion building on Fairmount Avenue,” the Press reported. “A wall, 10 feet high, will enclose the center, over which will be a tile roof extending 7 feet inside, allowing full coverage overhead from the elements. A landscaped patio on about 20 feet square will serve as a middle ground around which will be decomposed granite walks. There will be 14 booths, each with a table and four benches, to seat eight comfortably. Two horseshoe courts are provided at the rear of the center.

So there, in a few short months of the orchestrated campaign, were Points 1 and 5 of the 7-point program already realized. Which of the seven points would be realized next? Readers of the Press did not have to wait too long to find out. On June 17, the newspaper reported that the East San Diego Chamber of Commerce had appointed a committee to recruit other groups to persuade transit officials that a crosstown bus route was necessary. Managers of the bus line were dubious that anyone would want to ride on the proposed route, which would proceed, according to The Press, “from a southern terminus at the Hamilton school on Fairmount Avenue, northward along Fairmount to El Cajon Boulevard, west on El Cajon to Marlborough, then north on Marlborough to Circle Drive, and return.” Under pressure from the business community—backed by politicians—the company agreed in December to give the route a test. So, as The Press’s circulation continued to climb, Point 3 of the 7-point program was in effect.

In June 1939, the paper announced that Home Avenue, extending from Euclid and University to Fairmount Avenue, would open to traffic in two weeks – thus realizing another plank of the civic improvement platform.

It wasn’t a municipal swimming pool, exactly, but the pool at the Hulburt Grove Inn was opened to the public, with the paper pronouncing the establishment that also boasted cabins and a dining room to be a “Mecca” for East San Diego residents. It would be hard to argue that a fifth point in the 7-point program had been realized, but one would have to give The Press credit for continuing to chip away at its community goals. By the time that

the United States entered World War II, causing everyone in the country to reprioritize, the scrappy newspaper had made remarkable progress on its 7-point program..

Post-War Recovery

World War II was the all-consuming focus of East San Diego families, a large number of whom either had members in the military or worked in defense-related industries at San Diego Bay. After the war ended in 1945, East San Diego began to regain its civic momentum, albeit slowly. In 1947, City Councilman Ernest J. Boud urged that a 30-acre land parcel between 52nd and 54th Street be developed into a park, complaining that up to then, there was “only one-developed recreation area east of 30th Street.” His reference was to De La Cruz Park at 39th Street and Landis, which would also become the focus of development efforts over the next decade.

The 1950 census indicated the population for the City Heights section of East San Diego was approximately 30,100 persons of whom 97 percent were white, 2 percent were black, and 1 percent were of other races. There were 10,300 housing units in the area, of which 91 percent were single-family residences. Multiple family units comprised the balance. In 62 percent of these dwellings, the owner lived on the premises. Over the next decade, the area became somewhat more dense and diverse, census figures for 1960 showed the area’s population to be 37,500 residents, with 93 percent white, 2 percent black and 5 percent Hispanic.

Although the population was overwhelmingly white, it was not homogenous. European immigrants were attracted to the blue-collar neighborhoods, which featured stucco bungalows and palm trees. The adult school division of Hoover High School announced in October 1952 that it would offer free classes in English to the foreign-born, as well as citizenship classes.

In 1953, City Councilman George Kerrigan took up where his predecessor, Councilman Boud, had left off, announcing that the large parcel along 54th Street had been incorporated into the city’s master plan as parkland. “The rapid influx of people into the East San Diego area, and the extensive residential building program of this area points up the need for the rapid development of the park,” he said. He further noted that a new park was not the only need precipitated by growth. Inadequate planning for sewers, storm drains, traffic and playgrounds had created headaches in the booming eastern portion of the city, west of the La Mesa city limits and east of 54th Street.

Parks, Playgrounds and Phones

Kerrigan, who had risen in prominence through the East San Diego Kiwanis Club and the East San Diego Chamber of Commerce, persuaded his colleagues on the San Diego City Council to appropriate \$34,000 for grading and terracing of the new park land, a factor in his easy reelection that year. It took another two years before the park—named “Colina del Sol” meaning “Hill of the Sun” by vote of school children—was opened with a clubhouse, backstops, terraced slopes, playground equipment and a new golf course.

