-----Original Message-----
From: Don Skolnik [mailto:***@cox.net]
Sent: Friday, March 02, 2007 1:38 PM
To: 'Andrew Towne'
Cc: 'Lee Schoenbart'; 'Juli Peters Hyde'; 'Jay Hyde'; 'June Donmoyer'; 'Roy Dahl'; 'Christiana Gauger'; 'Dave Abrams'; 'Ken Sherwood'; 'Zach Shanks'; 'Alex Sachs'; 'Denise Bradshaw'; 'Elizabeth Bryson'; 'Leo Wilson'; 'Tom Mullaney'; 'John Hartley'
Subject: RE: Hillcrest Town Council Development Committee. Minutes, 2/28/7 Meeting
To all:

The policy statement passed by the Development Committee is a nearly no-growth measure. It is almost a no-change measure. I strongly oppose it.

Andrew Towne writes: "Don Skolnik...has been very upfront about what he wants. He is a developer who wants to build town houses in Hillcrest. He has clearly said so."

Actually, Andrew's statement is wildly misleading. I am a software developer, an engineer, a database programmer who has never developed any real estate.

If you read the email thread below, you would find that in a previous life, "I spent about 20 years as a construction engineer and project manager on commercial, industrial, and institutional projects. Last year, I seriously considered buying some land in the Uptown area and developing an "affordable" 3-to-5 unit project of small row houses. I devoted about 6 months to researching this. I had a property in escrow and submitted preliminary plans to the Development Services. In the end, I decided not to proceed."

But this debate isn't about me or what I do for a living. It is about ideas and a vision for the future of our neighborhood.

Like many of you, I have serious concerns about the current planning and development realities in Hillcrest. For example, one of my concerns is that public policy gives an excessively heavy weight to the requirements of vehicles and through-traffic. I would like to see HTC identify and lobby for some specific projects --- such as "pocket parks", green spaces, public art, dead-ending of streets to quiet the traffic, etc --- that would enhance the pedestrian-friendly, village quality of Hillcrest."

I happen to live in a row house that was built about 5 years ago, and I love it. I love this style of housing, and I love cities. Under Andrew's policy, my row house would have never have built.

In fact, under Andrew's policy, practically none of the housing that has been added to Hillcrest under the current zoning would have been built. This would drive up the price of the existing housing stock even more than it has gone up, and it would encourage more sprawl on the suburban and ex-urban periphery. It is a fundamentally anti-green, exclusionary policy. It is a policy that says, in effect, "We have ours...now the rest of you be damned."

Don Skolnik
**** ******** ******
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Email: ***@cox.net

-----Original Message-----
From: Andrew Towne [mailto:***@yahoo.com]
Sent: Friday, March 02, 2007 1:05 AM
To: Don Skolnik
Cc: Lee Schoenbart; Juli Peters Hyde; Jay Hyde; June Donmoyer; Roy Dahl; Christiana Gauger; Dave Abrams; Ken Sherwood; Zach Shanks; Alex Sachs; Denise Bradshaw; Elizabeth Bryson; Leo Wilson; Tom Mullaney; John Hartley
Subject: RE: Hillcrest Town Council Development Committee. Minutes, 2/28/7 Meeting

To all development committee members and others who have expressed interest but have not yet attended our meetings.

I have not blind-cc'd this email, because I want you all to be aware of everyone who is on or has expressed interest in the committee.

Some emails back and forth between committee members have only gone to a portion of the people who have expressed interest in the committee, so please update your committee list.

What follows is a response to concerns expressed by other committee members (see below.)

The minutes I sent were modeled on the minutes for the last steering committee meeting prepared, I believe, by Nancy Moors.

I will forward a copy of those minutes in another email.

There was a great deal of debate at the steering committee meeting that was not reflected in the minutes. Instead, those minutes focused on the votes that were taken.

I don't know how we can do it any differently than that.

If we were to summarize the debating that went on, the minutes could go on for many, many pages.

We could, I suppose, hire a court reporter to get everything in and end up with a 25-100 page transcript.

Or, someone could try to do a brief summary.

But I assure you, any such summary would not completely satisfy the meeting participants.

