



Office of the City Manager

CONSENT CALENDAR  
September 10, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: LaTanya Bellow, Interim City Manager  
Submitted by: Dave Sprague, Fire Chief  
Subject: Companion Report: Recommendation Regarding Panoramic Hill Secondary Evacuation

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution directing the Fire Department to reach out to other impacted landowners to determine interest in pursuing, and coordinate costs sharing to conduct a feasibility study to identify a safe secondary evacuation and access route for the access impaired Panoramic neighborhood. The results of the study should then be shared with the Public Safety Policy Committee.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On July 15, 2024, the Public Safety Committee adopted the following action: M/S/C (Taplin/Bartlett) to send the Commission item and the City Manager Companion Report to Council, and giving a positive recommendation to the City Manager Companion Report for City Council to adopt a Resolution directing the Fire Department to reach out to other impacted landowners to determine interest in pursuing, and coordinate costs sharing to conduct a feasibility study to identify a safe secondary evacuation and access route for the access impaired Panoramic neighborhood. Vote: All Ayes.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

No impact to the General Fund. The study would use funds within the Fire Department's budget.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

See Disaster and Fire Safety Commission (DFSC) report.

BACKGROUND

See DFSC report.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no environmental impacts that will occur as a result of initiating this study.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

**Long-Term Solution:** A secondary escape and escape route has been contemplated since at least 1959. Today it is a solution that the City should fully investigate in order to determine what impact it could have during an evacuation of – and emergency response to – the Panoramic hill neighborhood in the event of wildfire.

The subsequent design and construction of this road will likely be outside the scope and scale of what available Fire Department funding could support, thus alternate funding strategies would have to be identified.

**Determining Feasibility is the First Step:** The Fire Department supports the DFSC recommendation to conduct a feasibility study if other impacted landowners are supportive. Determining the overall feasibility and cost of a secondary escape route is the first step and must be completed prior to future action being taken with regard to identification of funding sources for design and construction.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

None

CONTACT PERSON

David Sprague, Fire Chief, (510) 981-3473

Attachments:

- 1: Resolution
- 2: Panoramic Hill Area Development and Environmental Resources Study, Summary Report, June 1974
- 3: Alternate Panoramic Hill Access Routes Map. May 27, 1959

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

DFSC PANORAMIC EGRESS/ACCESS FEASIBILITY STUDY

WHEREAS, a secondary escape and access route has been contemplated since at least 1959, and

WHEREAS, this solution should be fully investigated in order to determine what impact it could have during an evacuation of – and emergency response to – the Panoramic hill neighborhood in the event of wildfire, and

WHEREAS, the Fire Department supports the (Disaster and Fire Safety Commission (DFSC) recommendation to conduct a feasibility study if other impacted landowners are supportive, and

WHEREAS, determining the feasibility and cost of a secondary route is the first step and must be completed prior to future action being taken with regard to identification of funding sources for design and construction.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the Fire Department to reach out to other impacted landowners to determine interest in pursuing, and coordinate costs sharing to conduct a feasibility study to identify a safe secondary evacuation and access route for the access impaired Panoramic neighborhood. The results of the study should then be shared with the Public Safety Policy Committee.

PANORAMIC HILL AREA

DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL

RESOURCES STUDY

SUMMARY REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Panoramic Hill Study would not have been possible without the assistance of Panoramic Hill residents, representatives of various public agencies and the City of Berkeley staff.

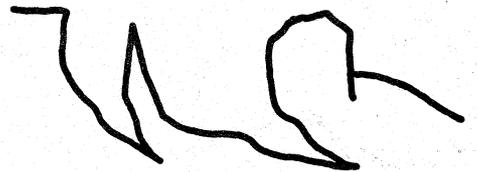
The Planning Department acknowledges the major assistance provided by Fire Chief Elmer Silva of the University of California Lawrence Laboratory and Professor Emeritus Harold Biswell of the University of California School of Forestry.

Also providing considerable assistance were Owen Eide of the East Bay Municipal Utility District; Roy Oakes and William Dabel of the Berkeley Public Works Department; Victor Porter and Milton Steele of the Berkeley Fire Department; and Fire Marshal Russell Norman of the University of California. Ken Moye, a city planning student at the University of California, donated many hours of volunteer work and was later added to the study staff.

The Panoramic Hill Association provided major assistance to the study, primarily through its Planning and Zoning Committee. The Committee which consists of Patrick Devaney, chairman, Della Reid, Dan Keig, and Judd Boynton met regularly with the study staff.

Dean Armstrong, Project Director  
Thomas F. Peak, Director of Planning

## Introduction

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

### Origin of the Study

Panoramic Hill has long been recognized as a portion of the Berkeley planning area that needed special study. The area consists of two steep ridges upon which the cities of Oakland and Berkeley have allowed the construction of 200 dwelling units over the last 50 years. Severe fire hazards, a single twisting narrow access road barely adequate for residential access, and severe traffic congestion plague the neighborhood.

Because it was felt that existing regulations and programs were not solving the neighborhood problems, on June 5, 1973, the Berkeley City Council imposed a one year development moratorium on the Berkeley portion of the Panoramic Hill area. At that time, the Berkeley Planning Department was directed to review existing development policies and analyze Panoramic Hill problems. Consequently, a study was begun of fire hazards, traffic circulation, parking and other problems in both the Berkeley and Oakland portions of the Panoramic Hill area. The Oakland portion of the Hill was included because it is impossible to separate the problems and environmental characteristics of the Oakland area from the Berkeley area.

