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Allan B. Jacobs and Leslie Gould

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OBSERVING AND INTERPRETING THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

CASE STUDY: NAGLEE PARK, SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

by Allan B. Jacobs and Leslie Gould

PREFACE

It is possible to tell a lot about a city or neighborhood just by looking. Clues that are visible in the physical environment--everything from houses and stores to people to doorbells--can often be pieced together to help tell the history and dynamics of an area: when it was built; for whom; the physical, social and economic changes that have taken place; who lives there now; what major issues and problems exist; whether the area is vulnerable to rapid change; and even something about how the area may change in the future. You may not be able to tell everything you would like to know about these questions, but you can tell a great deal.

Increasingly in recent years, quantitative data and qualitative surveys--census reports, traffic studies, opinion polls, and the like--are

used to assess existing conditions, growth, and change in the urban environment. Without challenging the importance or validity of those research techniques we believe it is equally important to cultivate our skills of observation. For in reality, people who live in urban environments, including policy makers, urban planners, designers, and other professionals, take clues from the physical environment every day, whether consciously or subconsciously. Often they act, appropriately or not, on the messages gained. The more consciously systematic the process the better. It is possible, we believe, to develop the process of reading the urban environment into a deliberate, analytical technique. That is the subject of this current inquiry.

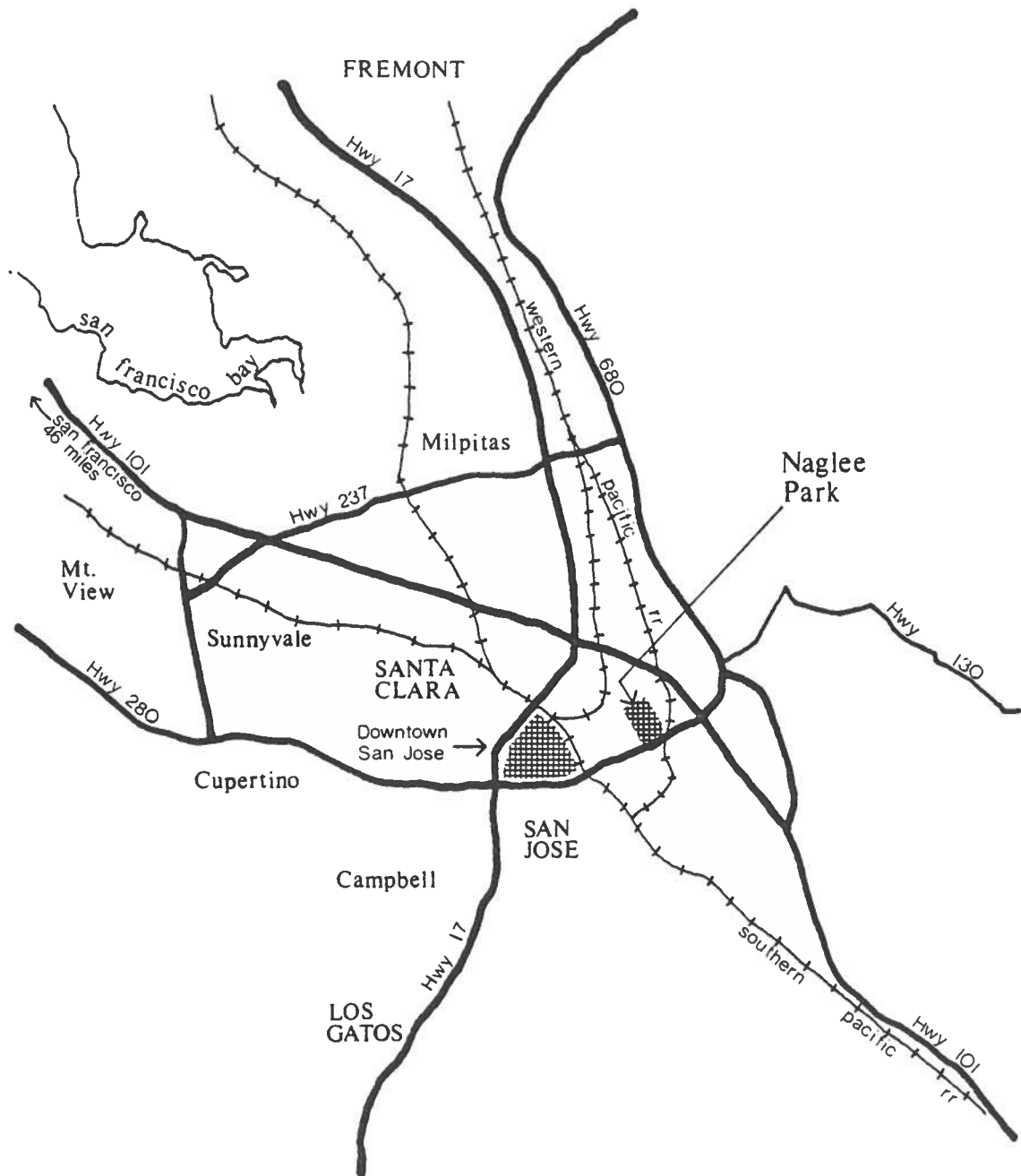
The purpose of this project is to develop and test a technique for observing and diagnosing change in the urban environment. As a first step, some case study "experiments" have been conducted, one of which is reported here. They involve a walking field trip by one to three observers in an urban area that is unfamiliar to them. A staffperson in a local planning agency has been asked to choose an area that is urban, can be walked in two to three hours, is well known to people in the department or community and an area

for which data is available. The observers are given only a street map on which the area they are to observe has been delineated. Two to three hours are spent in the area observing and interpreting what is seen. Short discussions with people on the street are permitted but these are not to be a major part of the inquiry. If someone says, "hello," or asks a stranger what they are doing, the field observer might well respond and a short exchange can take place; it is permissible to ask an occasional question of a passerby.

At the end of the walk the observers are permitted up to an hour to mull over and summarize what has been seen and to think about what it might mean. A general analysis of the area--its history, changes that have taken place, who lives there now, current issues and trends, and possible future issues--is presented immediately after the walk and mulling over period to people who are supposedly knowledgeable about the area. Usually they are members of the local city planning department staff. Notes of the presentations are taken.

