

ISLA VISTA –WHO’S IN CHARGE

INTRODUCTION

Early in the term of the 2001-2002 the Grand Jury (the Jury) held several roundtable discussions asking how the Jury could best be a service to the people of Santa Barbara County. It was during one of these sessions that Isla Vista was noted as an area of concern with many un-addressed problems – a community in neglect! Previous Grand Juries have written reports on “Public Safety In Isla Vista” (1993-1994)¹ and “The Isla Vista Recreation and Park District” (1994-1995). The 2001-2002 Jury decided to investigate the broad subject of “Isla Vista Living Conditions” this investigation compels the question: “Isla Vista – Who’s in Charge?”

APPROACH

The 2001-2002 Jury was informed by the County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) that 27 different agencies have a responsibility to influence the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB)/Isla Vista Community. The Jury wanted to know what these agencies did or did not do and whether they were effective in carrying out their responsibilities. A guided tour of Isla Vista and the western portions of the UCSB campus, plus an interview with the County Sheriff’s Isla Vista Foot Patrol immediately brought to mind a number of questions that needed to be addressed. The following is a list of those questions:

- What services does Isla Vista require? Which of those are in need of improvement?
- Is there consistent building code enforcement?
- Is there enforcement of zoning regulations, special regulations, fire regulations, etc.?
- What are the crime rates and how do they compare with other university related cities?
- What are the parking regulations and are they enforced?
- What is the status of the sidewalk construction for Isla Vista?
- Are the efforts of the County Public Works Department on balance with the other communities of Santa Barbara County?
- What responsibility does the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) share with the Isla Vista Area?
- What fire safety hazards exist?
- Is there a commonly accepted organization of authority or leader of developments affecting the Isla Vista living conditions?

¹ These reports are available on the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury web site at www.sbcgj.org.

In securing information to answer the above questions, and in addition to the previously mentioned inspections, the Jury interviewed 14 individuals and attended the “Isla Vista Design Workshop” April 9 thru 16, 2002. The Jury also reviewed all or portions of the following reports:

- University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), Program Support for the Community of Isla Vista, 1970 thru 1990.
- Goleta Transportation Improvement Plan, May 1999.
- UCSB Neighborhood Support Measures for the Community of Isla Vista, June 1, 1990.
- Cooperative Relations Agreement between The Regents of the University of California and the City and County of Santa Barbara, Citizens for Goleta Valley, Citizens Planning Association and the Isla Vista Association, December 14, 1990.
- Final Redevelopment Plan for the Isla Vista Redevelopment Project, November 27, 1990 and amended December 7, 1999.
- Enhancement Committee Recommendations.
- Isla Vista Circulation and Parking Study, April 29, 1991.
- Isla Vista Community Enhancement Report, November 1992.
- Memorandum of Understanding, June 1, 2000. By and Between
 - Isla Vista Recreation and Park District
 - County of Santa Barbara
 - Redevelopment Agency of the County
 - Regents of the University of California
- Isla Vista Planning Committee Proposed Work Plan, August 12, 1999.
- Proposed Isla Vista Master Plan, August 26, 1999.
- Minutes of various Isla Vista Redevelopment Agency’s Board of Directors meetings.
- County of Santa Barbara Coastal Zoning Ordinance, December 1997.
- Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan, January 1982.
- Santa Barbara County Building Code, April 27, 2000.

After reviewing the above information, it became evident that most of the problems with Isla Vista have been previously identified and many plans or programs have been undertaken to study these problems. The Jury has re-identified many of those Findings and Recommendations in this report. The Jury determined that one major Finding and its related Recommendation was basic to the multitude of problems of the Isla Vista/University community - no agency has been charged with responsibility to correct the problems that have been identified and studied for years! The Jury is compelled to ask: “Isla Vista – Who’s in Charge?”.

ISLA VISTA’S PRIMARY NEED

This lack of an agency charged with the responsibility for implementation of the many plans is due to the following observations:

- The Isla Vista Recreation and Park District authority is limited to managing and operating the parks in Isla Vista.
- The elected body for local government in the unincorporated area is the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. The citizens of Isla Vista are represented by the 3rd District Supervisor, who also represents the balance of the 3rd District, which has twice the population of the Isla Vista community.
- The County Board of Supervisors while sitting as the Santa Barbara County Redevelopment Agency manages the Isla Vista Redevelopment District. The District does not have full time employees or an assigned staff.
- Responsibility for municipal type services for the Isla Vista/University community are scattered over 27 different agencies.

The well documented problems in the area of safety, security, overcrowding, congestion, zoning and building code violations, poor lighting, limited access, elevated crime rates and disregard for property are a continuing blight on the community. No single agency is charged with the responsibility to address these problems or coordinate the response of other agencies beyond the planning process.

“UCSB is in danger of falling in popular image and will not be in the same league as other University of California campuses”.² A new Master Plan being generated by four affected agencies is to be completed in the next two years. Immediate steps need to be taken by the Board of Supervisors to clearly designate an agency, department or individual to have the primary responsibility of implementing programs and policies that will begin to correct the blight that affects Isla Vista. Without this, the new Master Plan will go the way of the many prior attempts, nothing will happen and it will be studied again in the future.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: No single agency has been assigned the responsibility to address Isla Vista problems incrementally or collectively beyond the planning process.

² Draft Proposed Isla Vista Master Plan, August 26, 1999 and Isla Vista Planning Committee Proposed Work Plan, Revised August 12, 1999.

Finding 2: The Isla Vista Redevelopment District does not have full time employees or an assigned staff.

Finding 3: Responsibility for municipal type services for the Isla Vista/University community are scattered over 27 different agencies.

