



**HISTORY OF THE
BELMONT HEIGHTS
CIVIC IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION**

-THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS -

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Belmont, California

**Strengthening the
Belmont Heights and Belcrest Gardens
Neighborhoods Since 1977**

This brief history traces the events that brought the residents of these neighborhoods together
and keeps them together today.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the people who started our neighborhood association back in the mid-1960s are gone, but not all. Finding those who were still here was very helpful in writing this history. Many of them were asked to provide background information and details of the events that were important to the development and protection of Belmont Heights. How did the association get started? Who were the leaders? What did they do and how did they do it? And important now and in the future, how did the actions they took affect or change the community in which we live today?

This history has been partly written for the benefit and guidance of future leaders of the Association. But just as important is that all residents, newcomers as well as those who have lived here for some time, realize how much we have benefited from our Homeowner's Association. Everyone should realize that we all have a responsibility to participate, either as leaders, or at the very least, as members. The benefits are real. The sole objective of the Association has been "to protect and improve property values and the quality of life". This beautiful neighborhood that we enjoy today is in good part the result of actions taken by the Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association to achieve those objectives.

It is also worth noting that the benefits of our neighborhood association have spread beyond our own area. Ours has been an example to other areas, and their associations have grown stronger. Contrary to most surrounding cities, local political leaders know that homeowner associations are important in Belmont, and they are listened to and consulted.

Incidentally, longtime resident and third president of BHCIA, Jim Bouick, who provided some data for this article, remembers how the association got its name. It was Alpha Land Company who named it Belmont Heights. The new home-owner leaders must have liked the name because for the very first directory, which was for 1968-1969, they had added "Civic Improvement Association".

CHAPTER 1

IN THE BEGINNING: RELOCATING INTERSTATE 280

Home construction in the hills of what we now call Belmont Heights began in the early 1960s, starting on Hallmark Drive, then Comstock Circle, Wemberly Drive, Benson Way and on up to St. James Road and Waltham Cross. By 1969 Waterloo Court completed the Alpha Homes section. For some years the model homes were located on St. James Road at Wemberly Drive. This location was chosen in part because most of the model homes bordered the beautiful open space of the San Francisco Watershed, then and now a game preserve.

So, it is no wonder that the new homeowners would be very upset when they learned in 1967 that Interstate Highway 280 was going to be constructed right next to St. James Road along the boundary of the Watershed property. Homeowners, who thought they had purchased a home with a country atmosphere and a great view, would border a wide, noisy, unsightly highway. Sheila Gray was watering her lawn on Wemberly Drive when neighbor Jack Grasberger from Comstock Circle came by. In the course of the conversation, he mentioned the planned highway construction. Sheila and other's reaction was to immediately have flyers printed for a neighborhood meeting at Fox School. Nearly the entire neighborhood showed up. An attorney living on Comstock Circle, Charles Ellsburg, was quickly elected president of the group. The entire community realized that an inevitable reduction in property values would quickly spread to adjacent streets, and a homeowner's association, filed with the State as a non-profit organization, was formed to fight the threat. Nearly everyone in the area recognized that a threat to one was a threat to all because 75% of all families joined the first year.

Charles Ellsburg, an extremely capable and knowledgeable leader and motivator, was an excellent choice as the first president. Threatening a law suit, and after innumerable trips to Sacramento, he and the board members managed to halt construction of Interstate 280 for nearly two years until the State Highway Department backed down and the freeway was located down the hill where it is today. This was no small accomplishment as the freeway had been completed from San Francisco to San Jose except for the gap bordering Belmont. While BHCIA had no support from anyone outside our area, the opposition included a lot of important people, including then Mayor of San Francisco, Joe Alioto, County Supervisors as well as other cities on the Peninsula. Once the route was relocated, construction immediately closed the gap on this important highway.

If these early residents had done nothing, or had not been successful, our neighborhood would be nothing like it is today. Our residents and the City of Belmont owe these people so much for their courage, wisdom and tenacity in battling the State of California Highway Department to protect our property values and quality of life.