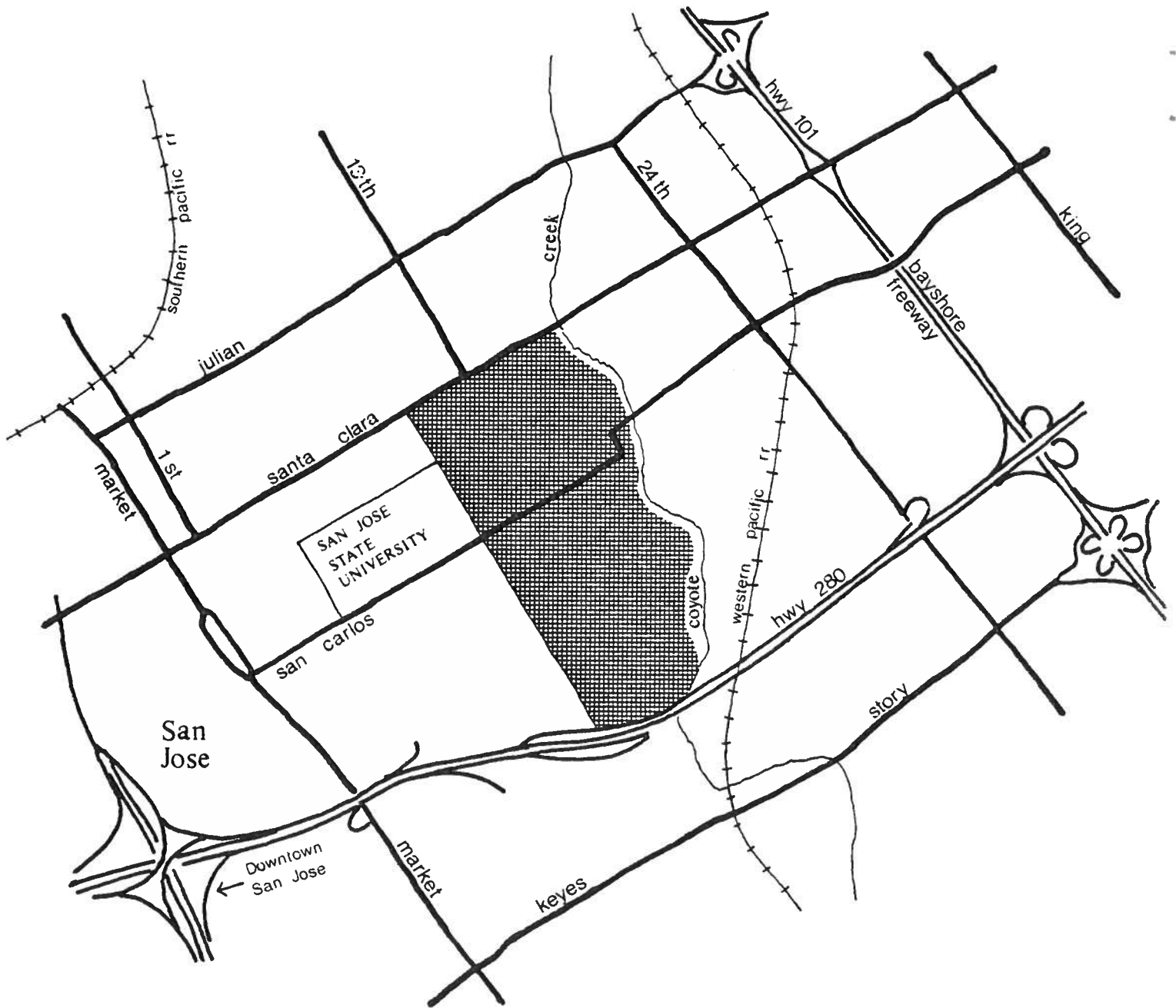
Comparing the conclusions to both the staff members' knowledge of the area and with other available data, the field observers can assess the

extent to which they were correct in their diagnosis. They can also determine which physical clues were most revealing and reliable, how clues were combined to help draw conclusions, the importance of personal knowledge, and some of the limitations and pitfalls of the method. The evaluation of the case studies becomes the basis for developing the observation process into a conscious analytical technique for analyzing change in cities.