Finding 4: The County, District and University are jointly planning efforts and resource commitments for a new Master Plan which is to be completed in the next two years.

Finding 5: In many areas the sidewalks have yet to be constructed, although it was an action item in the 1990 Redevelopment Plan.

Finding 6: The absence of sidewalks has allowed parking in the front yards of residential facilities to be a common occurrence.

Finding 7: County documents state that the cost of right-of-way limits the installation of sidewalks. The Jury's interviews indicated that several landlords would donate their right-of-way for sidewalk construction.

Finding 8: The Isla Vista Redevelopment District does not have sufficient funds to complete the construction of sidewalks, while at the same time it has funded (\$366,500) the purchase of the El Encanto Apartment Housing site. This site is not within the District's boundary.

Finding 9: Most of the streets have streetlights installed on only one side and many of the existing lights exceed the County Department of Public Works standard for spacing. For example, the four blocks on Camino Pescadero, north of Sabado Tarde have only five existing streetlights.

Finding 10: Some of the existing street lights are rated at 70 watts.

Finding 11: The University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) has inadequate parking for students, faculty and administration.

Finding 12: The existing parking demand in Isla Vista exceeds the parking space availability. This problem has been a recognized problem for at least 20 years.

Finding 13: In 1995, the 3rd District Supervisor stated that the parking problem in Isla Vista "continues to be an unmitigated community disaster".³

³ Memo from William B. Wallace to Board of Supervisors re Isla Vista Permit Parking Program dated February 21, 1995.

Finding 14: Prior studies, by the County, of the parking problems in Isla Vista recognized that the problems resulted in “heavily congested streets with illegally parked vehicles causing obstructions to emergency vehicles, pedestrians, busses and other motorists and bicycles”.⁴

Finding 15: The Isla Vista Homeowners Association has repeatedly requested that the County undertake a program to facilitate parking for Isla Vista residents.

Finding 16: Present parking ordinances (quantity of parking spaces required based on the number of bedrooms or studios) cause many of the owners to make building changes without proper permitting.

Finding 17: The Isla Vista Housing Inspection Program was established in April 1998.

Finding 18: The Inspection Program office is not staffed or equipped for adequate Zoning Inspection in addition to Building Code and Safety inspections.

Finding 19: The Inspection Program office computer does not have a broadband connection to the County’s network.

Finding 20: There is no central organization that works to improve the general living conditions. The Isla Vista Parks and Recreation District is the manager of parks and recreation and the Isla Vista Redevelopment District acts only when the Board of Supervisors convene as the District.

Finding 21: UCSB has adapted an “Extended Jurisdiction” policy beyond campus boundaries. This enables the Student Faculty Conduct Committee to conduct private hearings with students for offenses committed off campus. This is presently limited to offenses, which fall under the categories of physical abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment and hazing.

Finding 22: The main entrances to the University do not transit the community of Isla Vista.

Finding 23: UCSB pays little or no fees for community impacts of housing, schooling and parking facilities for the approximately 8,000 students that reside in Isla Vista.

Recommendation 1: The Board of Supervisors should designate an agency, department or individual to have primary responsibility to implement programs and policies that will begin to correct the many problems in Isla Vista.

⁴ Isla Vista Permit Parking Program, Draft Policy Summary, January 21, 1994.

Recommendation 2: The named agency, department or individual become the central contact for the University administration in the cooperative improvement of the Isla Vista community.

Recommendation 3: Create a parking district to develop and enforce parking ordinances.

Recommendation 4: Create incentive plans to encourage multiple unit rental owners to upgrade their properties.

Recommendation 5: Install new streetlights in areas that exceed Santa Barbara County Public Works standard spacing. Install these new lights on the side opposite the existing ones to improve the overall lighting.

Recommendation 6: Increase wattage of new streetlights to a minimum of 100 watts to improve public safety.

Recommendation 7: County Public Works Department continue to construct as many new sidewalks as the annual budget allows, while working with property owners to resolve the right-of-way for sidewalk construction.

Recommendation 8: The Isla Vista Redevelopment District should insure that all projects remain in the Redevelopment District.

Recommendation 9: Segregate the Isla Vista community parking program revenues for use to acquire additional off-site parking in the immediate vicinity of Isla Vista.

Recommendation 10: Work with the Metropolitan Transit District to develop a shuttle bus system, which would facilitate remote low-cost parking and minimize the need for vehicle use in Isla Vista.

Recommendation 11: The Isla Vista Redevelopment District should develop a plan for a remote low-cost parking facility.

Recommendation 12: Assign a part-time Zoning Enforcement Planner to assist the present Building Inspector.

Recommendation 13: Connect the PC workstation in the Isla Vista office to the County network via a broadband system.

Recommendation 14: Revise the parking ordinances in relation to the actual availability of existing parking.

Recommendation 15: The Sheriff’s Foot Patrol should request that the UCSB “Extended Jurisdiction” policy include second offense alcohol violations by both individual and student housing units.

Recommendation 16: The County needs to work with the University to expedite the revision of the west campus so that Pardall Street becomes a major entrance to the University.

Recommendation 17: The County should approach the University to consider payment of impact fees as any other large employer or developer.

Recommendation 18: The Redevelopment District should work with the University to develop the Isla Vista area into an equivalent world-class living area of which the students and faculty would be proud.

AFFECTED AGENCY

Board of Supervisors

Finding 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12 thru 20, 24, 27

Recommendation 1 thru 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17

Isla Vista Redevelopment District

Finding 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16

Recommendation 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 18

Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department

Finding 1, 7, 12, 14 thru 19, 23

Recommendation 4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17

Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Department

Finding 6, 25

Recommendation 15

Santa Barbara County Public Works Department

Finding 5 thru 10

Recommendation 5, 6, 7