The person doing the summary would be accused of "spinning" the summary to favor one position or the other.

I believe that minutes are normally kept short to avoid such problems.

I had no ulterior motive in compiling the minutes.

I simply followed the model provided by Nancy Moors.

What ultimately counts in these meetings are votes.

And those, I believe, I have represented accurately.

Christiana Gauger writes: "I am concerned that myself and I think a few others who were at that meeting believed that we were voting for a statement the intent of which was to encourage a particular direction for growth rather than to stop it. My feeling is that some of the words used in the statement do not reflect this sentiment and will have to be amended and I would prefer it if the minutes reflected this."

Um, if you didn't like the policy statement, why did you vote for it?

Do you think you were "tricked"?

Here is what Don Skolnik has to say:

"I stated my view that the detailed policy statement authored by Andrew [correction: the policy statement was first proposed and worded by Don Abrams; Andrew Towne added some detail, made the actual motion, and accepted friendly amendments from other committee members such as changing the wording "should conform to" to "should fit in with"] was, in effect, a statement favoring no growth and, indeed, no-significant-change in our community. Prior to the vote, when asked about this, Andrew agreed as much [correction: I actually said "yes and no"; the terms "should fit in with" are vague -- who decides what "fits in" and how? Bigger buildings with more people in them

might be held to "fit in", which would mean that Hillcrest grew in population and number of units; as to change, you could replace every building in Hillcrest with new buildings without increasing sizes or adding a net increase in the number of units and still be in line with the policy statement, so it is not a statement that would stop change -- but at this point, I believe nobody was really listening to me]. After the vote, I expressed my dismay that the committee had voted as it did."

Don Skolnik puts it in a nutshell: He says that he expressed his opinion before the vote that Don Abrams'/Andrew Towne's motion would stop growth.

And I, Andrew Towne, will now testify that I didn't even get listened to when I wanted to criticize that characterization of the statement.

Then, and only then, did we all vote.

And you, Christiana, voted in favor of the proposition.

I don't think you were tricked.

And I don't think there should be any change to that vote (5-1 in favor) or in the minutes.

I have a right to submit the results of that vote to the general meeting and characterize it as the recommendation of the development committee.

If you want to argue against your own vote at that meeting, that is your privilege.

Now that I've spent a good hour dealing with what amounts to Monday Morning quarterbacking, I want to make some remarks regarding Lee Schoenbart's statement.

Lee correctly writes:

"To those of us from the original steering committee -- from which grew the idea of the town council from the January residents meeting -- many of us have very, very strong feelings about preserving the charm, grace and community style of Hillcrest and this definitely does NOT include the loss of land or single-family homes to development interests that want to build dense and unlimited condos, high-rises and office buildings. This is the Mission Statement written by the Hillcrest Town Council and approved by an overwhelming majority at the February 13 general meeting: 'To provide a voice and enhance the quality of life for Hillcrest renters and homeowners and to support actions that benefit our neighborhood.'"

In other words, this town council is concerned with enhancing and maintaining quality of life for residents.

And I will ask all of you to think about the following: How does growth enhance the quality of life of Hillcrest residents?

Let me put this in specific terms:

If a high-rise is built next to where you live, blocking your views, cutting off your sunlight, bringing more cars onto your street so that there is less parking for you and your guests, bringing more traffic and traffic gridlock to your immediate neighborhood, bringing more people and noise at all hours of the day and night to your immediate neighborhood, is your quality of life enhanced?

If that high-rise is not built near you but near another Hillcrest resident, is his or her quality of life enhanced?

Or let's take a more modest example:

If the charming craftsman or Spanish-style single-family-home next to you is torn down and replaced by a condo or apartment building that takes up more of the lot than the house did, and is significantly bigger and higher than the house was, is your quality of life enhanced by the loss of greenery, flowers and lawns next door to you?

Is it enhanced by the light being blocked by a higher building?

Is it enhanced by your views being blocked by that new building?

Is it enhanced by the presence of more people in your immediate vicinity, so that there is less street parking for you and your guests, more noise from more people going in and out of the condo/apartment building next door at all hours of the day and night, and more traffic gridlock in the neighborhood due to the net increase in people?