NAGLEE PARK - SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 miles
SCALE



NAGLEE PARK - SAN JOSE

0 1 mile
SCALE 1:24000



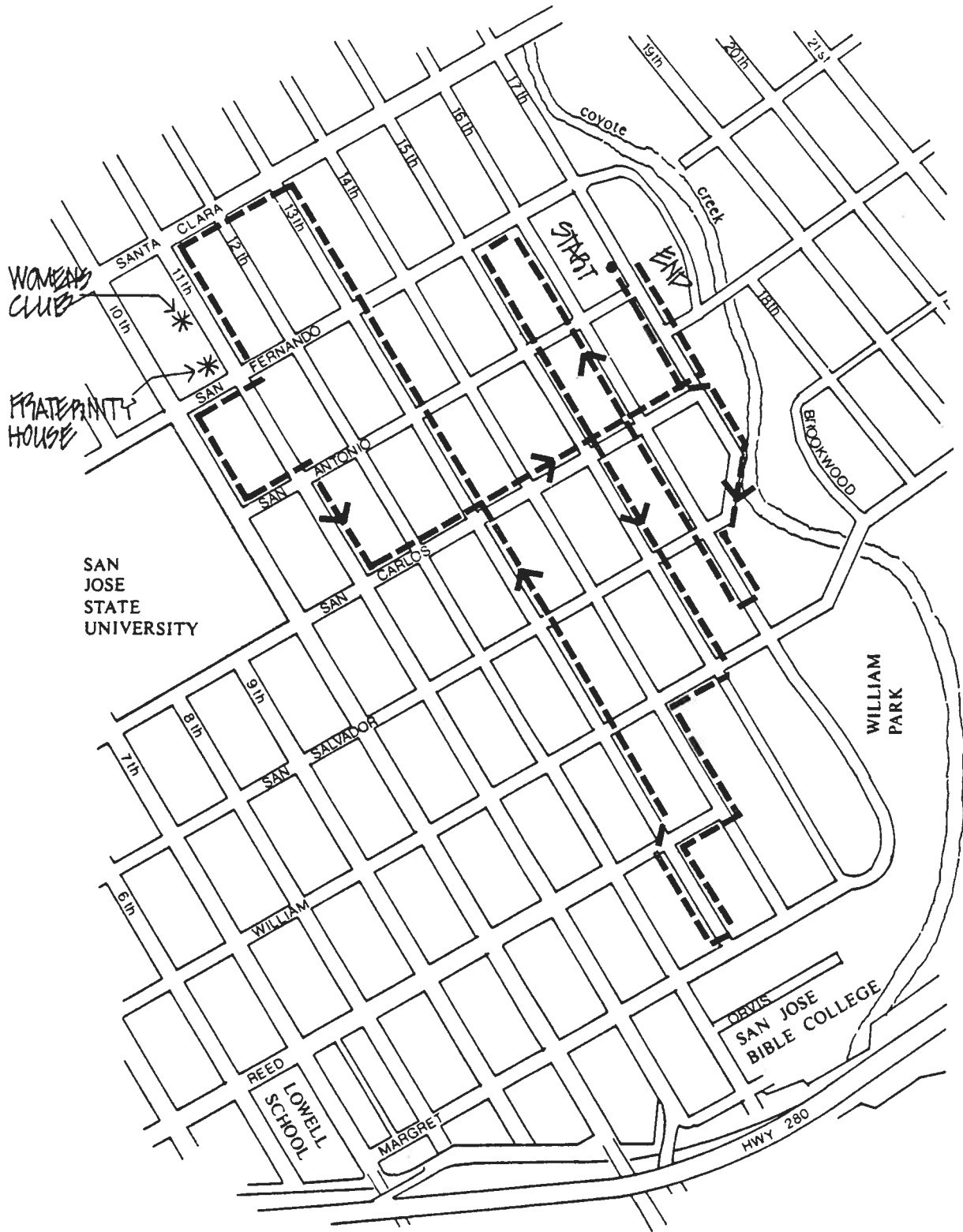
OBSERVING AND INTERPRETING NAGLEE PARK



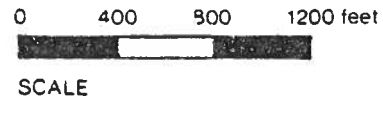
We have entered the Naglee Park neighborhood of San Jose from the north, arriving by car from Berkeley at about 10:00 a.m. on a warm Friday in late June, 1981. First, we drive around the area briefly, observing that we are not too far from the downtown area to the west on Santa Clara Street (there is a concentration of tall buildings to be seen), and that San Jose State University borders on the area on 10th Street. We cross the area, moving east, looking up and down the numbered cross streets as we pass. Some multi-family units along 11th Street quickly give way to what appear to be older, single family homes. We look to see if there is a focal point, maybe a local shopping street, that would be a good place to start walking, but we see none and continue to 17th, the eastern edge street, and park the car under a tree.



At 17th and San Antonio, a residential street, there is a street sign indicating that a parking permit is required between September and June, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The influence of the University must extend this far. Student parking has been a bother to residents. Are the parking regulations a testimony to organized resident



WALKING ROUTE IN NAGLEE PARK SAN JOSE



concerns, expressed forcefully and successfully at City Hall?

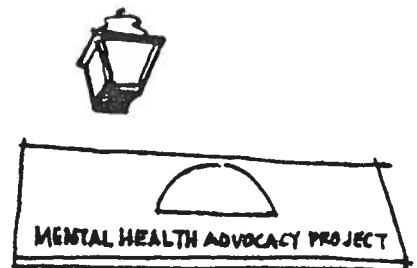


There is a mix of housing sizes on 17th Street: mostly older (earlier than 1930s) but also a few post-World War II houses. The latter "look" newer and are more modest in scale. There is less detail to them. The houses on the east side of the street are larger and in better repair than on the west (not that the ones on the west are in poor condition), possibly because they abut a ravine and creek to the rear and this was considered a choice location. Two older women sit on the side patio of a well-maintained home on the east. There are large trees on this street. The houses are well set back from the sidewalks. There is a sense that more recent and perhaps younger people live on the west side of the street. There is a moving van and furnishings being taken into a vacant house. The belongings are less substantial than what an older, better-off family might have. Some furnishings, briefly seen, are a bit frayed at the edges, maybe older and more used than what more well-to-do people would have. Pieces don't necessarily match in style. Are these people connected to the University?

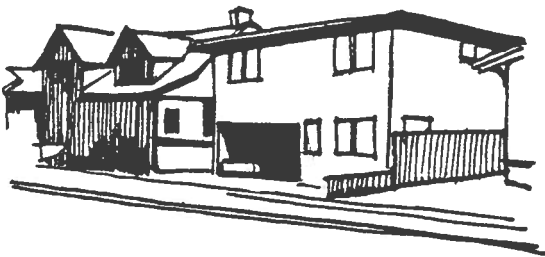
The buildings on 16th Street north of East William Street appear to be single family homes. Does the level of maintenance, not the best (especially the lawns and yards that are not as well cared for as they might be), indicate that some are rented rather than owner occupied? There are two "FOR SALE" signs. Some young couples as well as some elderly people are seen. There is a "home alert" sign in a window, then another, but they are faded. There are no bars or grates at entrances or windows. The house sizes indicate that they were occupied, originally, by middle income people. There is a variety of housing designs suggesting that the area developed over time, incrementally, with a variety of builders-developers. They seem to date from the 1920s and earlier.



Turning the corner onto San Fernando Street, there are more cars and traffic. One street north is Santa Clara Street; it must be a main east-west street leading to downtown as indicated by its traffic, its width, and the mostly auto-oriented commercial uses located along it. The houses on East San Fernando are not in as good condition as on 16th or 17th. Yards are not as well maintained. A mental health advocacy project is located here. Spanish speaking residents are



here. Some young Chicanos are working on a car. Does the commercial nature of Santa Clara have an impact that goes to East San Fernando as commercial uses spill down side streets? The presence of mixed uses, some marginal economic uses, and people with lower incomes than is the case further south seem to indicate that.



On 15th Street, moving south now, the housing is better maintained than on East San Fernando. It appears to be housing of the 1920s and earlier, but the investigators don't stop to ask why they think that. There is a "FOR SALE" sign on a house next to an apartment that is of 1950s or 1960s origins (stucco, lack of architectural detailing, aluminum casement windows, large plain surfaces, materials of lesser quality and with less individual workmanship than pre-war construction). People at this apartment are white. There is the sound of children's voices. At another similar apartment some people are black. Along the street there are a fair number of open doors. There is a rooming house. Do the security stickers on doors and windows and the lace curtains indicate more elderly people? Some older people are on the street. On the other hand, the sculpture in one window is something that a younger person would own, as are his/her books ("arranged" the way

students and young people often do, in a casual way).