### Components of the Study

Supporting the Study Conclusions and Recommendations are two major studies: 1) the Fire Vulnerability Study; and 2) the Environmental Assessment Study.

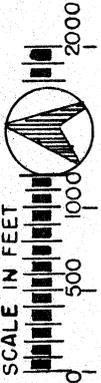
The Fire Vulnerability Study analyzes the factors that determined fire vulnerability: 1) factors promoting fire ignition; 2) fire hazards, especially fuel characteristics; 3) the capability of fire forces to respond to a fire emergency; 4) the degree to which people, property and other things of value are exposed or would be exposed in the future to fire danger.

The Environmental Assessment Study surveys the existing and potential environment of Panoramic Hill. Factors studied were: 1) the natural environment; 2) the social and cultural environment; and 3) threats to the environment.

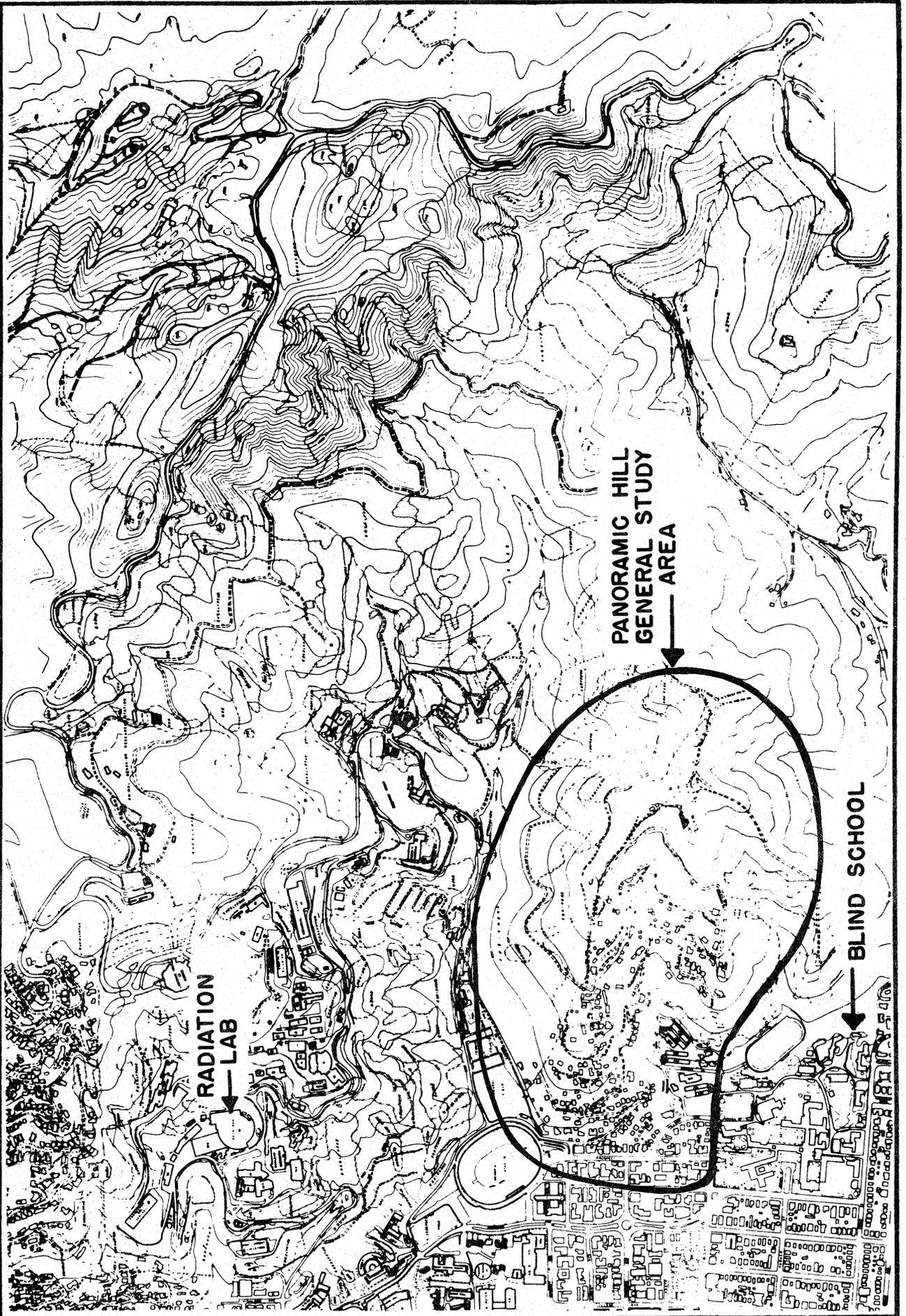
### Citizen Participation

Throughout the study, a major effort was made to achieve resident participation and to keep the residents informed. All of the residents were sent information on the study and their views were solicited through two separate questionnaires. Because it represents approximately one-half of the residents, the Panoramic Hill Association

LOCATION MAP # 1



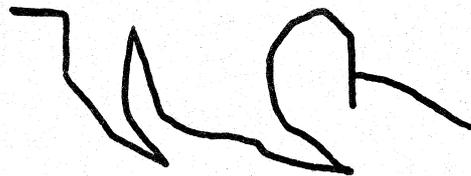
PANORAMIC HILL STUDY AREA  
BERKELEY PLANNING DEPARTMENT 6-74



was given the opportunity to provide significant input to the study including bi-weekly meetings between Planning Department Staff and a subcommittee of the Association. Staff presentations were also made at regular Association meetings.