Is the quality of your life enhanced by the disappearance of a charming, historic and possibly architecturally significant older home and its replacement by a generic stucco box or concrete modern glass box?

Or, if the condo/apartment building is not replacing a single family home next to you, but next to some other resident of Hillcrest, is his or her quality of life enhanced?

As condos/apartment buildings and high-rises spring up all over Hillcrest, bringing more traffic, more noise, less parking, blocked views, and less sunlight to the neighborhood, is the quality of life of the neighborhood enhanced?

Does it enhance Hillcrest residents' quality of life when their immediate neighborhoods become construction zones, with constant tearing down, building, remodeling, and all of the noise, loss of parking and traffic rerouting that such construction entails?

The answer to these questions is NO.

The quality of life of Hillcrest residents is NOT enhanced by the kind of growth that has been taking place in Hillcrest, and that will continue to take place until we take a strong position against growth.

We must take that position, not because we think it will stop all growth (we don't have that much power), but because it will give us our best bargaining position.

We won't be capitulating and giving into anything.

We will be fighting all the way.

And the net result almost surely will not be "no growth", but it will be significantly less growth than would result if we simply told city planners and politicians, "Oh, we don't mind growth in this community -- we just want 'smart growth'".

Folks, WE HAVE BEEN GETTING 'SMART GROWTH' (THE SAN DIEGO VERSION); THAT IS THE WHOLE PROBLEM!!!!

I'm not just some yahoo speaking off the top of my head.

I have followed local politics here IN DETAIL for the last FOUR YEARS.

I have paid close attention to the city council, to the planning commission, to the ten large projects that have gone up or are in the process of going up in Uptown, and to the Uptown Planners.

I am sick and tired of the typical San Diego politics of "everybody roll over and play dead" when the developers march into the room.

That is NOT what we need in this community.

Don Skolnik, our gracious host for the last development committee meeting, has been very upfront about what he wants.

He is a developer who wants to build town houses in Hillcrest.

He has clearly said so.

He is also a resident of Hillcrest, as we have thus far defined it, and he has a perfect right to have a voice on the Hillcrest Town Council.

BUT I do not believe that what he wants would enhance the quality of life of Hillcrest residents.

Quite the contrary.

Then we have some people on our committee who are not sure what they think, and we have one person who I believe just moved to the area.

It doesn't matter how long you have lived here. If you are a renter or homeowner, you have the right to participate in the town council.

However, I would like to make a small but significant observation.

Californians are constantly accused of "Cali-fornicating", or ruining, other states that they visit or move to.

If you are from California and say so in states like Oregon or Colorado, you are likely to be sneered at and told to go back home.

We in California have never been like that.

We have welcomed everyone to this beautiful and extraordinary state.

When I was about ten years old, California had about 12 million people. It now has 37 million -- more than three times as many.

We are feeling the strain of this population growth.

San Diego County has enough local water for about 100,000 people. But the county has thirty times that many people -- 3,000,000 -- and we are dependent on imported water that is also depended upon by more and more people in other places.

I do not think that GROWTH is always a good thing, or the RIGHT of those who advocate growth.

And I look askance at people who have just moved to this state and automatically agree that more growth is a necessary and good thing.

I also look askance at people who say "Growth is inevitable", which is just another way of saying "I want growth".

Growth is only inevitable if we permit it.

By "we", I mean the federal and state governments, the county and city of San Diego, and our local politicians and planners.

By "we", I ultimately mean citizens participating in the political process. And folks -- that is us.

In fact, growth is NOT inevitable.

I grew up in Marin County, and Marin stopped growth by withholding water permits.

Thirty years ago, I left Marin and the population there was 200,000 people.

The state and federal governments forced Marin to accept more people, and Marin did so, but only very grudgingly.

The population now is about 260,000. Not anything like the growth rate of San Diego over the same thirty-year time period.

The new religion -- "smart growth" -- is an unholy alliance of environmentalists who want to stop sprawl development in the countryside with developers and the politicians that developers quite literally buy.

"Smart growth" has NOT stopped sprawl development in the countryside.

In the last four years, I have watched 35 miles of farms between Hemet and Temecula get gobbled up by sprawl development even while "smart growth" was the religion everyone was bowing down to in LA and San Diego.