Ceremonies on June 4, 1955 to open the park were appropriately festive, with Phyllis Fleming, Miss San Diego, on hand along with Smoky Rogers' Western Band, organist James Erickson, musicians from San Diego State and chimpanzees from the San Diego Zoo. The usual complement of local politicians and officeholders participated in ribbon cutting ceremonies, and members of the minor league San Diego Padres tested the new baseball diamond with a hitting contest.

Meanwhile, in 1954, the YMCA began a drive to build a large recreational center at De La Cruz Park, a center which would include the long-sought public swimming pool. Over the next year, the YMCA also developed two "Indian villages," a council ring, amphitheatre, nature trails, and picnic areas..

The Telephone company actually was another indicator of the growth of East San Diego during the 1950s. The decade saw the introduction of seven-digit telephone numbers, the undergrounding of conduit along El Cajon Boulevard, the opening of a new regional office at 4569 College Avenue, and the introduction of new technology known as "crossbar" dial equipment. District Manager Harry Depert explained that a "remarkable aspect of the crossbar is its 'brain'...If it runs into a snag on one circuit, it 'remembers' the subscribers' number while it searches for a circuit which is open."

The Korean War in the early 1950s had its echoes in East San Diego: Navy Lt. John E. Peters, whose parents resided on Euclid Avenue, was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with two Gold Stars and other medals for his service flying an Skyraider attack bomber. After the war ended in 1953, Marine Private First Class Robert L. Patterson, whose parents lived on El Cajon Blvd, was selected to serve as a policeman in the demilitarized zone between North Korea and South Korea.

The '50's Boom

The need for infrastructure improvements was demonstrated dramatically in March of 1954 when a water main broke on University Avenue, causing extensive damage to approximately eight stores. Anecdotal evidence of the area's continuing growth was provided in July by Dr. H.S. Maxwell, who went along streets bordering El Cajon Boulevard and counted the vans moving people into town. He counted 11 of them from places like Missouri, South Dakota, Ohio, Texas and Arizona.

Civic pride found expression in 1954 with the installation of a large sign bearing the legend "East San Diego" across the intersection of University and Fairmount. It would remain up through 1968. East San Diego also took pride in visiting celebrities and some local ones during the decade of the 1950s. Kermit Bowen, a former member of the East San Diego Lions Club, invented a stringed musical instrument that made playing chords easier, and his invention received some attention on the national television "Ed Sullivan Show." Monte Hall, star of the TV Show "Let's Make a Deal," served as the Grand Marshal of East San Diego's Easter Parade in 1954. A mock national political convention at Hoover High School in 1955 earned letters extolling the school from its

namesake, former President Herbert Hoover, as well as from California Gov. Goodwin Knight and U.S. Sen. Thomas Kuchel. And Gene Outka, a graduate of Hoover High School, won 1955's national oratory contest for high school students.

Areas of East San Diego experienced a great commercial growth spurt in the second half of the 1950s. In 1958, the Jewish Community Center was opened on a 6-acre tract on 54th Street that also housed the Hebrew Home for the Aged. The same year, a \$3.5 million, 28-acre shopping center at 60th and University Avenue opened with the University Bowling Lanes becoming perhaps its best known tenant. In 1959, a two story building was added to the campus of Wilson Junior High School, enabling the school to boast industrial arts shops, an art room, home economics room, choral music room, auxiliary facilities and 12 classrooms. The venerable East San Diego Christian Church, which had opened smaller doors in 1913, held groundbreaking ceremonies 46 years later for larger facilities at 44th and Wightman.

Shopping Center Competition

Later in 1959, the College Grove Shopping Center at College Avenue and Freeway 94 brought 90 stores to the area, as well as jobs for 1,500 people. College Grove, to the south of East San Diego, was the first of several regional shopping centers that would ultimately ring the University Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard shopping districts and deprive their merchants of customers. Grossmont Shopping Center and Parkway Plaza later would siphon off the customers from the east, while Mission Valley Shopping Center and Fashion Valley Shopping Center would win the loyalties of customers from the north and west.

Wanting to attract their share of customers, City Heights merchants urged the city to straighten out the curves on University Avenue between Euclid and 54th Street, saying the thoroughfare, left unimproved, resembled “a winding cowpath.” True though that may have been, far more than an improved roadway was necessary to staunch the business losses. Something—anything—was necessary to attract shoppers back to City Heights. The merchants got behind a campaign for the removal of parking meters along the two major thoroughfares. In a double-barreled offensive, the East San Diego Chamber of Commerce filed suit in Superior Court in opposition to the meters, while a new group called the Uptown Merchants Association circulated petitions to force an election to make the city end its meter program.