The members of the Planning and Zoning Committee of the Association included Patrick DeVaney, Chairman; Della Reid, Dan Keig and Judd Boynton. Association members who also provided significant assistance were Bill Freedenberg and Doris Maslach.

**Summary of  
Study Findings**

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SUMMARY OF STUDY FINDINGS

General Description of the Neighborhood

Panoramic Hill is a neighborhood that straddles the Berkeley-Oakland border. It consists of approximately 200 dwelling units, 3/4 of which are located in the Berkeley portion of the Hill. Although the environment is very woodsy and rural, nearly half of the dwelling units are in buildings having two or more dwelling units.

The neighborhood rests on two ridges that jut out from the Berkeley Hills just south of Strawberry Canyon. Most of the development is on the north ridge (See attached map) that is bounded on the north by Strawberry Canyon and on the south by the middle fork of Derby Creek. The south ridge, which has only ten percent of the Hill's homes, is a far less prominent physical feature. It is bounded to the north by Derby Creek and to the south by the wildlands leased by the East Bay Regional Park District from the California School for the Blind and Deaf.

The neighborhood has "wildland" properties to the north (UC-Strawberry Canyon), the east (steep ridgelines owned by the University of California), and to the south (steep hillsides once a part of the California School for the Blind and Deaf). On the west, the neighborhood borders on a highly urbanized portion of the City of Berkeley which lies adjacent to the University of California Stadium. This adjacent neighborhood has many student-oriented apartments, fraternity and sorority houses.

Physical Character of the Hill

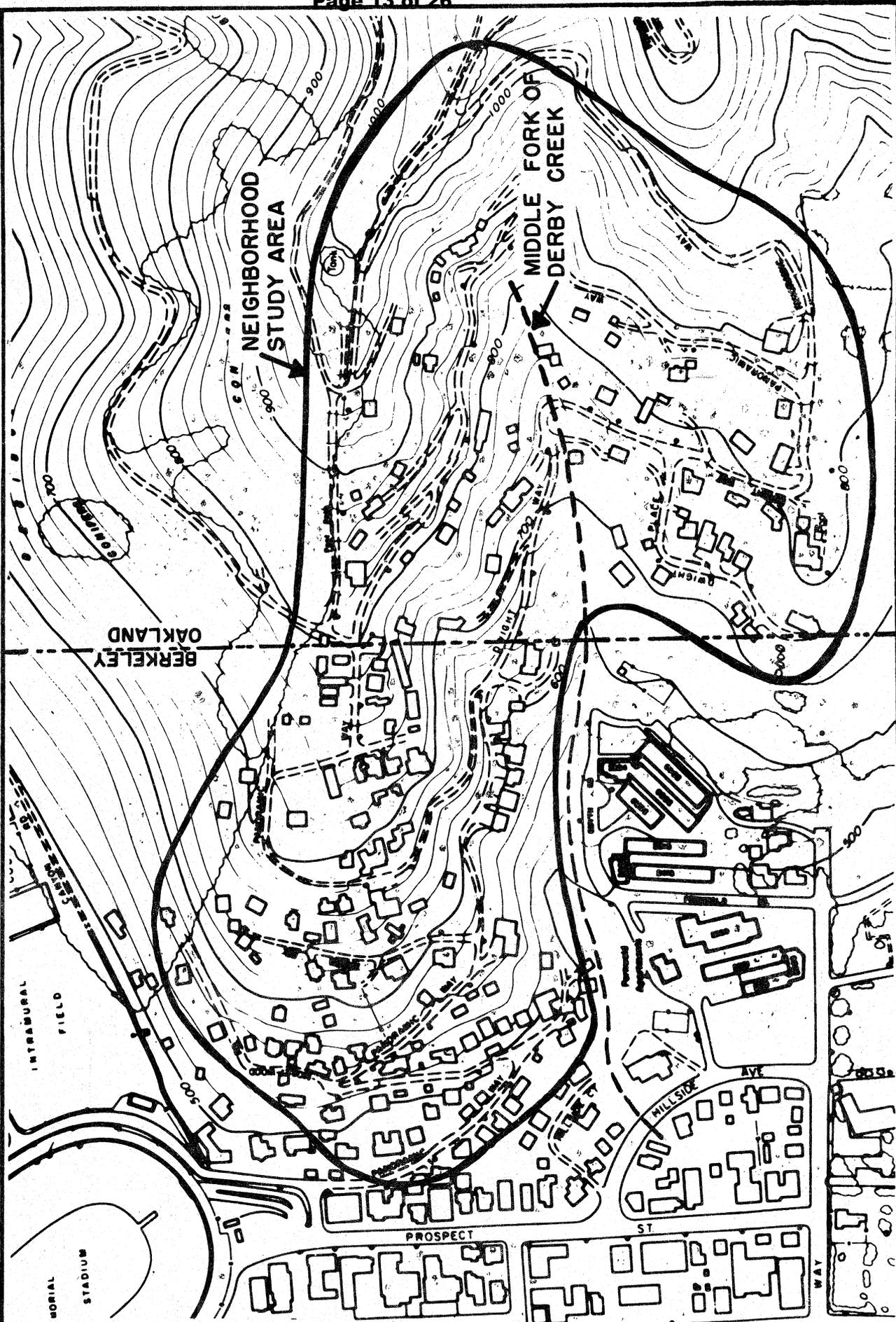
The lower part of Panoramic Hill was first settled in the early years of the twentieth century. The homes become much newer at the higher elevations. At the top of the Hill (in Oakland) most of the houses were built since World War II. Most of the houses are made of wood. This, combined with the large yards and dense vegetation and the very narrow, twisting streets, gives much of the Hill the feeling of a National Geographic Magazine picture spread of a mountain village.