Today Sheila Gray is Sheila Cockshott, and lives on Yosemite Drive. Charles Ellsburg moved



away not long after and is now deceased. We can't locate Jack Grasberger. Other board members included John Shipper, Joe Zneimer, Lou Chaiko and Nick Meris. To all of them we say, thank you.

CHAPTER 2

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE CORNER OF HALLMARK DRIVE AND RALSTON AVENUE

To understand the importance of this crisis, you first have to visualize what the corner of Hallmark Drive and Ralston Avenue looks like today. Then imagine what it would look like if retail and commercial development had been located at the very entrance to Belmont Heights. The Belmont Woods section and the seven large homes across the street would never have been built. Retail or commercial would most likely have filled in to the School District Office. This certainly would have had a major effect on property values nearby and throughout Belmont Heights and Belcrest Gardens. It is just impossible to imagine, but this could have happened without the protest of our residents. Many of us thought this threat happened after the Interstate 280 crisis, but it happened just before. While the homeowner's association did

not exist, it is almost certain that the threat of retail development was a catalyst in getting the neighbors together so that when the Interstate 280 threat came along the formation of BHCIA was a natural succession of events.

According to longtime residents and board members John De Felice and David Hall, both agree that the commercial development of this corner never became more than a proposal. However, the fact that the threat never became very serious is probably because of the loud, organized protest from the residents in the neighborhood. Most important the proposed development never got off the ground.



A few years later, someone wanted to change the zoning on the piece of property on Ralston Avenue just west of Fox School in order to build a multistory restaurant. BHCIA didn't think that appropriate for the area and the proposal was dropped with hardly a struggle. Now there is a single family home at the site. Who knows? If our Association had not spoken up, there might be a restaurant there today.

CHAPTER 3 THE BARRIER

A few years after BHCIA managed to relocate Interstate 280 away from St. James Road, an equally big threat appeared. The entire length of Hallmark Drive came close to being a main thoroughfare between San Carlos to Ralston Avenue, Route 92 and Interstate 280. This threat was certainly a defining moment for the neighborhood. This is the story of the "barrier".

When the Blackwell section of Belmont Heights was built in the 1970s, Hallmark Drive was extended up the hill beyond Waterloo Court, past Wakefield Drive all the way south to the city limits. At the same location on the other side, San Carlos had extended Crestview Drive north. However, Belmont's General Plan did not call for Hallmark Drive to go through, so the

builder planned for a cul-de-sac at the end, not a connection to Crestview. When some new residents alerted BHCIA that cars and motorcycles were making their way over dirt trails between the two streets, Bob Hoffman, who was President at that time, got the contractor to build a dirt barrier and ditch to prevent passage of vehicles. But since the City of San Carlos was publicly saying that the two streets should connect, Bob had to go to the Belmont City Council for their approval of a permanent barrier. One hundred fifty residents of Belmont Heights packed City Hall. Joe Hannauer and Gary Weinstein joined Bob in a presentation to persuade the Council on the necessity for a barrier.

In spite of the fact that Belmont's City Manager and the city staff were not only opposed to the barrier but had been working with San Carlos to connect the streets, the City Council agreed that traffic from San Carlos would be hazardous and would have a serious effect on property values and the quality of life in Belmont Heights. A wooden barrier was approved. This decision did not sit well with San Carlos and they threatened eminent domain legal action to force a through street, arguing that it was for the public good and placed the issue on their City Council agenda.

One hundred sixty people showed up at the San Carlos meeting, of which 150 were from Belmont and 3 from San Carlos. While city staff cited police and fire safety issues as the need for a through street, Bob Hoffman made it clear that the real objective was for San Carlos residents to use Hallmark Drive as a shortcut to 92 and 280. JoAnn Berridge, the new BHCIA President, testified that opening Hallmark Drive at both ends would increase our low crime rate, a far more serious safety issue. No Belmont attendees spoke in favor of a through street, and as it turned out, the three residents of San Carlos didn't like it either. San Carlos was beaten. The large concrete planting boxes there today replaced the wooden barrier, and at the request of the fire department, an iron gate was later installed.