The organization's president, Allen Hitch, expressed concern that there were no parking meters whatsoever at the College Grove Center. By comparison, East San Diego seemed “rude” to visitors, much to the detriment of its merchants, Hitch argued. “After 25 years, parking meters have become passé, a hindrance to business, and are now rendered useless,” said Hitch. The city said it realized \$877,454 yearly in revenues from the devices—money it needed to balance its budget.

While standing aloof from the anti-parking meter drive, longtime City Councilman George Kerrigan sought to help the merchants by sponsoring an ordinance to widen

Fairmount Avenue, thereby eliminating the bottleneck on the main route from Mission Valley to the East San Diego business district. Ed Burt, speaking for the East San Diego Chamber of Commerce, agreed that the widening would be a “major improvement for downtown East San Diego.” Had Kerrigan championed the widening and also opposed the parking meters he might have won reelection. But instead, he went along with a decision by the City Council to deny the validity of the petitions for an election on the parking meter issue.

The stage was thereby set for Hitch to announce his candidacy for City Council against the three-term incumbent. “Switch to Hitch” was his campaign slogan. Returning city government to the will of the people was his promise. Although the East San Diego Press backed Kerrigan, Hitch on April 20 won the right to represent the 4th Council District. While on the council, Hitch would vote for a plan to densify the Mid City area—a plan which latter-day urban planners believe was the largest single mistake in the history of East San Diego.

Growth of Multi-Family Residences

The 1960 census detected a growing trend in City Heights, the substitution of multi-family dwellings for single-family residences. Whereas a decade before, only 9 percent of 10,300 units were multi-family dwellings, now it was 15 percent of 14,700 units. That percentage would double over the next decade, so that by the 1970 census, 31 percent of the 17,100 housing units in City Heights were multiple family units.

From the standpoint of merchants fighting the Goliath of the big shopping center, the residential growth seemed auspicious: more apartment buildings meant more customers living in the immediate area. The First National Bank relocated to larger East San Diego quarters at the corner of University Avenue and 44th Street in February of 1960 “because of the growth...that has taken place in this area and the volume of business now being done in our present East San Diego branch,” according to manager John Gunsallus. Another indicator came in April of 1960, when the East San Diego Presbyterian Church reported its 1,000th member recently had joined the congregation.

The old Carnegie Library, at Fairmount and Polk, could not handle the wear and tear of age and the growth in its user population. The San Diego City Council voted in March of 1961 to replace the building with a more modern facility.

Merchants decided to seek a slogan for East San Diego to help visitors better identify it. Florence Williams, who had lived in the area since 1912 when East San Diego incorporated and called itself “The Golden Rule City,” suggested the winning slogan: “Friendship Reigns Supreme.”

Friendship might reign supreme in East San Diego, but its businesses were floundering. Slogan or no slogan, they just were not attracting the customers they had in the pre-shopping center days. As politicians weighed various ways to revitalize the area, including a concept which waxed then waned for a large civic center at Fairmount and

University, merchants added up their own balance sheets.

Even the generally optimistic East San Diego Press had to report a dire prediction in a speech by Councilman Hitch to the local Chamber of Commerce: Businessmen “must pull up the area by its bootstraps or face the prospect of boarded up shops and plummeting property values”. According to Hitch, an increasing number of empty stores have begun to dot the business district. If a redevelopment plan is not soon implemented, he predicted, “empty shop windows will be broken and later boarded.”

In the face of such pessimism, business interests enthusiastically endorsed the idea that a new customer base could be created by more densely packing the neighboring residential areas. In 1962, when the Chamber of Commerce celebrated the 50th anniversary of the creation of the now defunct City of East San Diego, one of the important ceremonies revolved around the opening of the 36-unit Ambassador Apartments complex at the corner of Van Dyke and Polk Avenue. At the time, the San Diego Tribune reported that the “deluxe” complex was expected to pave the way for additional deluxe type residential apartments as well as for a general face-lifting for the entire community.

In April of 1964, similarly positive publicity greeted the new three-story University Terrace apartment building, which would provide 56 units at 58th and University Avenues, a few blocks east of City Heights.

