

"Bad people succeed when good people do nothing"

-E. Burke



Sierra Madre

News

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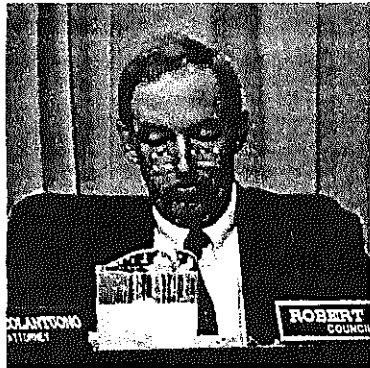
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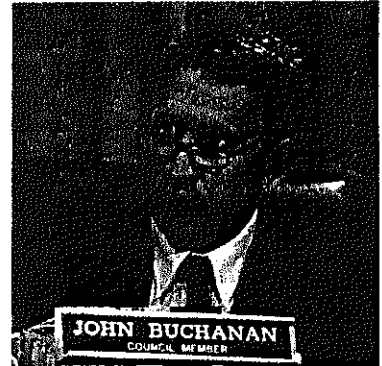
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BETRAYED

Sierra Madre Residents' Pleas Go Unheard by City Council Regarding One Carter Development & Settlement Agreements.



Over 500 residents attended several public hearings on the One Carter Development.



One Carter—A Sierra Madre History

For the better part of 100 years little attention was paid to the land at the top of Baldwin Avenue unless you were a Mount Wilson Trail hiker. Without knowing who resided in the well-hidden home, barn and cabin, most attention was paid to the wildlife that inhabited the chaparral-covered slopes of this northern most residence in Sierra Madre as you hiked along the trail to Mount Wilson or trail camps along the way.

This site is the home of the founder of Sierra Madre, Nathaniel C. Carter, who acquired it and a good portion of other Sierra Madre land holdings from the founder of Arcadia, E. J. "Lucky" Baldwin of Santa Anita Racetrack and Arboretum and Botanical Gardens fame. Carter and Baldwin, as early landowners and speculators in Southern California had a famous falling out over water rights coming out of our mountain canyons. Baldwin made it possible for Sierra Madre to remain as small as it is today by limiting Carter's water rights to Bailey and Little Santa Anita canyons.

Carter set about building a home for his family in 1882, calling it "Carterhia." The two-story Victorian home was given this name as a fanciful parallel to his rival "Lucky" Baldwin's. He graced the property with the entrance arroyo stone pillars, fishponds, exotic plantings, and the necessary out buildings and barn needed by a gentleman farmer. He set about to follow the Southern California agriculture trend of the time, taking advantage of the favorable climate, by becoming an orange grower. The Carter Orange, developed here in Sierra Madre, is on file at the University of California Citrus Archives.

Carter was not the first to settle on the site however, as there is a homesteader's cabin dating to the time of the Civil War, bearing the name George Macomber. The Macomber cabin was built in 1864 and had minor expansions in the 1940's and 1950's. There is little information about Mr. Macomber but his cabin still stands at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains, as does the original barn. The Victorian homestead was demolished to make way for the second long-term residence.

The Willis family acquired the property and in 1939, after the Carter house was razed, set about to build a modern structure which was completed in 1941. This, too, is well hidden from today's trail users, as it sits on the original home site, surrounded with tall pine trees. It is, however, another architectural treasure, built by USC-trained architect John I. Matthias. Upon completion, the new home was featured in the Architectural Forum magazine and it served as the residence of the Willis family for nearly 60 years.

In response to the natural fire and flood cycle that is part of the ecosystem of the chaparral covered foothills of the Angeles National Forest, the County of Los Angeles Department of Flood Control built the Carter debris basin in 1955. It is situated at the northern most end of the canyon floor above the barn. The County Department of Public Works maintains this flood control structure and has a road up to the area. In 2000 it was rebuilt to meet modern flood and debris retention standards.

One Carter Avenue encompassed 103 acres, when in 1972 a local real estate developer at Five Star Realty put together a project that was the first to attempt to subdivide the land. This plan also required the inclusion of a 13-acre site to the east of the property along the entrance to the Mount Wilson Trail in order to gain access from the east. "The Top of Baldwin Avenue" development was to include seven condos with 49 units and three condos with 15 units to be entered from Carter and Baldwin and twelve homes to be entered along Mount Wilson Trail road. A Castaways Restaurant and parking lot to be entered off Baldwin, was designed set on the ridge line to the west of the canyon floor.

Hillside development pressures mounted throughout all of Southern California in the late 1980's. A developer whose purchase of 100 acres, 13 being within the City of Sierra Madre at the Chantry Flats Road, the remaining in Arcadia and Monrovia, triggered an interest in the City developing a Hillside Ordinance to govern development in steep, hillside areas. A further outgrowth of hillside preservation saw the organization of the Sierra Madre Mountain Conservancy. At its inception 1989, the conservancy made a list of all the hillside acreage that they wanted to preserve. On this list was the One Carter site. Through several phases of negotiations the Conservancy also bought the 13-acre piece that was part of the "Top of Baldwin Avenue" project, preserving the integrity of the trailhead to the Historic Mount Wilson Trail.

Two other proposals for subdividing or developing the remaining 63 acres of the original home of Nathaniel C. Carter came about in mid-1990. There was a 25-lot tract map developed by Ted Willis. A developer from the La Jolla area proposed another project, which did not have much publicity. It was a 400-unit senior type residential and medical care facility. Neither of these two project's proposed use of the acreage within the Hillside Ordinance area was in keeping with the stipulations of the ordinance.

In 1999, Maranatha High School entered escrow simultaneously with plans to develop the One Carter Avenue site for a 650 student Christian high school. The had been utilizing the Pasadena Unified School District elementary school facility at Canon Avenue with a student body of 350 students for nearly twenty years. This proposal required zone changes, a General Plan Amendment and Conditional Use Permits as One Carter is zoned for single-family residents, including Hillside Ordinance provisions for much of the area.

Over the course of two years of full environmental review and citizen input and after several revisions, the City Council denied the high school project. The site is currently under review for a tract map by the Glendale developer Dorn-Platz, while under ownership of Maranatha High School. The current tract map proposes sites for 32 houses.

Citizens concerns for the current project are focused on the proper interpretation of the City's Hillside Ordinance for the site. There is a formula for reduced density in the hillside area of the site. This is accomplished by a slope-density ratio that is the core of the ordinance. The slope-density ratio reduces the number of homes that can be built in the steep areas of the hillside, in order to preserve views, animal habitat and watershed.

The sites proposed for normal single-family residence density are also of concern as this is the site of the founding father of the City of Sierra Madre. The preservation group, Residents for the Preservation of Sierra Madre, has been watching both the high school project and the housing development closely to see that proper environmental evaluation followed the California Environmental Quality Act, also known as CEQA. Concerns focus on traffic, noise, and loss of trees, animal habitat and watershed.

In the Southern California Region, it is remarkable to be able to account for the activity on a residential landmark over the course of so many years. Sierra Madre's small foothill village environment makes it more likely than one might find in another community. As a close-knit community we have this common history to share and it is no doubt why the community is so interested in the future of One Carter Avenue.