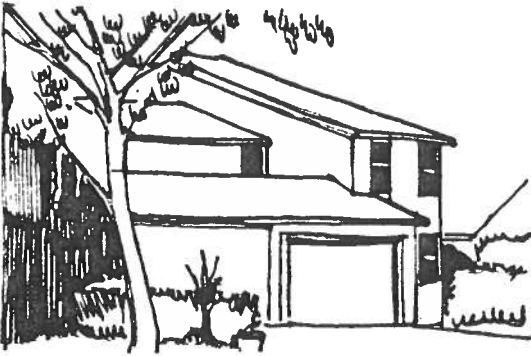
What was originally a single-family house (design, size) has been converted to five units (mailboxes not originally part of the house). Students live there (a young black male dressed as one would expect a student during the summer in shorts, T-shirt; a street sign from France in a window). Another house has been converted. Why were there conversions rather than replacements of older structures with newer, higher density buildings? Does that say anything about the market for new housing at the time, or the relative desirability of this area?

Sidewalks were repaved in 1966, according to the identification markings in the sidewalk. A house has foundation problems (sagging ground floor and a major crack leading from the foundation in the center of the street facade).

East William Street seems to act as a divider street; it is wide, appears to have traffic, fewer trees, not many houses or activities facing it or opening on to it, directly.

On 14th, between East William and East Reed, the houses are newer than those north of East

William. They are also maintained better. This appears to be a more stable, maybe wealthier area. There are alarm systems attached to houses on Reed.

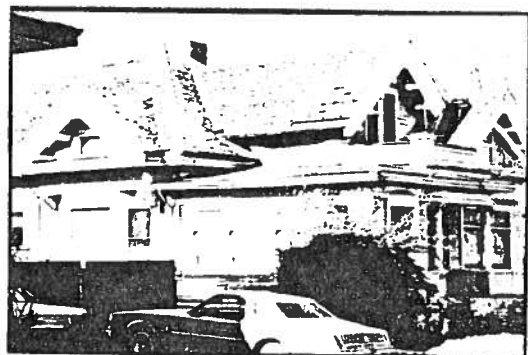


Homes on 13th, south of East William, are larger than on 14th. The parked cars are larger and more expensive models than others seen earlier. A new single family home is under construction. It is expensive (wood siding, a fair amount of carpentry, variations in the facade, non-standard windows) and looks like it was designed by an architect. Many homes have electrical alarm systems, but front doors are open. Is it the heat? There seems to be a mixed message here. The open front doors may be more significant than the alarms. Few people are seen on the sidewalks.

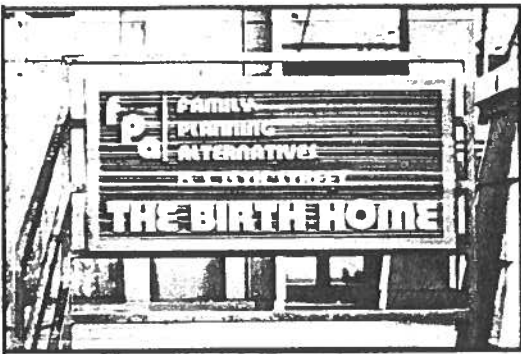
Still on 13th, but north of East William, the houses are older, smaller, and less well maintained. Residents are younger. Some are Chicanos. Is there or was there a zoning change at East William? The change in quality, size and maintenance of housing, at East William, has been observed on other north-south streets. Three doorbells indicate that what was originally a one-family home was converted at some point. There are indications that repair and maintenance

work has been done by nonprofessionals (uneven painting, paint lines that should have been straight but aren't). Are young people moving in and doing their own rehabilitation? More people on the streets are Chicanos. Three houses in a row with outside metal window shades indicate that the metal shade salesman may have gone through in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Further along there is evidence of more serious maintenance problems: cupped shingles, roofs in need of repair, missing and rotted materials, old and flaking paint. There is no danger of structural failure, just signs that people don't have the money to maintain as well as they might like, or that owners just aren't doing it.

Moving north, there is a boarding house (the sign says so), a "FOR SALE" sign, a "FOR RENT" sign, more people on the streets (more Chicanos among them), and at least two homes for the mentally handicapped. A number of homes have outside plumbing fixtures (pipes) but no particular thought is given to this phenomena. The last block of 13th Street (before Santa Clara) has a number of good buildings, but there is a temporary sense to this immediate environment, as if the people are new and/or do not expect to remain a long time. Maybe it is the outside plumbing or



An indication of change:
outside utility plumbing
added to original home.



the mix of uses or the institutions that give that feeling. The "Birth Home" indicates another social service. Why is it there? Inexpensive space? Nearness to clientele?

Paolo's Restaurant, on Santa Clara, looks like it's been there for a long time and the crowded parking lot, with large and expensive cars, suggests that this is a citywide, not just a local, eatery.



Moving south on 11th, the first block, like other first blocks immediately off of Santa Clara, seems to be in slow transition, something between solid residential to the south and auto-oriented commercial on Santa Clara. Maybe it's been in transition for a long time. The sizes of the homes indicate that it was once solid middle class. The San Jose Women's Club is here: they would only have moved into a secure, family-oriented community. That is no longer the case.



This is a one-way street.

The ATO Fraternity house, at San Fernando, indicates the University influence. Recent rehabilitation of this old Victorian is superficial at best (the materials are not the best, the workmanship not by the highest quality craftsmen,

painting is not crisp).

Large, old houses on 10th, across the street from the University, bespeak early wealth, probably at the turn of the century. Later, there was probably infill development of smaller houses on the original parcels that were subdivided. The University owns much of the land and the buildings now or, where it doesn't, the uses are oriented to it. University influence extends into the Naglee Park area on 11th (a lot of University-oriented housing, many students in evidence). This is a heavily travelled, one-way street.

Moving east on East San Carlos, back toward the starting point, one is aware of the flowers and their smells. Streets have been clean throughout this area.

At 15th and San Carlos there is another home for older, semi-retarded people. They are visible. There have been any number of these homes visible in the area. Why? It is recalled that in the early 1970s the State changed its policies and funding practices related to care for retarded to favor the housing of these people in local communities, in small care homes rather than in large institutions. The people went to the larger cities: San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose. The

care houses had to be in locations where prices were "right" and where they would be accepted (care homes usually required special approval in many cities). So, maybe, in the early 1970s, house prices in the northern part of Naglee Park were low and maybe there was no strong neighborhood association at that time, because most such groups associated with good-sized single family homes would have had major misgivings over the influx of a lot of care homes and might have fought them. Maybe they did object but weren't strong enough to win.