What "smart growth" in San Diego really means is that low-density northern suburbs (Scripps Ranch, Del Mar, etc.) don't have to increase their density, but all the charming, historic older neighborhoods around Balboa Park do.

Never mind that a neighborhood like Hillcrest -- with its dead-end streets, windy roads and cul-de-sacs -- cannot support more traffic.

Never mind that the San Diego fire department has flatly declared that it is not equipped to fight high-rise fires.

Never mind that we have a huge infrastructure deficit of pot-holed streets, blown-out water pipes, old and decrepit sewer lines, a short-staffed police department, and so on.

The city of San Diego is hell-bent on "densifying" our neighborhood into a mini-Manhattan and replacing what amounts to the real history of San Diego reflected in its oldest neighborhoods with new condos and high-rises.

"Smart growth" also reflects an unholy alliance between affordable housing advocates and developers.

We are told there is a crisis of affordability.

No, there isn't.

You can buy houses for as little as $50,000 in some parts of this country.

I was offered a house -- a fixer, granted -- for $4,000 in Bunceton, MO about ten years ago.

Housing in Kansas City is relatively cheap.

Ditto Mississippi.

Oh, they aren't the trend capitals of the world. Well, too damn bad.

I suppose it's also a gross injustice that I can't afford to buy a nice house in Beverly Hills, or for that matter in the town I grew up in -- Belvedere in Marin County (median home price last year: $2.65 million.)

I do not see ANY justification whatsoever for ruining beautiful areas of California like our own neighborhood in order to accommodate people who could move somewhere else, and then move back here after they've made their money and can afford to live in "paradise".

Those who wail that San Diego is losing its diversity are wrong.

People with little money continue to live here -- and make the necessary compromises by living in apartments with roommates.

If policemen, firemen, teachers and others feel so underpaid that they leave, the city and school districts will pay more to lure them back. They will have no choice but to do so.

Aspen, CO lost some of its needed workers twenty years go. So Aspen not only increased their pay but offered them free vacations to Hawaii if they would come back.

That's the way the market works -- if you let it.

Hillcrest has never (in the last 12 years that I have been visiting/living in this area) looked as diverse as it does today in terms of income, lifestyle, race and so on.

Given all of the above, I find it unbelievable and appalling that I have to fiercely defend my anti-growth position in a planning committee for a residents group of one of the very neighborhoods that is being trashed -- and "trashed" is not to strong a word -- by over-development.

Whether it is the 160-foot-high, block-long, massive high-rise that will loom over Hamburger Mary's, Peet's and Bread and Cie at Third and University unless the lawsuit against it succeeds...

...or the 190-unit building being built a block from where I live...

...or the sunset-view blocking monstrosity at Washington and Albatross...

...or the no-setback/no-greenery "Egyptian" soulless concrete-and-glass box at University and Park Boulevard...

...or the endless demolitions and "lot scrapings" of charming old craftsman houses and their replacement by ticky-tacky stucco condo buildings...

...or the depletion of affordable apartments through the "slap-on-a-coat-of-paint-and-call-it-a-condo" condo conversions taking place throughout Hillcrest and North Park...the evidence could not be more visible or clear.

Our community is being raped by developers -- duh.

And if you can't see this, it's only because you're not looking or you haven't been here long enough to see what is being lost.

Sad.

"Smart growth?" Sure.

And why don't we have "smart crime", "smart litter", and "smart grafitti" as well?

Can't we get our act together, folks?

Andrew Towne

Don Skolnik <***@cox.net> wrote:
To all,

There are two typos in my earlier email. The second paragraph should read as follows:

"The meeting lasted more than 2 1/2 hours. The short minutes sent by Andrew do not reflect the full discussion we had on a variety of topics. I believe they should be amended to do that."

Thanks,

Don Skolnik

-----Original Message-----
From: Don Skolnik [mailto:***@cox.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 01, 2007 11:44 AM
To: 'Lee Schoenbart'; 'Andrew Towne'
Cc: 'able dave'; 'Jay Hyde'; 'jm don moyer'; 'Julianne Hyde'; 'R. Dahl'; 'Christiana Gauger'
Subject: RE: Hillcrest Town Council Development Committee. Minutes, 2/28/7 Meeting
Lee and Andrew,

I was the host of the meeting.