The main road of the Hill is Panoramic Way, a street varying in width from 12 to 18 feet. Panoramic Way provides the only access to the Hill. All traffic that enters or leaves the Hill must therefore, funnel through this narrow road. The road is extremely twisty--three major turns have corners with angles of far less than 90°.

LOCATION MAP # 2



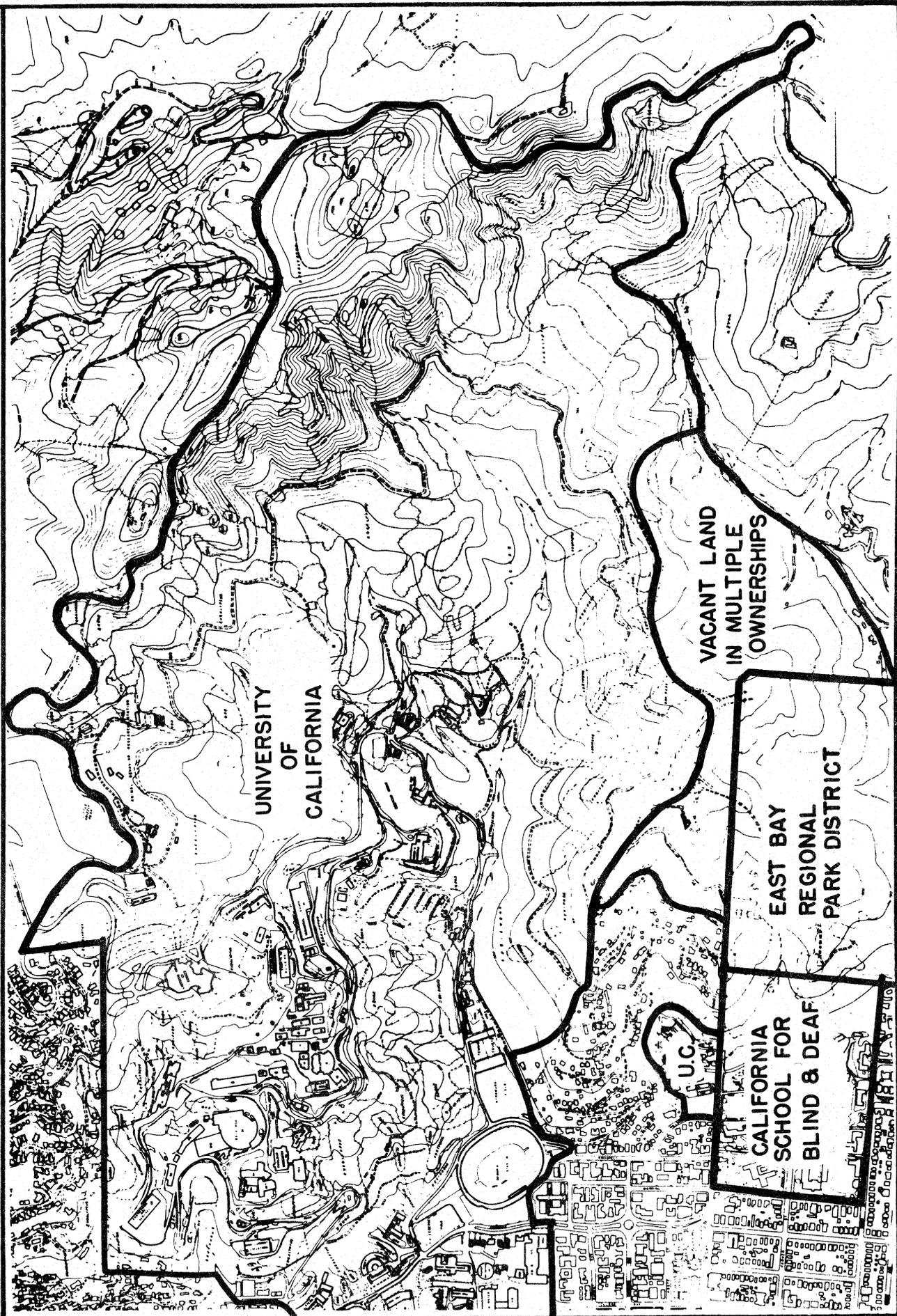
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LARGE LAND HOLDINGS



### Fire Vulnerability

The most important environmental characteristic of the Panoramic Hill area is the presence of a very dangerous fire situation. The proximity to the densely wooded University of California Strawberry Canyon watershed is the main reason for concern. However, heavy amounts of fuel (wood houses, debris, thick vegetation) within the neighborhood itself constitute a dangerous situation. These problems combined with the effects of high wind conditions during dry parts of the year (September primarily), very steep topography and extremely poor access, make the Panoramic Hill neighborhood among the most fire-dangerous neighborhoods in the Bay Area. (For details see Fire Vulnerability Study) (The attached map explains the fire situation)