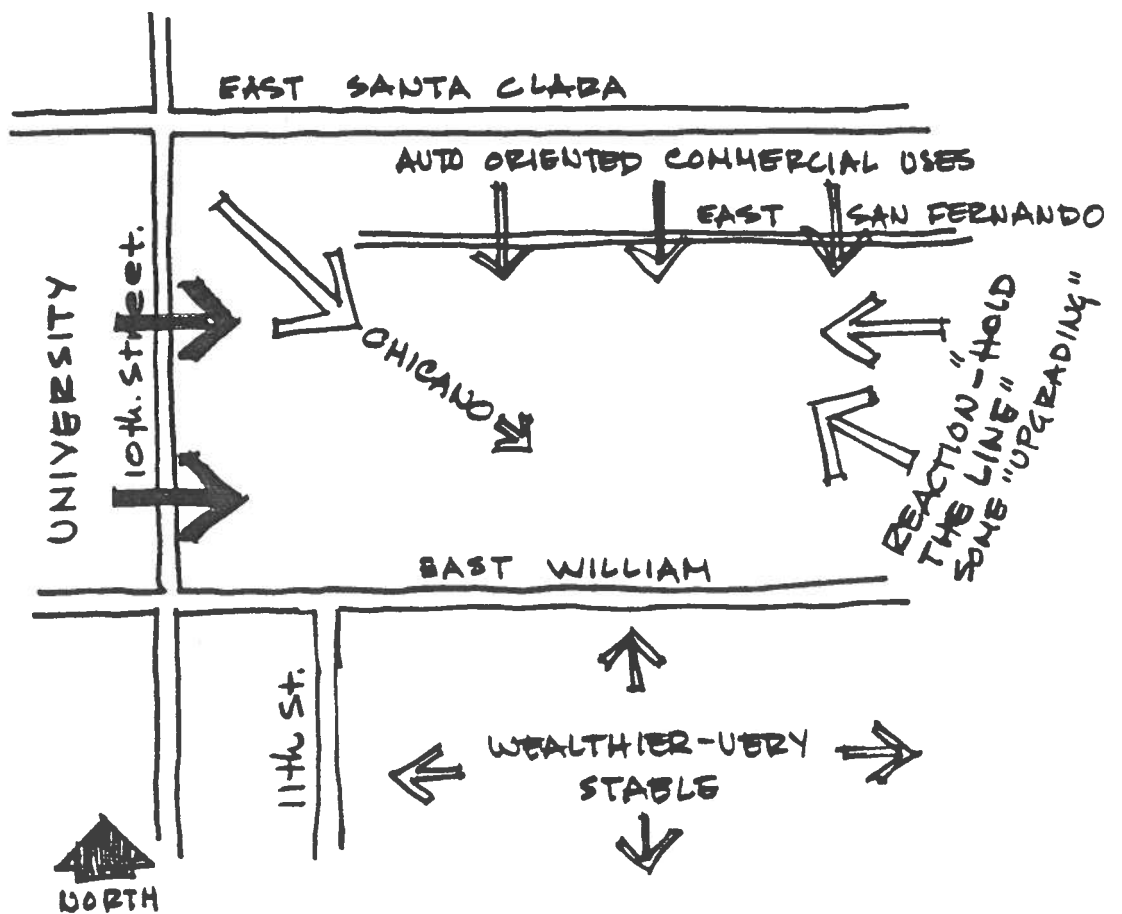
Summarizing

Thinking about this area as a whole, it would appear that urban development started around the turn of the century, maybe a bit earlier. There are very few buildings that look old, old, old, before the turn of the century: not much Bay Area early Victorian. Development was steady, maybe even slow. The many housing designs and sizes (not too many of the same houses in a row) indicate many small builders rather than one or two major developers. A few early homes were for wealthy people, but by and large this was probably a middle class area (house sizes, good but modest materials and designs).

The area south of East William was probably developed later than the area north (the houses look "newer" and a bit wealthier). One exception: the quality of development along 11th is not as good as other areas south of East William. It would even appear as though there was a zoning change along the rear property line between 11th and 12th, a line that either confirmed differences that already existed, or which helped create the differences.

People may have started to move out of the Naglee Park neighborhood during the 1950s and 1960s in favor of "more desirable," newer, "ranch" homes in new suburban subdivisions. The northern parts of this area may not have been all that fashionable or desirable then. At some point during that period, the area north of East William may have been rezoned for multi-family use (before that it was zoned for single-family use, if it was zoned at all). But change, since then, appears to have been slow; only a little "new" multi-family construction to go with a fair number of conversions of older, single unit homes. Renters probably moved in then, either into converted houses or into houses whose owners had moved elsewhere. The area may have become a housing resource for Chicano people at some point. Conversions to

rooming houses took place in the late 1960s or early 1970s, about the same time or earlier than the influx of care homes for the mentally handicapped. A lot of owners, old and new, stayed on though (a lot of older whites).



SOME OF THE FORCES AT WORK IN NAGLEE PARK

Presently, there appear to be a number of economic and demographic forces at work in this

area. The commercial activities along Santa Clara push southward into the area, and the first block of most north-south streets, to East San Fernando, appear to be a transition zone--some offices, parking or vacant lots, houses converted to boarding houses, care homes or social institutions, residential uses "hanging on," at some places with greater strength than at others. The University's influence is felt from the west via students looking for housing and maybe from faculty, certainly from the University housing on 11th and from cars whose owners populate the campus. The Chicano influence seems strongest in the northwest corner of this neighborhood, and pushes to the southeast. All of these movements, it seems, work to a dividing line at East William, south of which are wealthier residents and a moderately well-to-do area along the east: 16th and 17th. "Gentrification" on a modest scale may be happening along 17th and would be pushing in a northwesterly direction.

There is evidence that younger people are moving into the area (they can be seen, evidence of children is visible), but a lot of older residents (who can also be seen) remain.

It seems a good bet that some people are

having (or have had) second thoughts about the multi-family zoning that took place (if it did in fact take place). With the new people moving in they will want the area to be as it has been, and it is possible that zoning will be a subject of contention in the future. Does the zoning create a sense of unsureness about the future of the area?

There seems to be a pretty fair amount of turnover ("FOR SALE" or "FOR RENT" signs mixed with visible rooming houses). Why? Older people passing away or moving because the units are too big and hard to maintain? People who bought not too long ago realizing significant profits by selling now? This last seems a bit doubtful.