Development Research Associates, a group hired by the Mid City Redevelopment Corp., foresaw East San Diego and North Park becoming “the major residential apartment area of San Diego.” Completion of Interstate 805 would make the area a traffic hub, the planning organization said. In August of 1965, the San Diego City Council—believing the doctrine that more dwelling units means more business, and prosperity for all — approved the Mid-City Plan. The East San Diego Press saw only positives in this development. It pointed out that already Pearson Ford had located on El Cajon Boulevard, a small shopping center was planned at 40th and Orange Streets, two new churches were under construction, other new buildings were on the drawing boards as were multi-story luxury apartments “too numerous to mention..”

Looking back from a vantage point of more than a quarter of century, Police Sgt. Andy Mills—who later would be called upon to develop a community policing plan for the area—thought the 1965 rezoning of East San Diego by the San Diego City Council was “the biggest, most disastrous policy they ever made, to allow them to put up all these cheesy apartment complexes.

And then developers came in, took out the single family homes, increased the density and made it very trashy housing. San Diego seems to go through cycles of booms in the population, and this was their answer in the 60s. Here it exploded, and as a result crime exploded. This is a result of a failed City Council policy from yesteryear. When you put these apartment complexes in, you had white flight—more importantly middle class flight—people said, ‘hey, I am not raising my kids in this type of neighborhood.’ The density changed and the typical problems of a tightly packed community began to take

place.

Mills had the benefit of hindsight. Business people at the time thought matters were getting better, and indeed there were many positive signs: The Board of Education approved a new baseball field for Hoover High School. Pearson Ford was a \$1.5 million dealership, something the public relations people in Detroit called “a look at tomorrow.” FedMart Store No. 16 opened its doors in August of 1965 in 6405 El Cajon Boulevard. A shopping center was proposed (but not built) for the corner of Fairmount and University Avenue. A new 11-acre park at the foot of Poplar Street was scheduled for development into Azalea Park. The City Council in 1967 authorized the widening of 19 blocks of University Avenue to four standard 12-foot traffic lanes, and two 8-foot parking lanes, along with new sidewalks, curbs, ornamental lighting, and underground utilities. Transit bus service expanded.

The widening of University Avenue spelled the doom of the East San Diego sign which had hung over the intersection at Fairmount Avenue. Taken down during the construction phase, it never was replaced. In a 1970 interview with the San Diego Union, William Geisinger, vice president and manager of the East San Diego branch of the Southern California First National Bank, was upbeat about the area’s prospects. “Developers are aware that we are in the center of things and that we have easy accessibility to everything,” he declared. “The result is an influx of apartments to replace the old, single-family dwellings. And it is having its effect on property values... There is a demand for land to build apartments on and the only way to get it is to tear down the old houses.”

Problems of Densification

Wilbur W. Easton, a former city clerk for the old City of East San Diego, sounded a more cautionary note: “On a weekend, it is hard to find a parking place within a block of your house,” he said. “Most families have two cars and when you replace a house with an eight-unit apartment building you are adding about a dozen more cars... Our main concern was with revitalizing the business district. Now we have to worry about the parking. If we can’t work out a solution then we may be strangled again like we were in the early 60’s.”

The 1970 census noted greater percentages of ethnic diversity among City Heights 40,100 residents. Whites accounted for 76 percent of the population, Blacks 7 percent; Hispanics 15 percent, Asians 1 percent and others 1 percent.

Police Sgt. Andy Mills would later note glumly that the 1970s also marked the time of the burgeoning industry in illegal street drugs, particularly methamphetamine. The arrival of the drug industry in City Heights, he said

directly impacted this neighborhood... Crystal (methamphetamine), in my opinion, was an acute lynch pin because that served to trash this neighborhood. This was the heartbeat of the methamphetamine industry. A lot of it was cooked in this neighborhood... Those dynamics started changing this neighborhood.

Whereas every city has crime (notwithstanding the City of East San Diego’s early advertising brochures), reports seemed to take on an added urgency in the East San Diego Press during this period. Newspapers were filled with stories about crime at home and deaths in Vietnam, where numerous young soldiers from East San Diego had been serving.