While the existence of the Barrier is a sore point with some residents of San Carlos, it is still strongly defended by residents of Belmont Heights. Were it not there our neighborhood would be quite different and property values would certainly be much lower. Thanks to Bob Hoffman, JoAnn



Berridge, Joe Hannauer and Gary Weinstein (who all still live here) and all the other BHCIA Board Members; the barrier will always be an enormous achievement of our association. In all likelihood the barrier was also a defining moment for Bob Hoffman. Liking what they saw, the Belmont City Council appointed him to the Planning Commission. He then won election to the City Council and served 10 years and was Mayor of Belmont twice. During this time the City Manager, Ed Everett (now City Manager of Redwood City) got him interested in mountain climbing. In no time Bob had climbed the tallest peaks of every continent in the world and after a number of attempts, reached the peak of Mt. Everest. Who knows? This chain of events may have all started with the "barrier".

CHAPTER 4

TROUBLE WITH THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

A review of the major issues that our homeowner's association has faced over its long history reveals a curious fact. Almost without exception, the serious problems were created by a "jurisdiction" proposing something that was not in the best interests of our residents. For example, in the matter of relocating Interstate 280 away from our backyard, we were at issue with the State of California. When the Polhemous Housing Project was proposed, (the subject of a coming chapter), we were up against San Mateo County.

When property owners received storm drain assessment notices, (the subject of the next chapter), it was the City of Belmont that had proposed the action. Similarly, the City of San Carlos was our main adversary on the Barrier, the subject of the last chapter. In addition, we have had problems with another jurisdiction that you would never expect, the Belmont Elementary School District.

This is what caused it: In the early 1980s, the District faced a problem common with many school districts in California, declining enrollment. At that time there were six "neighborhood", kindergarten through 6th grade, schools spaced along the east-west axis of Belmont. With nearly double the classrooms needed to handle the available pupils, and a shortage of funds to keep schools operating, the Superintendent of Schools came up with the idea of renting out empty classrooms. Since renters had to accommodate themselves to spaces designed as classrooms, rents were cheap. Even so, renting was so difficult that the Superintendent spent a good proportion of his time in this effort. And there was a major

problem with this entire concept. Cities, and Belmont was no exception, had Zoning Laws which establish and protect residential areas against encroachment by commerce and business.

While school districts have historically had jurisdictions independent of cities, and while both recognize that they have to work together in matters of mutual interest, school districts have always believed they were not strictly subject to city codes on their land. So a conflict quickly arose when the school district rental program brought commercial activity into areas zoned for schools which are usually surrounded by residential areas. And the rental program was not confined to just the school properties. BHCIA discovered that the district was going to rent out the lower floor of the District Office on Hallmark Drive to a printing company. But Larry Otto, who lived right next door, was prepared to go to court to prove that this would have a severe effect on the quality of life of his family. In addition, Dr. Tim Crooks, who lived just a few doors away, testified for BHCIA before the School Board regarding the impact on property values if a printing company were to be allowed. The School District wisely backed off on this proposal.

Even with the rental program, it was not long before the Superintendent came to the conclusion that some neighborhood schools would have to close. Since public support for this effort was essential, he sought community volunteers to serve on a number of school closure committees. Typically, in matters such as this, BHCIA, always the first to challenge threats, immediately volunteered members to help solve the problem. Marcia Smerican was then President, and she and several other board members were among those who played leading and active rolls on all the committees formed. One committee, on which I served, looked at the school district's finances and the rental program. It didn't take long to figure out that the latter was not going to solve the financial problem even if all the available space were rented. A second group was the "School Facilities Study Committee". Its task was to review the school physical plants and other data such as enrollment, to recommend which schools would be best to close. Since one of the schools the Superintendent wanted to close was our own Fox School, BHCIA was particularly anxious to be represented on that committee.

For what possible reason would the School District want to close Fox School? It was not only the newest school in the district, and in good repair, but enrollment was higher than most. The answer made sense to the Superintendent - from a financial standpoint. Located on top of a hill with commanding views in all directions, Fox School is located on prime real estate with

very high property value. BHCIA representatives quickly and loudly let everyone know that this reason could not possibly justify closing the school and would fight any and all school board members that would support that proposal. It didn't take long for the Study Committee, perhaps somewhat intimidated by BHCIA representatives, to agree that three other schools made a lot more sense to close. Barret School, located near the Carlmont Shopping Center was easiest because it was the oldest, the worst repair and smallest enrollment. Reluctantly, Cipriani School and McDougal School were also selected for reasons of enrollment, state of repair and location.