All in all, this is a fairly dynamic area. There would seem to be a number of forces and interests competing for it. It is hard to tell now if one or another will prove dominant or even if there will be (or need be) "winners" or "losers."

Generally, the quality and maintenance of the housing stock is good, albeit there are some buildings with foundation problems and some that could use better care. If the zoning north of William is for multi-family residential uses, then

it is not likely that replacement housing will be of as high quality (in terms of materials or space per living unit) as what exists. People will want to change the zoning back to single family. Others may argue that it has been a housing resource for Chicanos and other less affluent ethnic groups, and that a return to single-family zoning could bring about gentrification.

Confirming (and Questioning) the Observations

Knowledgeable staff of the San Jose City Planning Department confirm that the Naglee Park neighborhood began to develop at the turn of the century. They confirm many other of the field observations but also point out one major misconception on the part of the observers.

Zoning has indeed been an issue in Naglee Park. Prior to 1951, the area was zoned for single family dwellings. Attempts to allow multi-family development (R-3) started in the 1940s, but it was not until 1958 that an alliance of property owners succeeded in getting the change made. Many of them were long-time residents, middle-aged and elderly, who were leaving the neighborhood and foresaw larger sales values for their properties with the more permissive, dense zoning. City

Council at the time was very pro-growth. People had started to move from the area after World War II, earlier residents had become old and some had died, structures were getting old. The downtown area nearby was declining (an observation that might have been made about many downtowns at the time). In short, the area was becoming less desirable.

The 1950s and 1960s saw slow physical deterioration in the area. It was "redlined" by the banks, making it difficult to get property loans. There were more conversions, rather than new apartment building in this period, attesting to an expanding market for student housing but not for new apartment units in a somewhat declining neighborhood.

University policy in regards to housing changed in 1968. Prior to that, students had to live either on campus or in University-approved boarding houses; these were concentrated largely on 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th streets. With the change in policy, students were free to live where they wanted and many dispersed to a wider area. It was at this same time that state policy changed in regard to mental care institutions and approximately 70% of the county's board and care homes

were placed in this neighborhood where rents and prices were low. Less affluent and minority tenants also moved in during the period. The conclusions of the field observers in regard to the sequence of the board and care homes and why they moved into this area are largely confirmed.

In 1973 the neighborhood convinced the city to not deposit money in a particular bank unless it stopped redlining the area and gave loans there again. The city did that; the bank changed its policy.

Young professionals (with families) are moving into the area and, in reality started doing that in the southern and eastern parts of the neighborhood in the early 1970s. In the later 1970s new buyers were concentrating in the northern and western parts of the neighborhood. The typical buyer is married, under 40 years of age, with a child. According to newspaper articles as well as staff of the Planning Department, buyers are looking for houses with unique architectural features. Many people do their own improvements.

The Campus Community Improvement Association, the neighborhood group, has emerged as the strongest in the city. According to one source they did protest the concentration of board and care houses

in the early 1970s. In 1978 neighborhood residents banded together and succeeded in getting the zoning changed back to single family, establishing a policy which prohibits further conversions to multi-family units, and preventing more board and care homes in the neighborhood. An October 1981 newspaper article speaks to the urban homesteader as becoming protective of the area.

The sketch map of population dynamics is basically confirmed by the staff. The area closest to the park has always been the most desirable (higher income) area, and 17th Street, along the creek, was always a "good" area--at one time known as Doctor's Row. Block statistics from the 1980 census generally confirm the location of Spanish surname people to the north and west. The area in general is basically a white enclave. It is a stable population including both homeowners and renters.

Observations about many elderly people living in the area were correct. Home alert stickers were indeed from an older program.

Students have tended to move out of, not into, the area, according to staff. Landlords prefer permanent tenants to nine-month student tenants.

Field observations about likely zone changes at William and along 11th were correct.

The Planning Department is attempting to "save" the first block south of Santa Clara and to keep it neighborhood-oriented. Santa Clara was a street of regional significance as a segment of the original El Camino Real. New development activity is residentially related, and the medical offices have existed for a long time. The birth center, the most recent non-residential use, was established around 1978. The northern limit of the 1978 rezoning to lower permitted density was in this first block south of Santa Clara. There is as much a residential push northward as a non-residential push to the south. It would appear, then, that the field diagnosis of this area may not have been correct, at least not at the time of the observation.

But perhaps a more significant field misperception was in regard to "gentrification." Higher income people are moving in. Many households, say the staff, have two wage earners. Properties are being improved, at times by the owners, but do not show it as yet. (Some of the inexpert workmanship that was observed might be related to rental properties and to landlords doing minimal repairs or

tenants making "make-do" repairs). The rehabilitation is privately funded, without any government programs. Property values have risen sharply since 1975. The large number of "FOR SALE" signs is momentary, with the signs being found generally at homes of elderly residents who have died or can no longer live alone. Conversions are to single-family from multi-family, not vice-versa.

In summing up, it would appear that the field observations and diagnoses were largely correct, especially in regard to the history of development, changes that have taken place, current population characteristics and dynamics, and the types of issues now operative in the area. Most of the conclusions drawn from observed details (signs, house stickers, older or younger people, etc.) were also reasonably drawn.

On the other hand, the pace of gentrification, the rezoning that had already taken place, and the strong community organization were not perceived. It is as if the field observers, pleased with their observation that zoning had been an issue and that one change had already taken place, stopped and failed to think through the second stage of change which had taken place. Some evidence was there to interpret, had they

seen it and only done so. There were no recent multi-family units. There was no evidence of new conversions. There were no new care facilities.

Finally, for those who are more into food, yes, Paolo's is one of the oldest, best restaurants in San Jose and yes, it does serve a city-wide clientele.

COMMENTARY: THE CLUES, THE METHOD, THE PROCESS

What were the most important physical indicators, the clues? Of all of the things that were seen, some were more important than others in helping to understand the present, the past, and to get a sense of some current issues in the Naglee Park area. We want to review what they were. But in some cases the indicators themselves, especially individually, told very little. It was patterns, breaks in patterns, combinations of indicators and questions about them that suggested the history and present dynamics of the area. We should comment on some of those, too, as the method of this inquiry. Finally, we are concerned with some observations about the process of seeing and of diagnosing what took place in the Naglee Park case. By this we mean how we looked and how we saw and how our minds worked, or at

least how we think they worked as we progressed from seeing to conclusion and prognosis.