Growing Crime Problems

The Press reported that on April 8, 1965, a gunman fled with \$9,400 from the Bank of America while a robber of a nearby pawn shop and police fought a gun battle nearby. On July 15, a robber in dark clothing held up the First National Bank branch. By 1969, crime was so worrisome in the district that Councilman Hitch, running successfully for a third term, felt it necessary to pledge to fight narcotics. By 1971, police decided to open a “community relations office” at 4010 University Avenue to advise people what they could do to reduce crime in their area. Yet crime remained a common occurrence. On March 2, 1972, Suhail Joseph Salah was shot to death during an attempted robbery in his store. Four weeks later, clerk John Blaney was killed during a robbery at a 7-11 market on Van Dyke Avenue. The East San Diego Pharmacy at 4351 University Avenue had to remain on constant vigil after thieves searching for narcotics broke in twice in one month in 1975.

William Gomez, then director of the Highland Landis Park and Recreation Center which was located a couple blocks southeast of City Heights’ main intersection of Fairmount and University, was interviewed by The San Diego Union in 1978. One of the buildings was boarded up; graffiti covered every other wall. The park, said Gomez sadly, had become a favored nighttime hangout for gangs and drug traffic.

Between 1970 and 1980, the population of City Heights grew from 40,100 residents to 45,100 residents—a growth of only 5,000 people. But as Police Sgt. Mills commented, there was a great deal of “white flight” from City Heights, with the percentages of Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and “Others” all registering increases, as shown in the following table:

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
1970	76	7	15	1	1
1980	44	21	18	5	12

Back in 1970, there were 17,100 dwelling units in City Heights, of which 31 percent were multiple family units. This number rose in 1980 to 20,800 dwelling units, with 34 percent of them multifamily. Over the next decade, the switch to multiple family units would become so pronounced that more than a majority of the 24,385 housing units – 55 percent – would house more than one family. City Heights still would contain only 100 blocks, but instead of 45,100 residents it had in 1980, by 1990 the population would swell to 67,548 people.

Such growth had its consequences. Although the median household income increased slightly from \$20,367 in 1980 to \$20,580 in 1990, there was also a large increase in the number of households reporting incomes of \$15,000 a year or less. In 1980, there were 6,223 such households; by 1990, that number rose to 9,608.

Residents feared that the image of their area also was changing. A proposal in 1982 to locate God's Haven, a mission for the homeless, in the City Heights area, stirred a lot of resentment. Jim Bliesner, president of the City Heights Community Development Corporation, said he was irritated by the proposal because "for the first time in a long time in City Heights, there is a community spirit emerging." He told a reporter for The Reader that tree plantings and garbage cleanups had been organized.

The Mid-City Community Plan

In 1983, when Mills was assigned to police the area, there were reportedly some 200 prostitutes a night on El Cajon Boulevard. The following year, the Mid City Community Plan identified City Heights major two socio-economic issues to be an "expanding elementary school population taxing existing school facilities" and "criminal activity, especially residential burglaries, thefts, drugs and some graffiti not adequately addressed."

There were physical issues to worry about as well. The 1984 Mid City Community Plan identified the following problems: 1) "substantial mult-family residential housing with reduced resident ownership"; 2) "deterioration of residential housing stock"; 3) "lack of residential neighborhood identity"; 4) "lack of a coherent neighborhood business district"; 5) "the University Avenue business district is deteriorating"; 6) "under-use of commercially zoned land"; 7) "isolated environmental destruction is taking place."

Along with these problems were the complaints common to old urban neighborhoods: substandard streets, deteriorating infrastructure, inadequate public transportation, insufficient parks and recreational opportunities for the burgeoning population.

Identifying the problems was one thing; resolving them was another. There was an effort in 1984 to persuade merchants on University Avenue to invest in improvements to their properties. Low interest loans were offered along with free consultations with architects. There was a demonstration block between 42nd and 43rd streets. It was difficult to persuade merchants that with all the criminal activity the area could have a future. In a five-month period, that block alone had suffered three burglaries, two robberies, seven batteries, two assaults with a deadly weapon and six petty thefts. Gil Rivera, owner of Drapery Corner on 43rd Street, told The Reader: "By the time (the city) does something here, it's going to be so damn deteriorated you won't be able to make any (low interest) loans because no property owner will be able to rent their building out."

Mills, the policeman who became an unofficial historian of crime in City Heights, said

one of the reasons the crime situation was so gloomy was that about this time, “rock cocaine exploded onto the scene and that forever changed the neighborhood in epidemic proportions.” There was a struggle for control of the drug trade, he said. “Gangs were fighting with each other and the Mexican Mafia was very quietly behind the scenes taking care of business.”