A third committee handling "Grade Realignment", decided that it was not practical to close Ralston Junior High School and make the neighborhood schools kindergarten through 8th grade. Instead it was recommended that 6th grade should be moved from the remaining three elementary schools to Ralston School, making the elementary schools K to 5 and Ralston 6 to 8. These public committee meetings must have taken at least six months, but at the conclusion, the School Board unanimously approved all the recommendations. While the idea of losing their neighborhood schools was reluctantly accepted by large sections of Belmont, there was very little alternative.

Looking back, it is worthwhile to wonder if the correct decisions were made, because eliminating half the neighborhood schools was a big step. Some years later the McDougal School property was sold to the private and highly acclaimed Armstrong School for dyslexic children. Around the same time the downward slide in pupil enrollment reversed sufficiently that most of Cipriani School was reopened. While we might wish the committees hadn't been so hasty, apparently no one saw that coming. And now a brand new school has been built in Redwood Shores, where the population has increased dramatically. The School District, no longer just oriented to Belmont, has been renamed the Belmont/Redwood Shores Elementary School District and is one of the best school districts in the area. Always a big supporter of our public schools, we like to think that BHCIA gave them a hand when it was needed.

Another good question is whether BHCIA actually influenced the results or whether it would have turned out the same way anyhow. That can be debated all day, but the fact is that only BHCIA had the organization and the will to fight for Fox School. Other neighborhood associations, like the Central area, also fought to save their schools, and they did. Other neighborhoods were poorly represented, and maybe it would have happened anyway, but they lost their schools.

CHAPTER 5 THE STORM DRAIN ASSESSMENTS

While our homeowner's association has faced many crises threatening our own neighborhood, the storm drain assessments affected the entire city. And while most threats to property values and quality of life can't be quantified or measured in terms of dollars, this one could be. What BHCIA spearheaded saved Belmont property owners ten million dollars, and that was twenty years ago.



One day in the mid-1980s every property owner in the City of Belmont received a letter announcing a tax assessment on their property. The purpose was to pay for a \$15 million Storm Drain Improvement Bond. The property assessments were not a flat amount but based on the square footage of each parcel. The funds were to cover improvements to Belmont Creek where the small culverts at the western end, including the Carlmont Shopping Center, were causing flooding, and further along the creek and beyond Belmont through the unincorporated Harbor Industrial Area to the Bay. In addition, there were many other

improvements proposed for areas in the central and northern parts of Belmont where the streets and homes had been built without storm drains.

An emergency meeting of the Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association was immediately called to discuss this matter. It didn't take long for the Board of Directors to unanimously oppose the assessments for one simple but critical reason. Belmont Heights had been built with storm drains, bought and paid for by the homeowners. It did not seem fair to have to pay for similar improvements to other neighborhoods when it is normal practice for direct beneficiaries to pay for such improvements.

Joe Crangle, now deceased, was President of BHCIA at the time, and he and the entire board did an outstanding job of not only informing our own members but encouraging other homeowner associations in Belmont on the importance of protesting the assessments. One man's contribution was outstanding in preparing for the protest. Bill Larsen, an attorney and a long-time member of the association still living on Elder Drive, knew exactly what legal grounds to use for the protest. He drew up a statutory legal form called a "Declaration of Objection". Copies of this document were distributed to all property owners in Belmont Heights and supplied to other Belmont homeowner associations as well. Thousands of signed copies were delivered to City Hall.

Suddenly realizing they were faced with a major protest from property owners, the City Council and City Manager Ed Everett called a special Council meeting to explain the importance of the storm drain improvements. Faced with the size of the protest, it was held at the Carlmont High School gymnasium to ensure that everyone would have a seat. In fact the gym wasn't big enough. Filled to capacity, the fire department would not let several hundred people inside. Worse for the City Council, the audience noisily disagreed with all their proposals. The Council knew they were defeated and finally did what they should have done in the first place. They announced that they would appoint a citizens committee to look into the matter. Shortly thereafter, Joe Crangle, Phil Condon, the next BHCIA President, and I volunteered for the committee and were accepted.