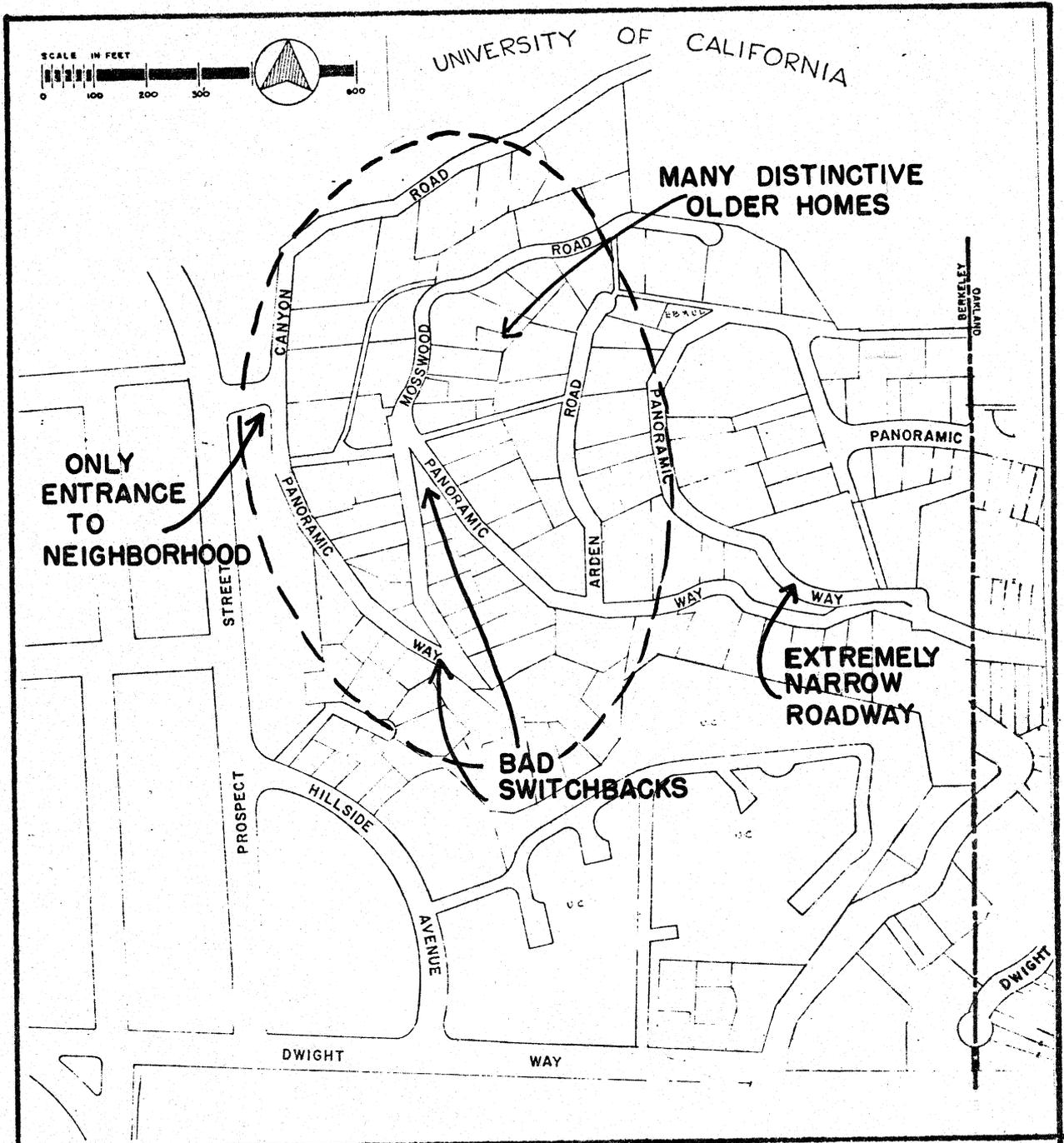
### Geologic Hazards

If the fire hazard did not overshadow all other concerns, geologic hazards would have to be considered of greatest significance for Panoramic Hill; in fact, the two are related, with the potential for earthquake activity exacerbating the fire hazard. Geologic problems include the potential for: ground rupture from earthquake fault movement; intense ground shaking; landsliding; mudsliding; erosion and flooding. While all are important considerations, ground rupturing from earthquake activity is a very significant potential hazard.

Panoramic Hill is transected by the Hayward Fault, a major fault in the San Andreas Fault system. This fault experienced earthquakes in the 19th century which were nearly as severe as the San Francisco Quake of 1906. Seismic experts predict that there will be a major earthquake centered on this fault in the near future. When such a quake occurs there is a likelihood that the ground will be ripped open for much of the length of the fault. If this happens, the ground on one side of the fault would move as much as seven to ten feet relative to the other side. Given such fault movement, many homes, sewers, water lines, and gas lines would be severely damaged in a band that would transect the whole width of the Hill neighborhood. Gas lines breaking and starting fires combined with damage to water lines, the existing difficult access situation and the presence of severe fire hazards, could result in devastation.

### The Natural Environment

Panoramic Hill consists of a major ridge and a minor ridge. The major ridge which is on the north side of the Hill area is a part of the Strawberry Canyon Watershed. The two ridges together form the watershed for the middle fork of Derby Creek. The south ridge also is in the watershed of the south fork of Derby Creek.



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BERKELEY PORTION OF PANORAMIC  
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CHARACTERISTICS  
OF  
BERKELEY NEIGHBORHOOD

The ridges were formed by erosion and mass wasting (mudslides, landslides) of less resistant rock. This erosion and mass wasting is a continuing process in the Hill's environment. Most problems with drainage, landsliding and mudslides have occurred in the area near the middle fork of Derby Creek.

Panoramic Hill originally was composed of grasslands and brush on the ridges with dense tree and other growth along the creeks. However, man has altered the environment greatly. Between 1914 and 1924, the University of California planted dense mixed conifer stands in the watershed land on both sides of Strawberry Canyon. These trees have now matured into a forest. Within the neighborhood, residents have planted dense stands of trees and other vegetation, such that the homes look as though they had been built within the forest.

