



The MARA News

Winter 2004–2005 Edition

Montecito Area Residents' Association

P.O. Box 150266

San Rafael, CA 94915-0266

mara@cwnet.com

<http://users.cwnet.com/ourfence/>

Visit Your New Web Site

We encourage you to visit MARA's new Web site, located at <http://users.cwnet.com/ourfence/>, and to send us your comments and suggestions. We want this new site to be useful for you and fun. Submit your ideas, articles, and event notices to MARA via e-mail (at mara@cwnet.com—there's a link at the site) or via regular mail to the address shown above.

You can also access the site through the new Neighborhood Association Web site hosted by the City of San Rafael Volunteers Program, by going to <http://www.sanrafaelvolunteers.org>.

The site was designed by Anne Ross, who volunteered her time and expertise, and the hosted space was donated by Doug and Lynn Mason.

MARA Design Guidelines Adopted Citywide

Kudos to our neighborhood association for its contribution to the new San Rafael General Plan, which requires that residential design guidelines be developed for all of San Rafael. As such a formulation may take several years to accomplish, the Plan says that, in the interim, the guidelines developed as part of the 1996 Montecito Neighborhood Plan—the result of months of neighborhood meetings attended by hundreds of people from our neighborhood—will be adopted for all of San Rafael.

These well-considered guidelines are good news for everyone. They require that new and renovated residential buildings be compatible with nearby existing homes, have a pedestrian-friendly relationship to the street, including front gardens, doors facing the street, parking screened from the street, and so on. They also require that multiunit buildings' details (windows, doors, roof lines, etc.) reflect the small-scale character

of nearby homes, unlike the large “blank boxes” constructed in the '60s and '70s which blight many of San Rafael's neighborhoods. And they encourage the protection and renovation of historic and architecturally significant buildings to retain their character.

We can take pride in the fact that the final citywide guidelines will likely incorporate most of MARA's basic ideas.

Watchdogging the Proposed Grand Avenue Traffic Changes

As you may know, City Engineer Nader Mansourian proposed removing parking from a portion of Grand Avenue and installing traffic signals at the four-way stop at Mission and Grand, as well as at the T-intersection at Fifth and Grand.

The MARA board feels that these changes would be detrimental to the neighborhood and that traffic at these points already flows sufficiently well.

When a petition stating our objection was presented to the City Council, MARA was assured that these changes would not be implemented for several years and that the neighborhood will be consulted before plans are finalized.



MARA \$pring Garage \$ale

This spring MARA will again sponsor its popular annual neighborhoodwide garage sale. Look for flyers, and a date posted on the MARA Web site.

We welcome your input, including any inventive ideas that will make this another outstanding success. Also, if you would like to be on the organizing crew, or the “details” crew on the scheduled day, let us know via s-mail or e-mail or at a monthly board meeting (second Wednesday of every month, 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., San Rafael Corporate Center, 750 Lindaro at Second).

MARA Volunteers' Busy Year

The MARA board reviews all projects proposed for the area to ensure that the present quality of life for every resident is maintained or enriched.

When a proposal might affect the entire neighborhood, the board contacts as many members as possible for individual input. Because of this, we encourage you to send us your e-mail address when you join or renew.

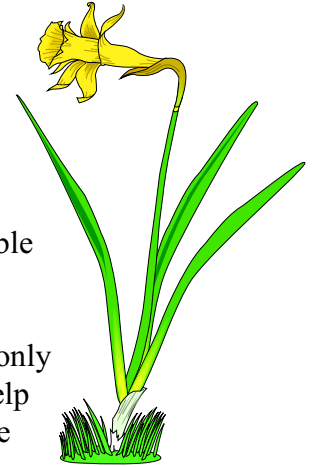
Some highlights of the past year:

- Senior and disabled residents of Aldersly and the San Rafael Commons, concerned with their **safety at the Third and Union intersection**, circulated a petition we presented to the City Council. We also met with the City Traffic Engineer seeking to arrive at a solution. MARA members have spoken at City Council meetings to emphasize the danger that exists for not only hundreds of high school students and other pedestrians, but drivers as well.
- **When Whole Foods proposed expanding its parking area, the board met with the company's representatives and planners** to offer our views. We also met jointly with Whole Foods and the City Traffic Engineer.
- Since any changes at San Rafael High School affect our neighborhood greatly, we **have been attending the school's Site Committee meetings** to keep tabs on the progress of the ongoing construction.
- Two of our board members, who worked on committees that helped formulate the 20/20 General Plan, spent innumerable hours attending those meetings **so that the concept guidelines our residents established several years ago for the Montecito area would be upheld** and not be invalidated. These concepts were so well thought out that they are now to be incorporated in the General Plan as citywide guidelines.
- In addition to **maintaining our first triangle beautification** at Park and Jewell streets, members have planted over 1,500 bulbs in a triangle at Irwin and Mission (see articles posted on the MARA Web site).
- MARA volunteers helped advertise our presence by **creating a Web site and producing and delivering this newsletter**. Between 500 and 600 copies will be delivered to residences and businesses within the Montecito Area boundaries.
- Members delivered approximately 500 **flyers announcing the Irwin Street planting**.

Blossoms for Irwin Street

A second MARA "triangle" project was conceived when one of our Irwin Street members attended a board meeting and requested help. An open space across from her home, land that had some years earlier been donated to the City by the adjacent property owner, had become weedy and strewn with trash.

Cory Bytof, the City's Volunteer Coordinator and the organizer of the citywide Beautification Week, arranged for the Recreation and Park Department to place a picnic table onsite and provided coffee and cookies for the workers—all neighborhood volunteers. Not only that, he too grabbed a hoe, to help the crew place some of the more than 1,000 spring bulbs planted throughout our area that first weekend.