What happened is that the citizens committee, representing every area of the city, met for nearly a year and a half, and cut the improvements from \$15 million to \$5 million. All of the so-called neighborhood projects were removed because the committee believed they were either unnecessary or that individual property owners should pay for them if they wanted them. The improvements to Belmont Creek in the Harbor Industrial Area were eliminated simply

because they were not in Belmont. The property owners there were outspokenly opposed to being annexed by Belmont even though these property owners benefit from some of Belmont city services. In this case they were infuriated because they believed that Belmont should pay for the improvements since their flooding originates from Belmont Creek. But the law clearly says that even though flood waters may originate or come through a property, that property is not responsible for any damage that may occur providing nothing was done to create the problem.



Unfortunately, this didn't sit well with them but, it should be pointed out, these property owners didn't want the improvements badly enough to pay for them themselves. Nearly all of what was finally recommended by the Committee was the improvements to Belmont Creek from west to east, within the city limits. The City Council unanimously approved the Committee recommendations, and a \$5 million bond was proposed. A special election was held and the bond was approved by a large margin of the voters.

It is also important to note that the citizen's committee recommendations have proved to be correct. Belmont Creek drains well without flooding and other sections of the city that did not get any improvements have not been seriously damaged since then. In handling this crisis, no one individual or group of citizens in the City of Belmont had more influence on the outcome of the storm drain assessments matter than the Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association. We thank all those board members and especially Bill Larsen. It is interesting to note that prior to the storm drain crisis the Belcrest Gardens neighborhood had no homeowner association of its own. Many of these property owners received huge assessments because they have large properties many going down toward Water Dog Lake. Applications to join our association were walked to every house and over 70% of that neighborhood joined in a few weeks. Belcrest Gardens has been an important part of our association ever since.

CHAPTER 6

THE HOUSING PROJECT

One day in the late 1980s, Josephine DeLuca, who then lived on Comstock Circle, called me about an impending problem that could affect our neighborhood. In the northeast corner of Route 92 and Polhemus Road, (which is the western extension of Ralston Avenue), San Mateo County owned 17 acres of vacant unimproved land. The property is located in the County adjacent to a residential area of an un-incorporated section of the City of San Mateo. Josephine had just heard that the County proposed to build a 450-unit low-rent housing project on this property.

While this site is about a quarter-mile from the nearest part of Belmont Heights, Jo thought we ought to find out how traffic from such a project would affect our neighborhood. Furthermore, while the site was zoned for low density residential, the same as Belmont Heights, the proposed project would require changing the zoning to high density, suitable for apartments. Generally, jurisdictions follow zoning regulations carefully so as to protect property rights but apparently the County did not intend to follow their own zoning restrictions.

The next day Jo and I drove over to the neighborhood adjacent to the housing project site. We were looking for someone, anyone, who could steer us to the person in charge of their homeowner association, if they had one. Finally we did find that person, and he in turn steered us to a man named Ted Clausen. We quickly found that he and his neighbors were very much alarmed about the project, but didn't know what to do. In the next few weeks we visited all the neighborhoods in the surrounding County areas, as well as adjacent City of San Mateo and Belmont neighborhoods. Soon a group was organized known as the "Coalition of Western Hills Homeowner Associations", representing 12 neighborhoods and tens of thousands of homeowners. The principal objective was to protest the change in zoning proposed by the County.

Many meetings of the Coalition were held in the Highlands Elementary School near San Mateo and many letters were sent to the County and to the editors of local newspapers. Finally the Coalition confronted the County Board of Supervisors in several sessions of their meetings in Redwood City. In those public hearings the Coalition argued against the impropriety and

unfairness of the zoning change and the negative influence on property values nearby. It was also argued that the surrounding streets could not handle the traffic impact and that this was a poor location for a low rent housing project due to the lack of public transit and the absence of any source of jobs nearby. The County Supervisors were also reminded that our areas had high voting records and the Coalition represented the interests of homeowners everywhere in the County. While the Coalition was accused by some of the supervisors of being "nimbys", (Not In My Back Yard), that would only have been true if the zoning was already set at the "high" density level. Local newspapers recorded the protests and arguments.