Since the vegetation that has been planted is for the most part not natural to the area and because of the man's presence, wildlife in the area is not especially unusual. Deer, raccoons, deer mice and jays are the predominant form of wildlife.

While the area cannot be called "natural", it is extremely beautiful. The beauty of the forest, however, has strong competition from the breathtaking views of the entire Bay Area. In addition, the Hill itself is a scenic asset of the Berkeley community. The forested, house-dotted north ridge of Panoramic Hill is the most prominent natural landmark in the Berkeley hills above the University Campus. The importance of how the Hill looks is made obvious by looking at one of the emblems of the City of Berkeley which features the north ridge of Panoramic Hill as a backdrop to the Campanile. (For more details see the "Environmental Assessment Report")

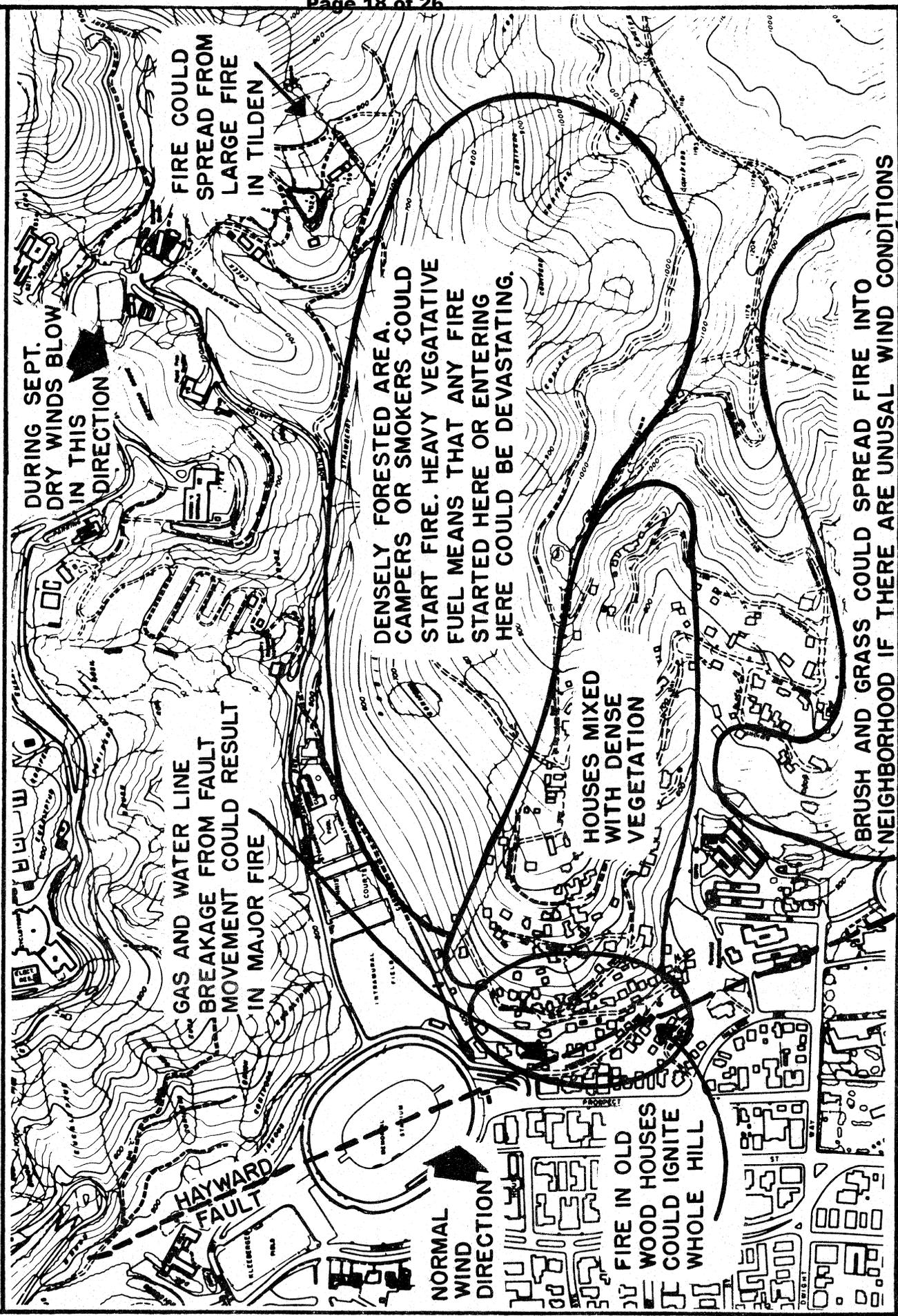
#### Threats to the Hill Area Environment

The Panoramic Hill area is a resource that benefits the entire City of Berkeley and not just the residents. Many hikers and joggers share in its beauty and rural qualities. However, this tranquil neighborhood has many problems that presently detract from its quality or could potentially destroy the quality altogether. These threats include: 1) fire; 2) land development; 3) geologic hazards; 4) conditions of sewers; and 5) street conditions. In addition, public actions aimed at these problems can themselves become threats to the environment.