The meeting lasted about than 2 1/2 hours. The short minutes sent by Andrew do reflect the full discussion we had on a variety of topics. I believe they should be amended to do that.

Taking Lee's points one by one:

1. Lee wrote: "I think it was a mistake to allow your first subcommittee to be hosted by someone who does not live in Hillcrest proper... "

I live about one block east of Park. My neighbors and I consider that we live in Hillcrest "proper", notwithstanding the fact that Park Blvd. in the eastern boundary of Uptown Planners jurisdiction. This matter was fully discussed at the last HTC general meeting, and it was overwhelmingly voted that people who live within at least a 1/4 mile of the Uptown Planners boundary would be voting members of HTC with full rights in the organization.

2. Lee wrote: "I think it was a mistake to allow your first subcommittee to be hosted by someone who ....did not disclose a pro-development agenda."

Lee, I do not have a pro-development "agenda." I have favor smart growth. Is there to be a "litmus test", namely that only those who share your views should be allowed to host a meeting? I should hope not.

Also Lee, may I say respectivefully that your facts are simply wrong.

Respectfully, here are the facts:

Andrew sent an email asking whether others would be interested in hosting the meeting. I replied with an email offering my home.

Andrew's email included a strong statement of his no-growth views. Therefore, I thought it appropriate to summarize my own views. So in the same email offering my home for the meeting, I said:

"Thanks [Andrew] for sharing your ideas for the work of the committee. I am a database programmer, but in a "previous life" I spent about 20 years as a construction engineer and project manager on commercial, industrial, and institutional projects. Last year, I seriously considered buying some land in the Uptown area and developing an "affordable" 3-to-5 unit project of small row houses. I devoted about 6 months to researching this. I had a property in escrow and submitted preliminary plans to the Development Services. In the end, I decided not to proceed. But I learned a lot during this process that I would glad to share with others.

I am not in the "no growth" camp. I favor "smart growth" that takes into account the community's broad needs, including required infrastructure.

One of my concerns, is that public policy gives an excessively heavy weight to the requirements of vehicles and through-traffic. I would like to see HTC identify and lobby for some specific projects --- such as "pocket parks", green spaces, public art, dead-ending of streets to quiet the traffic, etc --- that would enhance the pedestrian-friendly, village quality of Hillcrest."

I am pro-smart-growth, and I stated that clearly before the meeting and at the meeting. And I certainly make no apologies for my pro-smart-growth views.

3. Lee wrote: "It sounds to me like there was a tug-of-war of wills with the host lobbying for pro-development and Andrew attempting to take the high road while holding onto the integrity of why we formed this subcommittee in the first place. I apologize in advance if anyone takes offense, but it seems as though the rest of the folks in attendance had to be cajoled and convinced that this subcommittee is against uncontrolled density development not approved by the citizenry of Hillcrest."

Lee, you were not at the meeting, but I can assure you we had a vigorous debate and discussion on many topics at the meeting. No one was "cajoled." The meeting was conducted in a civil manner.

Now to your point: I stated my view that the detailed policy statement authored by Andrew was, in effect, a statement favoring no-growth and, indeed, favoring no-significant-change in our community. Prior to the vote, when I asked him about this, Andrew agreed as much. After the vote, I expressed my dismay that the committee had voted as it did. We still have free speech in America.

Don Skolnik
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-----Original Message-----
From: Lee Schoenbart [mailto:***@cox.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 01, 2007 10:29 AM
To: Christiana Gauger; Andrew Towne
Cc: able dave; Don Skolnik; Jay Hyde; jm don moyer; Julianne Hyde; R. Dahl
Subject: RE: Hillcrest Town Council Development Committee. Minutes, 2/28/7 Meeting
Importance: High
Dear Christiana:

Since you included me in the e-mail, and although I was not present at the subcommittee meeting, I want to weigh in with my opinion.