Finally, seeing they had no public support for their project, the County backed down, although as it turned out, they did not lose. The property was very quickly sold to a developer for \$16 million, an incredibly high price for unimproved land, leaving the County with a large sum of money to use for other purposes.

Today, there are 64 single family homes on that property called Crystal Springs Estates. Another crisis resolved.

Throughout this entire proceeding, the BHCIA Board of Directors moved quickly and unanimously to approve everything necessary to organize the Coalition and our protests. Jo DeLuca, who now lives near Woodside, deserves special recognition for her foresight and dedication to the protection of not only Belmont Heights but our neighboring areas.



CHAPTER 7

BELMONT WOODS

The seven acres at the southwest corner of Hallmark Drive and Ralston Avenue were not part of the property developed by Alpha Homes that became Belmont Heights back in the 1960s. And a good many years after the Blackwell section was built up Hallmark Drive to Wakefield Drive and beyond, those seven acres at Hallmark and Ralston still sat vacant.

Finally about 1980, the property owner, Enshallah Developments, went to the Planning Commission of Belmont with a proposal to subdivide the land and build about 25 homes. The plan would have leveled the property to the extent possible, laid out streets and divide up the buildable land in roughly equal size lots. As far as the City of Belmont was concerned it was a routine subdivision and probably would have been approved with little change. But the City was very much aware of the existence of Belmont Heights because so many City Council members were from the area and the Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association was promptly advised of the proposed development.

At the next BHCIA board meeting, a representative of Enshallah Developments, Inc. attended for the purpose of describing what they had in mind for the site. After listening to the plans, our board members were of the opinion that this strategically located site deserved something better than what was proposed and asked them to reconsider the design. Fortunately, Enshallah Developments was collaborating with the Silicon Valley architectural firm of Goodwin B. Steinberg & Associates and they promptly did just that. Either his son or daughter attended many of our meetings; they listened to our comments and took it from there.

Their eventual proposal was a relatively new building concept called a "Planned Unit Development". The design includes an entry road that leads to a loop around the middle of the property, with the "clustered" homes on individual lot pads arranged around both sides of the loop with maximum privacy to each home. The remaining 4 acres of property around the sides, which is in part steep slopes, fills in the space to Benson Way, Hallmark Drive, Ralston Avenue and the Fox School property to the west. This remaining property, including the private entry road and loop, and a swimming pool and spa, comprise "common undivided property" owned by all the twenty-one property owners as a group. Each house and its sizable pad of land with gated entry is owned solely by the property owner. A homeowner's association manages the common property and establishes and monitors requirements on the maintenance for individual units.

Everyone agrees this was a very successful combination of beautifully designed homes and environmentally sensitive landscaping. The effect both from outside and inside is that the homes are located in a park. The grounds are forested with birch, redwood, Chinese pistache, liquid amber, olive and flowering ornamental trees. Both the developer and the City of Belmont won awards from Architectural Digest for coming up with an innovative design on a beautifully located but difficult lot. The Steinberg family was so appreciative of the interest and efforts of

BHCIA that they hosted the entire Board of Directors for dinner when the project was completed. In turn our community is delighted to have beautiful Belmont Woods at its entrance. After all the homes were sold and the Belmont Woods governing board was set up, a liaison was established between their first President, Dick Crafts, and Marcia Smerican, then President of BHCIA, to coordinate relations between the two organizations, which remain to this day.

Then and now, BHCIA continues to attract very capable board members willing and able to contribute their talent, time and effort to protect and improve our neighborhood. The development of Belmont Woods at the entry to Belmont Heights is another good example of what our homeowner's association is all about.

(My thanks to Bonnie Childs for some special research on this article)



CHAPTER 8

THE LIGHTED SPORTS COMPLEX

This episode is another example that nearly every major crisis BHCIA has faced over the years has been caused by some jurisdiction attempting to do or develop something without fully understanding or considering the rights and interests of our neighborhood. In this affair it was two jurisdictions: the City of Belmont and the Belmont Elementary School District.