Abandoned Buildings along I-15

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) unwittingly exacerbated the situation when it purchased hundreds of homes along what would become the Interstate 15 corridor through San Diego, and then boarded them up rather than demolishing them. “CalTrans didn’t have a policy in place where they were going to take those houses out immediately,” Mills said. “As soon as people sense that a property is abandoned, immediately they will go inside and take a look at it.” The abandoned houses, unfortunately, were ideal meeting places for illicit drug purchases.

Having police stationed closer to crime scenes seemed to be one obvious way of combating the increasing boldness with which criminals operated in the City Heights neighborhood. Late in the 1980s, San Diego Mayor Maureen O’Connor and the San Diego City Council decided the city needed three new substations in areas of rising crime: the Mid City; the border area, and Barrio Logan. Given the city’s fiscal restraints, however, construction of these substations was not expected until after the turn of the millennium.

‘A State of Emergency’

By 1990, the crime situation in City Heights was so staggering that newly elected City Councilman John Hartley asked the City Council to declare a “state of emergency” in City Heights. Complying with the request, the council designated Jack McGrory, who was then an assistant city manager, to serve as the city’s person to develop solutions. McGrory created a group called the City Heights Improvement Project (CHIP), bringing together to work with residents of City Heights representatives of the police and fire departments, litter control, building inspection and neighborhood code compliance departments. “I told people in the city staff that City Heights was our number one priority,” McGrory later would recall. “So we began to give an increased level of service over what other communities were getting because the needs were so great there.”

CHIP’s law enforcement subcommittee recommended that separate police storefront offices be established across the street from the City Heights Community Park and on University Avenue. The latter office was designated to deal in particular with the area’s rapidly growing Indochinese community. The subcommittee also proposed a program for Neighborhood Oriented Policing, which McGrory later described as a “problem solving

partnership between citizens and police. Community members are encouraged to take an active role in preventing crime, through volunteering, reporting, organizing, etcetera. Police officers are encouraged to take a proactive problem-solving approach to reoccurring crime, and good-faith cooperative efforts between the two is deemed essential.”

On June 16, 1990, the City Heights Community Development Corporation sponsored a rally at 40th Street and Polk Avenue to express concern about the effect of the boarded-up properties along 40th Street. Hartley was joined at the rally by such officeholders as Congressman Jim Bates, Assemblyman Jeff Marston and School Board Member Susan Davis. Besides being havens for drug-dealers, the abandoned structures were “psychologically depressing,” suggested Frank Gormlie, a community development specialist for the organization. “It gives the appearance of a blighted war zone.” CalTrans officials responded that the situation was not their fault; the City of San Diego had been slow in issuing demolition permits. Hartley vowed to streamline the process.

As the rest of the city began to become more aware of the deteriorating situation in City Heights, Leanne Brown, 37, outlined for an Aug. 19, 1990 article of the San Diego Union Tribune what had been happening to the neighborhood in which she had grown up and had once known all the neighbors. “As everyone grew started getting older and their kids grew up, they started selling or renting the houses out. The apartments started going up, and more people moved into the area. Traffic started getting worse. The schools became overcrowded. With prices going up on houses, both parents had to go to work. The kids became latch-key kids and they started hanging around together to substitute for family. Then came the gangs, and we started having graffiti. The gangs had to prove themselves, so they started doing burglaries and vandalism. It was a gradual thing. But it has escalated in the last 10 years to the point where we have at least three or four very active gangs in the area.”

The Visions Project

In 1991, the City Heights Community Development Corporation gave its full backing to a proposal for a “freeway cover” over eight blocks of the soon-to-be-built extension of Interstate 15 through the area. Noting that freeways had been covered in such cities as Phoenix, Boston and Seattle, the CHCDC envisioned using a similar project to revitalize the community. A complete eight-block cover would cost between \$90 and \$198 million but could be an economic asset, officials suggested. Instead of dividing City Heights, a covered freeway could knit it together. CHCDC Director Jim Bliesner urged residents to demand what became known as the Visions Project. “Don’t shortchange yourself when you create a vision,” he said, “because if you only ask for a nickel, you get a nickel.”