The Clues

Buildings, particularly housing, were used constantly as indicators of when development took place, the relative income ranges of the people for whom the housing was originally intended (as well as those living in it now), and what changes may have taken place over time. Age, size, quality of materials and nature of the design, quality of maintenance, and the mix or homogeneity of uses within buildings seem to be the most important clues. Having made that observation, it is noteworthy how general or imprecise some of those clues were. Rarely did the field observers tell (or know) why buildings were of a particular age or period. Conclusions were reached based on relatively unspecific personal knowledge more than a specific knowledge of architectural history. For example, buildings with little detailing, large unbroken materials, aluminum casement windows are newer than buildings with more intricate details, many smaller pieces and double-hung wood windows, Victorian housing came around the turn of the century, a particular kind of apartment unit came after World War II. Regardless, the

conclusions were reasonably accurate.

House size was used as one indicator of income of initial and current residents, the assumption being that higher income people live in larger housing units than lower income people. To be sure, the field observers had some unstated notion of what large and small meant in order to use the clue. They had some norm in mind and they had to relate what they saw to that standard.

Quality of design and of materials was another indicator of incomes of at least early residents. Design quality, in this case, is associated more with individuality and complexity than with a judgement of "goodness" or "badness" of design.

Building maintenance and the quality of repairs were used to suggest the economic status of residents, whether they were more or less likely to be owners or renters (higher incomes and ownership associated with better maintenance), whether the work was being done by occupants or professionals (by the professional quality of the work), and possible trends (a lot of new work or not very much) that could suggest new people of a new economic bracket. The state of materials (e.g. cupped shingles) suggested the need for work

that was or was not being done just as a wall crack might indicate a foundation problem. The existence of outside plumbing pipes, pipes on walls, something not normal in the U.S., was an indicator of change from an original condition and of the economic status of the new user (it had to be inexpensive).

Building maintenance went hand in hand with yard maintenance and landscaping and what might be in the yards (e.g. toys) to suggest ownership, family status, and incomes.

Often the uses themselves, especially if they were obviously different than what a building was originally designed for, or if they changed abruptly from block to block, were the most important clues in suggesting change as well as possible current and future issues. Multiple units in what was originally a single-family house, conversions to rooming houses or board and care homes, a change from single-family to multi-family homes at a certain line or street were all apparent in this case. Similarly, a mix of building sizes and types as well as their recentness were clues to suggest timing of development, the nature of original builders and clients (large or small), and how active the housing market was at the time of

observation.

People were important clues in this case, especially in regard to the dynamics of Naglee Park. Age and race were apparent while activity (student), life style (two older, well-dressed ladies sitting on a terrace having coffee), income (not-too-well dressed men sitting on the porch of a boarding house), and state of health and economic independence (the different physical appearances of some mental patients) were only a little less evident. If the people couldn't always be seen then at times they were heard (children's voices). The physical location of the people in the neighborhood was also important.

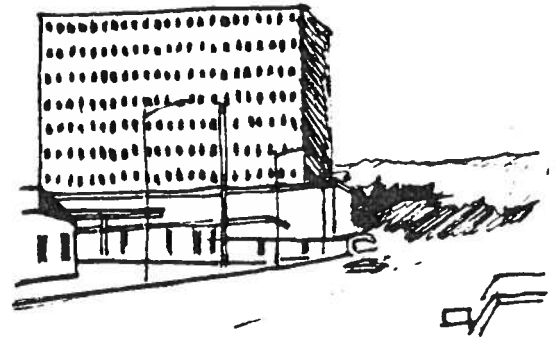
What we will choose to call artifacts were important indicators: doorbells, telephone wires and mail boxes spoke to numbers of units in a building and could be used to indicate change from original intentions; "FOR SALE" signs were indicators of pace of change (but only if there is some idea of what "normal" turnover might be); "NO PARKING" signs or limited parking signs were interpreted to suggest possible issues related to the university; or sculpture, the arrangement of books, and the nature of household belongings were all used at one time or another to suggest

characteristics of their owners and, by extension, of the area. The size, maintenance, and expense of automobiles was used to confirm impressions related to the incomes and life-styles of residents. In this same vein, alarm systems, faded home alert stickers on windows, and open doors spoke to perceived safety issues, past and present, and even gave contradictory messages.

Single purpose uses and buildings, including institutional uses were particularly useful as indicators. These included the most obvious university uses (including the fraternity house) as well as the mental health uses, the birth home, the care homes for mentally handicapped, and the women's club. Possible town-gown conflicts were associated with the university. The likelihood of past and future issues were noted in relation to the care homes as was the probable economic desirability of Naglee Park at the time they were established. The birth home and other mental health operations raised questions as to where the clients were living as well as the rent structure of the area.

Finally, the location of Naglee Park was noted in relation to downtown San Jose and to the Main Street, Santa Clara. But this indicator was

not used except in passing to suggest indirectly when the area might have been developed and the likely softness of the market for its housing after World War II. The auto-oriented commercial nature of Santa Clara was used as a possible indicator of change that had taken place on the block immediately to the south.



It is clear that individual clues or indicators, taken by themselves, might mean very little. A single family house, even if we know that "modest size" might mean 1,500 square feet, is, by itself, not much more than a single-family house. An older white man is an older white man. A single thing seen, by itself, could not give meaningful answers to the questions at hand nor permit conclusions as to current and future issues. More often it was combinations of clues, the patterns, and the breaks in patterns that were most useful in gaining an understanding of the past and present dynamics of Naglee Park. All of which leads to some observations about the method of inquiry used in this case.

The Method

Central to the method of inquiry and diagnosis was the combination of observing those "things" that make up the physical environment and a constant questioning of "why" and "what": why does a particular thing such as a sign limiting parking to certain hours during certain months of the year exist; why is a particular use or building where it is; what might a new use in an older area mean and why is it happening now; what might have been the reason for all of those board and care homes; what might a large number of older people with fewer younger people in newly rehabilitated housing suggest for the future; and on and on, constantly. All of the diagnosis, including the continuous formulation and reformulation of hypotheses about the area is dependent upon this constant questioning related to what was being observed.

In this case, combinations of clues were used, together with constant questioning to get a sense of how the area might have changed as well as of current and evolving issues. At the very start of the walk the sign indicating the required parking permit was noted. By itself that sign might have meant very little. But having also

seen the nearby university, plus some knowledge of the general schedule of a university, and the probability that many students drive cars, it was possible to conclude that university oriented parking might have been an issue to local residents. Later, immediately south of Santa Clara, a build-up of characteristics--housing condition, yard maintenance, non-residential uses, social service institutions, nearness to Santa Clara, and a concentration of Chicanos--suggested a one-block deep transition area.