A common practice for cities and school districts is to form a partnership on the care and use of school playgrounds. Schools have the playground areas while cities need those spaces for city-sponsored sports programs. In Belmont, the City maintains these fields and in turn gets the use of them for its programs, such as soccer and baseball on afternoons and

weekends. Ralston Middle School, just adjacent to our neighborhood, is one of these locations.

In the late 1980's someone with the City or a sport program came up with the idea of converting Ralston School's large playground area to a "Lighted Sports Complex". Specifically, the proposal was to erect 70 foot high overhead lighting on the area behind Ralston School with the intent to permit its use by both adult softball teams and youth sports teams until 10:30 PM each night. When this proposal became known many residents in the Wakefield, Hallmark, Comstock Circle areas, and virtually everyone in the Belcrest Gardens, were very concerned about the impact of not only the lights, which would destroy their nighttime view, but the noise as well. The Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association received many calls protesting this proposal and promptly began to document individual protests of its members. As he had before, Bill Larsen, whose home on Elder Drive was one of those overlooking the fields, was especially helpful in the protest BHCIA made before the City Council. Faced with such formidable opposition for a project which should have been proposed to the neighborhood first, the City backed down.



Eventually a lighted sports complex was built in a more suitable location, on the east side of Route 101. This was done with the financial participation of the developer of the Island Park section of Belmont. Chalk up another victory for BHCIA.

CHAPTER 9

This completes the first twenty-five-year history of BHCIA, but it is by no means a complete description of all that was accomplished in those twenty five years. In addition to the major crises and accomplishments described above there have been dozens of other minor projects which either threatened the neighborhood or were improvements to it or the City.

For example:

- When Cable TV came to Belmont Heights the Cable Company was going to put the cable boxes above ground. BHCIA protested and they were buried.
- About 25 years ago a man from the Skymont area donated nearly 100 trees to our association. A task force of about 15 members planted the trees in Hallmark Park. Fox School painted its roof a bright garish red. BHCIA protested but then bought paint in a subdued color and volunteers repainted the roof.
- A debris clogged storm drain in back of a home on Hallmark Drive caused very severe flooding and damage to the home not covered by insurance. BHCIA asked for donations for the homeowner and something like \$11,000 was collected.
- A roadside park with picnic area was proposed for the area on Interstate 80 just down the hill from St. James Road. Seeing this as a threat to the Watershed environment and our neighborhood, BHCIA protested. Proposal cancelled. At our request and support, the first Neighborhood Watch area in Belmont was established in Belmont Heights.
- Over the years BHCIA has sponsored “earthquake preparedness” programs many times.
- BHCIA prevailed upon the City to improve the center divider on Hallmark Drive at Ralston Avenue and completely revamped the center divider at Tahoe Drive and Ralston. Volunteers continue to maintain these spaces as well as the planting boxes at the Hallmark Barrier.
- BHCIA has purchased and volunteers have planted hundreds of daffodils.
- BHCIA created the CLIP (Community Landscape Improvement) Committee which, among other activities, has prodded the City to enforce its own codes and agreements for property maintenance.
- Worked with the City to develop small passive parks in the neighborhood such as the bench and plantings opposite the foot of Waterloo Court.
- Worked with the Fire Department to publicize the brush clearing program.
- Asked members for donations for Belmont's new library. Members responded so generously that BHCIA is listed on the plaque at the front door.

My apologies in advance for any items that should have been included. The Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association has had and still has a strong, positive influence on the protection of property values and quality of life in Belmont Heights, Belcrest Gardens and the

City of Belmont. This has happened because hundreds of dedicated hard working residents have served as presidents, secretaries, treasurers, newsletter editors, membership chairmen, publishers of the directory, city hall monitors, board members and committee members. Thousands more homeowners representing the great majority of residents have been faithful and supportive members.

Our neighborhood association is all about great people.

If you're not already a member, come join us!

<https://www.bhcia.org/members>



Written by Dick Green, one of the first residents of Belmont Heights and an organizer of the BHCIA. The bench and plaque in *Hallmark Park* are dedicated to *Dick Green* for his contribution and service to the City of Belmont and the BHCIA.