While not buying in for the full eight blocks, the San Diego City Council directed the City Manager’s staff to study ways of obtaining a cover over 5 ½ blocks of the freeway. The San Diego Union reported in May of 1991 that “the plan suggested today would have the heart of the freeway cover between University and El Cajon Boulevard where a town square with shops, restaurants, a library, post office, police substation and community

center are planned. A major market also is envisioned to anchor a center at El Cajon Boulevard that would include a community college and recreation center.” The Visions Project also recommended an expansion of parkland, bikeways and walkways, an extension of the San Diego Trolley along Interstate 15 and an express bus lane. CalTrans reacted cautiously. They weren’t opposed to the project; but there was insufficient money in the CalTrans budget to pay for it. The money would have to be found somewhere else.

Karen Manley, a neighborhood activist in City Heights, originally was among the residents dazzled by the Visions Project. However, in the face of CalTrans’ response, she changed her position from support to opposition. If the community held out for the Visions Project, she said, it would only end up delaying the completion of Interstate 15.

Councilman Hartley, who initially was one of the project’s biggest boosters, also reversed field. “I didn’t have the mayor’s office behind this and other council members were afraid it would take (tax) money out of their districts,” he told a San Diego Union reporter in June of 1992. “I didn’t have the money; I didn’t have the votes; and I had a badly split community.... The Visions support was a mile wide and an inch deep.” Although it did not agree to a cover for the freeway, CalTrans did agree to upgrade and widen six freeway bridges in the City Heights area, making them wide enough for pathways, medians and some buildings.

The Community Organizes

Another blow to the community came in 1993 when a gang fight left three Hoover High School students dead. At Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, citizens decided they had to do something positive to stop the killing. “After the boys were killed, we spoke with the police, the schools and with gang members themselves,” Ada Padilla told a reporter for The Reader. “They gave us a sense of how hopeless it was for them to go to school saying it didn’t matter if they graduated. They still couldn’t get a job. This led us to talk to the Chamber of Commerce and to start asking where the future for our children was.” Members of the church decided to organize a “Way of the Cross” march in City Heights on Good Friday. Four times the 200 marchers expected showed up. “It was a very unifying experience,” commented Sister Marita. “We talked about the crimes, the crucifixions of today, and we would choose here to stop and say ‘this is where someone was murdered’ or ‘this is where the prostitutes are’ and we would pray at those spots.”

The City Heights Business Improvement Association decided to erect billboards that would declare “Welcome to City Heights, San Diego’s Crime Capital. Won’t Anybody Help?” Hearing of the proposed signs, city officials asked the Business Improvement Association to refrain from causing such embarrassment. The association agreed, with its vice president, Dennis Presfield, explaining. “The billboards opened communication. There is lots of discussion going on and the community has drawn together.”

Jack McGrory, who by then had been promoted to City Manager, and such organizations

as the Partnership, the Community Development Corporation, the Business Improvement Association and other groups in the community began to coalesce around the idea of staging in April of 1994 an Economic and Crime Summit. Meanwhile, citizens led by Julie Sexauer and Karl Grusendorf formed an organization they called "City Heights on Patrol" (CHOP) in which two members patrols checked for residential and business security, prostitution, stolen vehicles, and graffiti, then notified police and city code compliance officers about matters needing attention.

In November of 1993, Vons Companies announced that it planned to close several stores, including one in City Heights. Carol Seneff, a member of the Partnership's Law Enforcement Committee telephoned City Manager McGrory to suggest that he look into acquiring the Vons site for a Mid-City Police station. Taking her up on the suggestion, McGrory had his staff talk to corporate people at Vons. "We negotiated the acquisition of the store once they confirmed that it was going to be sold. When we did that though, we really didn't have a way to immediately access money."

And so matters stood until January of 1994, when an article in the San Diego Union about the closure of the Vons store in City Heights caught the eyes of businessman and philanthropist Sol Price, members of his staff, and former City Councilman William Jones. Through much of 1993 these men had been researching and meeting together in the hope of launching a community-based, entrepreneurial redevelopment project which would marry outside capital to the energy of citizens living within the redevelopment area. As a retailer who had first pioneered Fedmart, and later the Price Club, Price and his colleagues believed such an effort might begin successfully with the establishment of a large store offering both goods and services. The men wondered whether the closure of the old Vons store represented an opportunity to immediately test the concept. They decided to drive together from their La Jolla offices to City Heights to find out. In so doing, they began a new chapter in the history of City Heights.