On a rainy Saturday in October the job was completed. More volunteers moved the picnic table to a shadier spot and planted 500 fall bulbs.

By spring the area will be a pleasant corner for lunch, where we can enjoy a profusion of blossoms.

Check Out the Park/Jewell Triangle

The last Saturday in November, MARA volunteers placed a plaque on the first triangle project, at Park and Jewell streets.

Many thanks to Alastair Cumming for the attractive brass plaque he donated.

Call for Volunteers

MARA always welcomes anyone who would like to volunteer his or her time, talents, labor, expertise, or ideas to assist in having our neighborhood be a great place to live.

If there is some special way you think you might be able to contribute, if there's something in the neighborhood you'd like to see improved, or if you'd just like to be more a part of your local community, feel free to contact any members of the board, or simply e-mail MARA at mara@cwnet.com.

Don't Be a Target of Mail Theft

Here is a useful checklist to help you avoid being a mail-theft target:

- Never send cash or coins in the mail. Use checks or money orders instead.
- When writing a check that you're going to mail, use a permanent-ink pen.
- Always deposit your mail in a U.S. Postal Service mail-collection box or the mail slot at your local post office, or hand your mail to your letter carrier. Never leave your outgoing mail for carrier pickup in an unprotected mailbox or area where it can easily be stolen.
- Make sure your mailbox is secured and in good condition. Your postmaster can tell you how to improve your mailbox's condition or how to obtain a locking group box. The San Rafael area's postmaster is Len Robbins (call him at 457-1945 or e-mail him at leonard.e.robbs@usps.gov). Consider purchasing an individual locking mailbox from a local hardware store.
- Promptly remove mail from your mailbox after delivery, especially if you are expecting checks, credit cards, food coupons, or other negotiable items. If you will not be home when valuable items are expected, ask a trusted friend or neighbor to pick up your mail.
- When ordering checks or credit cards, have them delivered to your bank branch instead of to a curbside mailbox, if possible.
- Have your local post office hold your mail while you are on vacation or absent from your home for a long period of time.
- If you do not receive a check, food coupons, or other valuable mail you are expecting, contact the issuing agency immediately.
- If you change your address, immediately notify your post office and mail a notice to the people with whom you do business.
- Consider starting a Neighborhood Watch program. By exchanging work and vacation schedules with trusted friends and neighbors, you can watch each other's mailboxes (as well as homes). If you observe a mail thief, immediately call the local police and then the nearest postal inspector.
- For further information, contact San Rafael Police Detective Ed Rudolph at 485-3017.



Additional Safety Tips for Household

Officer Lomba of the SRPD attended our October monthly board meeting and updated us on how the new budget cuts affect our neighborhood—also known as “Beat 4.”

Fortunately, there have been no manpower or time reductions to the coverage.

Officer Lomba offered many helpful suggestions that we should all practice to protect ourselves and our homes:

- Close and lock garage doors during evening and nighttime hours.
- Close and lock windows during evening and nighttime hours.
- Keep house, car, and recreational-vehicle doors locked at all times.
- Outdoor lighting, set to be triggered by motion sensors, promotes safety.
- Audible alarms are also a good idea.
- Call the police if you see or hear something that doesn't look or sound right.
- Remember the old adage: “It's better to be safe than sorry.”

If you are interested in the Neighborhood Watch program, please contact Lynette Keller of the SRPD (at 485-3114 or lynette.keller@srapd.org), and she will mail you the necessary information to get started.

SRHS Construction Update

Despite the apparent chaos in front of San Rafael High's main gym, construction is progressing on schedule. Work on the school's east wing and the science building is complete, and the auditorium is next up for renovation.

More Whole Foods Parking

Whole Foods Market has a proposal before the City Planning Commission to remove three buildings on Mary Street to create a 32-space parking lot.

Improved access for customers is a key consideration, as well as beautification.

Plans include planting not only Boston ivy, as wall cover, but also crepe myrtle and other attractive trees and plants. A grassy area, with seating under a shade tree, is to be provided as well.

New Arrivals on Second and Third Streets

MARA is pleased to see new businesses moving into our area. Some of the new arrivals:

Third & Mary Mall

Peet's Coffee & Tea (402 Third)

777 Grand Avenue Mall (at Second)

Marin Floor (Suite 104)

Starbucks (Suite 105)

Montecito Shopping Center

Jasmine Market

Three Wishes

Montecito Nails

181 Third Street Minimall (next to Trader Joe's overflow parking lot)

Pella Windows (Suite 100)

Hollywood Video (Suite 150)

171 Third Street

TD Waterhouse (Building B)

It's Easy to Join MARA

To become a MARA member or renew your annual membership, send your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address (if you wish) along with a \$10 check per person (\$5 for seniors) payable to "Montecito Area Residents' Association" c/o MARA, P.O. Box 150266, San Rafael, CA 94915-0266.

In addition to residents, MARA extends a welcome to our neighborhood retail, commercial, and other organizations and invites them to become members. Some of these include Encore (11 Mary), R & M Property Management (Novato), St. Michael's Extended Care (416 Fourth), Swift Loan of Marin (536 Fourth), and Whole Foods (3rd & Union). Please support them.

As of January 1, 2005, the annual dues period will start in January instead of May. Current members will be notified by mail of their prorated balance due for the year 2005. (Any donations in excess of membership are always accepted, appreciated, and put to good use.)

Make Sure Your Voice Is Heard

Come to the annual meeting in mid-May and you can participate in the election of officers, voice your concerns, and offer your support and ideas.

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SUPPORT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION . . . JOIN NOW!