Two threats completely overshadow the others. These are the threat of fire and the threat of major new development. The fire danger could not only kill people and destroy property but could destroy the natural qualities and man-created qualities of the Hill that make it a community asset. In 1923, Berkeley lost a whole neighborhood of Maybeck homes to a fire disaster. One can only imagine what that area of redwood homes and woodsiness would be like today. Similarly, the potential loss of Panoramic Hill and the Strawberry Canyon watershed must be viewed as a severe threat to the quality of the Berkeley environment. Major new

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FIRE SITUATION



development on Panoramic Hill would further clog existing congested streets, destroy its woodsy rural atmosphere, expose many more people to fire danger and imperil the quality of the view of the Hill from the rest of Berkeley. Any programs aimed at reducing fire threat must therefore be evaluated in terms of their propensity to promote additional residential construction.

The sewers on Panoramic Hill are over 50 years old in the Berkeley portion. They are in very bad condition. Problems include massive root intrusions at several locations, moderate root intrusion throughout the length of the sewer, numerous cracks and breaks, crushed pipes, displacement between pipes at the joints. Separation of pipes at the joints at several locations and settlement of pipes are problems. In several locations there are dips in the line.

Panoramic Hill is served by a 1900's style street system. The streets are very narrow (12 to 18 feet) and extremely twisty with two almost unmaneuverable switchbacks. There is only one road into the Hill. The streets have a very poor surface made up primarily of patched potholes. Major improvement to the street or sewer system however, are not now feasible because such improvements would require closing Panoramic Way and in effect closing the Hill for long periods of time.

Panoramic Hill has two personalities. During week days it is quiet, tranquil and quite empty of cars and people. However, in the evening and on weekends, it becomes noisy and congested. The reason apparently is that this steep hillside neighborhood with narrow twisting roads has a very low capacity to absorb people, automobiles and their problems. When too many cows graze land (that is exceed its carrying capacity), they destroy it; similarly, too many people and their automobiles may destroy Panoramic Hill.

The number one problem of this nature is the automobile. Parking is difficult on Panoramic Hill. Many dwelling units have inadequate off-street parking. Much of the area has parking limited to one side only. There are many apartments which do not provide adequate parking area. Many of the houses are rented to groups of adults thus generating extra automobiles. Because of the parking shortage, there are many cases of automobile parking in "No Parking" zones in front of driveways and the like. The result is unpleasant to residents and dangerously impairs traffic flow. Residents have complained often of inadequate enforcement of parking regulations. On Saturdays and Sundays, cars visiting the area roar up and down the narrow streets. (For descriptions of the situation see "Residents' Perception of the Neighborhood Environment in the Appendix.)

The crowding of more people and automobiles onto Panoramic Hill results in increased social tension, noise, dog activities and unpleasantness. (Older residents expressed the greatest concern about this unpleasant situation) (For more details see "Residents' Perception of Neighborhood Environment")

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Present and future fire problems of Panoramic Hill are caused by many natural and man-made factors. The major factors over which man has control are:
  - a. The heavy amount of vegetative fuel present in the University of California land immediately to the north and east of the Panoramic Hill residential area;
  - b. The heavy amount of fuel in the form of thick vegetation, wooden houses and trash found in the residential area of Panoramic Hill;
  - c. The extremely poor emergency traffic circulation pattern on the Hill for resident evacuation and emergency vehicle access;
  - d. The exposure of nearly 400 residents to extreme fire safety problems and the presence of zoning regulations that encourage creation of additional dwelling units and additional exposure of people;
  - e. The presence of several sources of fire ignition in the area including residence fires, recreationist fires and fires resulting from ground rupturing along the Hayward Fault which slices through the lower part of the Hill;
  - f. The congestion of the neighborhood, primarily caused by the inability of the neighborhood to absorb increased amounts of traffic and parked automobiles;
  - g. The lack of knowledge of residents relative to their possible actions in coping with a fire situation;
  - h. The large number of fire and other agencies that have jurisdiction over fire safety in the area.
2. Environmental problems of Panoramic Hill are:
  - a. Automobile congestion, destruction of vegetation, noise, traffic congestion, parking problems caused by increased new residential construction and intensification of the use of existing residences;

- b. The poor condition of the pavement of the streets, the poor condition of the sewers of the area, and the general aged condition of neighborhood utilities;
- c. Potential for ground rupturing, shaking and landsliding resulting from activity of Hayward Fault which transects the neighborhood;
- d. Creek erosion and minor flooding caused by destruction of Derby Creek, inadequate construction practices and construction on slopes of over 40%.
- e. The possible ground water pollution caused by the extensive use of Septic tanks in the Oakland portion of the Hill;
- f. The threat of substantial new development if the Hill were provided with improved traffic circulation or sewers were extended to the Oakland portion of the Hill.

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

For each of the study recommendations, the study staff has determined which City Council actions are necessary to insure that a desired recommendation is carried out. Once the City Council has determined which recommendations it supports, the appropriate action for that recommendation can be taken.

Recommendation #1: Develop Fire Emergency Response Plan for Panoramic Hill

The Berkeley Civil Defense Director (Fire Chief) should be directed to oversee the production of a Fire Emergency Response Plan for Panoramic Hill. In addition, Council correspondence requesting participation in this effort should be directed to the Oakland City Council and the UC, Berkeley Chancellor. The Plan should provide pre-disaster agreed upon procedures for public and private agencies and Hill area residents. The Civil Defense Director should assemble a committee consisting of representatives of the Berkeley Fire Department, the Oakland Fire Department, the UC Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory Fire Department, the UC Fire Marshal, the PG&E, EBMUD, the Alameda County Civil Defense Chief, the Oakland Civil Defense Chief, the California Office of Emergency Services and area police departments and neighborhood residents. This committee should produce a plan of action for residents and the agencies. The Plan should be in the form of a written document with maps and illustrations. The OES San Francisco Bay Area Earthquake Response Plan should be consulted as a reference. The written Fire Emergency Response Plan should be submitted to the City Council for review. Once completed, the Plan should form the basis for periodic disaster simulation exercises. The Plan should be explained and distributed to the residents.