To those of us from the original steering committee – from which grew the idea of a town council from the January residents group meeting – many of us have very, very strong feelings about preserving the charm, grace and community style of Hillcrest and this definitely does NOT include the loss of land or single-family homes to development interests that want to build dense and unlimited condos, high-rises and office buildings.

This is the Mission Statement written by the Hillcrest Town Council and approved by an overwhelming majority at the Feb. 13 general meeting: “To provide a voice and enhance the quality of life for Hillcrest renters and home owners and to support actions that benefit our neighborhood.”

I think it was a mistake to allow your first subcommittee to be hosted by someone who does not live in Hillcrest proper that obviously did not disclose a pro-development agenda. (I can tell you with certainty and clarity that the border between Hillcrest and North Park is that Hillcrest includes only the west side of Park Boulevard, everything to the east is North Park.)

Quite frankly, Andrew, who created the subcommittee, should have hosted the meeting.

It sounds to me like there was a tug-of-war of wills with the host lobbying for pro-development and Andrew attempting to take the high road while holding onto the integrity of why we formed this subcommittee in the first place.

I apologize in advance if anyone takes offense, but it seems as though the rest of the folks in attendance had to be cajoled and convinced that this subcommittee is against uncontrolled density development not approved by the citizenry of Hillcrest. The 301 University Avenue project is a good, yet sad, example of what happens when developers come into Hillcrest and have their way with the politicians against the will of the residents and local businesses.

Perhaps at the next general meeting folks ought to be informed about the dissention taking place in all the steering and subcommittee meetings and agree to more micromanaging with the addition of pro-development, anti-development and moderate-development committees along with groups that meet with and without political and media influence to satisfy everyone’s personal quest while resolving nothing to the detriment of Hillcrest.

Sincerely,

Lee A. Schoenbart

(619) ***-****

***@cox.net

www.LeeSchoenbart.com

“The art of writing is the applying of one’s ass to the seat”

-- Dorothy Parker

-----Original Message-----
From: ***@yorku.ca [mailto:***@yorku.ca]
Sent: Thursday, March 01, 2007 9:50 AM
To: Andrew Towne
Cc: Lee Schoenbart
Subject: Re: Hillcrest Town Council Development Committee. Minutes, 2/28/7 Meeting

Andrew,

Thanks for sending out those minutes so quickly! But could we please amend the minutes (to record for posterity!) to reflect the debate around the policy statement? I am concerned that myself and I think a few others who were at that meeting believed that we were voting for a statement the intent of which was to encourage a particular direction for growth rather than to stop it. My feeling is that some of the words used in the statement do not reflect this sentiment and will have to be amended and I would prefer it if the minutes reflected this.

Thank-you,

Christiana

Quoting Andrew Towne <***@yahoo.com>:

> Present: Andrew Towne, Don Skolnik, Christiana Gauger, Juli Hyde, Roy Dahl,
> Dave Abrams
>
> Andrew Towne led the meeting.
>
> Don Skolnik graciously hosted the meeting.
>
> In keeping with Town Council procedures, participants informally agreed to
> follow Robert's Rules of Order (make a motion, discuss if it receives a
> second, 50%-plus-one majority vote needed for a motion to pass. No quorum
> requirement at this point.)
>
> Motion Passed (6,0,0): The Development Committee will rotate meeting
> leaders, decide the agenda for the next meeting at the end of the current
> meeting, and choose the leader for the next meeting at the end of the current
> meeting.
>
> Meeting participants introduced themselves and stated their positions on
> growth and development.
>
> There was much discussion and debate as participants acquainted themselves
> with each other's respective positions.
>
> A list was compiled of specific suggestions for planning and development in
> the community.

>
> No votes were taken on that list, which will be developed further in future
> meetings.
>
> Juli Hyde made the list and has custody of it.
>
> Motion Passed (5,1,0): The Development Committee will recommend to the Town
> Council at its next general meeting (2nd Tuesday of March, 6:30 PM, Joyce
> Beers Community Center) that the Town Council adopt as a policy statement the
> following:
>
> "New development in Hillcrest should fit in with adjacent housing in terms
> of size, lot footprint, height, bulk, setbacks, type of housing, character
> and integrity, with allowances made for zoning boundaries."
>
> Minutes prepared by Andrew Towne