Recommendation #2: Regulate New Development to Promote Fire Safety

The Planning Director and Planning Commission in cooperation with neighborhood residents, should be directed to prepare new zoning regulations for Panoramic Hill. These new zoning regulations should limit new construction to very low density single-family uses; limit floor area, height and bulk of new buildings; increase minimum yard areas; and require Board of Adjustments approval of the design of all new units. This design review should consider building layout, construction materials, landscaping, building size, fire fighting characteristics and other factors deemed necessary to promote fire safety. It should also consider such environmental considerations as site preparation and grading, drainage, alternatives to existing vegetation, open space and view protection. The City of Oakland should be requested to adopt similar regulations.

Recommendation #3: Develop a Fire Safety Public Information Program

The Fire Chief in cooperation with neighborhood residents should develop and/or collect already available information on measures Panoramic Hill residents can take to reduce fire hazards, prevent fire ignitions, suppress small fires, and handle home fire situations. The chief should forward this information to the City Council along with an outline of the program he intends to follow in getting this information across to the residents of the Hill. The Council should request the City of Oakland to undertake a similar effort.

Recommendation #4: Vigorously Enforce Existing City Regulations Which Affect the Level of Fire Safety.

The Director of Inspection Services, Planning Director, Police Chief and Fire Chief should be requested to identify which regulations under their responsibility relate to fire safety or factors related to fire safety such as overcrowding of units, illegal units or traffic congestion. Each of these directors should be directed to identify specific regulations that would pertain to the fire safety of Panoramic Hill. Each director should forward to the Council information on these regulations, a history of enforcement efforts and specific plans for more vigorous enforcement of regulations. A possible new tool would be to develop a required residential record report for when residential units are sold. Such a report would indicate to prospective buyers the existing zoning conditions. The report also becomes the basis for promoting compliance with existing regulations at the time of sale of property.

Recommendation #5: Insure that the University of California Officially Adopts and Implements a Fire Safety Vegetative Management Plan for Strawberry Canyon.

The City Council should request the University of California-Berkeley Chancellor to forward a report to them on the status of the vegetative management programs that would affect the level of fire safety for Panoramic Hill. The report should point out hazard areas, specify what steps the University presently is taking to lower hazard levels and what steps it plans to take in the future. The Council should suggest to the City of Oakland that they make a similar request. Once the report has been submitted, it should be reviewed by the Berkeley Fire Department for its adequacy in reducing hazards to Panoramic Hill residents.

Recommendation #6: Develop Improved Fire Road Access and Resident Emergency Escape Routes.

The Berkeley Fire Chief should assemble a committee consisting of himself, the Oakland Fire Chief, the U.C. Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory Fire Chief, the U.C. Fire Marshal, and appointed representatives from the Berkeley and Oakland Public Works and Planning Departments in order to study fire road needs in the Panoramic Hill area.

The fire road project should develop specific right-of-way locations and specific costs for new quick access fire roads and escape routes. The project should also recommend methods of improving existing fire roads so that they will be functional for all types of fire apparatus.

Residents of the Hill should be consulted as part of the fire road planning project. The committee should make proposals as to how the roads should be financed and who should pay what portions of the costs. Once completed, the Fire Road Plan should form the basis for capital improvements budgeting, University fire road maintenance programs and financial participation by property owners.

Recommendation #7: Limit the Quantity of New Construction on Panoramic Hill.

This can best be achieved as part of the implementation of Recommendation #2. The Council should request that the Planning Director and Planning Commission draft regulations that would require a minimum lot size of 12,000 square feet with only one unit allowed per lot. This new zoning should be applied to the entire Berkeley portion of Panoramic Hill. The City of Oakland should be requested to rezone the Oakland portion of the Hill from R-30 (5000 square feet per single family unit) to R-20 (12,000 square feet per single family unit).

Recommendation #8: Adopt and Implement a Mandatory Fire Prevention and Fire Hazard Reduction Program for the Private Homes and Vacant Lands on Panoramic Hill.

The Fire Chief should be directed to prepare a program designed to identify and abate fire hazards and prevent fire ignition. This program should require individual inspections of all Panoramic Hill residences and enforcement tools to insure that fire problems are eliminated.

The Fire Chief should be requested to declare Panoramic Hill a High Fire Hazard Area. This action will automatically put into effect Fire Code provisions which require regulation of vegetative fuels for hazard reduction. The Fire chief should, through reconnaissance, determine the approximate amount of private effort needed to abate serious fire hazards. Based on this reconnaissance and in consultation with the Public Works Department, the Fire Chief should recommend public efforts that would assist the residents. Such efforts might include city assistance in vegetation and rubbish removal. The Oakland City Council should be contacted relative to developing a joint program aimed specifically at the fire hazards of the Panoramic Hill neighborhood. In addition to the vegetative management program, consideration should be given to amending the Fire Code to compel installation of fire-smoke (ionization type) detectors, and outside warning devices in all new and existing dwelling units on Panoramic Hill.

Recommendation for Later Action:

If the recommendations noted above relating to controlling new development in Oakland are adopted by the Oakland City Council, then the utilities and sewers in the Berkeley area should be immediately improved. However, the sewers should not be improved or extended to the Oakland portion of the Hill until new development density restrictions are adopted which are at least as restrictive as existing septic tank use restrictions.

# ALTERNATE PANORAMIC HILL ACCESS ROUTES