Although usually unstated, there were notions of normalcy, and of standards in the observations and conclusions drawn from them. A "NO PARKING" sign or one indicating unaccustomed time limits was noteworthy in a quiet residential street because it wasn't expected; it wasn't normal. Then the questions of "why" start. Another side of this coin is in not seeing something that goes unanswered in this case.

More significantly, conclusions about quality of materials, quality of building or yard maintenance (i.e. good or bad), the size of a house (large or small and therefore more likely associated with people having a particular income), and many more, all imply some bench mark or standard

on the part of the observer. More often than not the standard is unstated. But the process of questioning acts to make the observer aware of whatever standard is being used and to question it, in turn. It can also lead to simple measuring in the field, for example, to pace the width and depth of a house to get an estimate of its size and to thereby understand more clearly what "modest" or "small," or "large" means.

The identification of patterns and breaks in patterns was used in deducing the present nature of the area, its development history, changes that took place, and possible future issues. A pattern of large, well-maintained, single-family houses south of William suggested who might live there. A pattern of similar-sized but different housing of roughly the same age suggested many small builders rather than large developers building for a mass market. Breaks or changes in the pattern of single family houses north of William bespoke change that had occurred and the observer could then ask the questions of why and when and what might it mean for the future. Questions such as why there were conversions rather than replacement are the kind that lead to conclusions about previous desirability of the area.

Patterns start and stop, geographically. The observation of patterns or of individual phenomena (which may or may not combine to form another pattern) was done with geographic space in mind. The larger area was broken down into sub-areas that might overlap: one area characterized by one type of housing, another by a type of housing and older people, another where change is happening. A mental image or map of all the sub-areas and locations and observations of where change is occurring puts the forces that are at work in a geographic context. This permits speculation as to what is happening and what might happen in the future. The diagram on page 20 derives from this kind of observation and questioning.

The observers came to the Naglee Park area with considerable knowledge that was helpful in decoding what was seen. They had to know something about parking habits and issues (from other places) to conclude that this was an issue. It was important to know the general history of in-town residential areas and their transitions following World War II to put together the conversion and market picture that evolved during the 1950s and 1960s. It was important to recall the shift in state policy on mental institutions that explained why so many homes for mentally

handicapped are in Naglee Park and what that would say about the housing market at that time. Individual indicators, combined with one of those "why" questions served to help recall stored knowledge that an observer might not have known was available.

Significant conclusions came early in the walk, they didn't necessarily wait until all the "facts" were assembled and sifted into a series of conclusions. The possibility, for example, that upgrading and gentrification was happening came early, maybe on the first street, based on very little evidence. These are like hypotheses and require constant checking, testing, developing and refining. If there was a problem with this in the field it might have been in not keeping open to new clues, of the sort, for example, that might have shown that much of the area had already been rezoned to permit only lower density development; that the issue, for the moment, had been joined and decided.

The Process

The distinction between the method of the field observation and diagnosis and the process that went on is fuzzy. This part of the

commentary, though, is concerned with such matters as the differences between something seen and a conclusion drawn from the thing, the importance of reflection, the possible importance of one clue as a spark that recalls other information, and an assessment of whether this sort of observation and diagnosis is better done with one or more people. In short, we are concerned here with some things that seemed to be happening in the minds of the observers as they went about their work.

Quite often, in the description of the Naglee Park area, conclusions are stated as if they were facts. Instead of observing that houses are of particular sizes or that materials are worn or that a building is out of plumb, the observation is made that the buildings are large or in better condition than others. Or, the initial conscious observation may be that an area (south of William, for example) is peopled by well-to-do homeowners; obviously a conclusion, not a direct observation. What seems to happen is that the eye sees and transmits messages (pictures) extremely fast and these in turn get processed by the mind so speedily that the observer is hardly conscious of all that is taking place (maybe it's just as well) and arrives at a conclusion without being aware that something seen had to generate that conclusion.

In the field the clues were sometimes bypassed in favor of a conclusion, for example, that the "belongings are less substantial than what an older, better-off family might have." Later (even five seconds later) one might (or might not) ask what it was that led to that particular conclusion, but at a conscious level the conclusions often seem to come first. This happened many times and there may be no avoiding the phenomena. It would seem that this is an example of values and of knowledge that the observer brings to the act of observing, values and knowledge that may or may not be appropriate to the situation. On the other hand it might be that the mind is processing the information so quickly that intermediate steps leading to conclusions do not consciously register. Understanding that the process is operating is important. If nothing else it should lead the observer to an awakening of the kind that says, "Hold on, that's a conclusion. What did I really see that led me to it?"

Similarly, one clue, one thing observed, may bring into focus a set of observations and associations from a much earlier period, and the association between what is seen now and what the clue was related to then may be the basis of a hypothesis of what is happening now. For example,

some of the furniture of the people moving into the house on 17th Street was not unlike that which young people in the late 1960s might have owned, people associated with free speech movements or anti-war movements or the "flower children" that lived in San Francisco. A memory was momentarily evoked, and a very tentative hypothesis about something similar happening here began to form. The conclusion or hypothesis based on these associations could more easily be wrong than right, underlining the importance of continually questioning hypotheses and testing them against other observable indicators.

The continual questioning and challenging of ideas and conclusions (as well as of hypotheses based on a "light bulb" that suddenly turns on) is more likely to happen if there are two observers than if there is one. That was a reason for having more than one observer. Not only does a second observer question the first, he or she also adds knowledge and sees things that one person, alone, cannot. The ultimate conclusions and diagnosis is based on more "data" and more experience than with one observer. That was so in this case. One observer saw "FOR SALE," "FOR RENT," and boarding house signs that a second person missed. A young observer, with different experiences and

values than an older person, saw little to question about furniture that didn't "match." Together they discussed the dynamics of what was being observed.

But the process that involved two people was not without its drawbacks. The act of talking, of verbalizing what one is seeing, is slower than seeing, recording and sifting in one's own mind, without the necessity of communicating with someone else. A result is that by working together and by communicating constantly (there seems to be a psychological need for at least some of this once two people are together), there is less time to see, to think about what one is seeing, and to allow associations between what is being observed and previous knowledge. Two observers looking at an area separately, then combining notes and questions at the end might be an answer to the problem. In any case, we continue to think that for this type of observation and diagnosis two people are better than one.

A BRIEF CONCLUSION

This has been a case study, carried out under predetermined and loosely controlled conditions; one of a series of test cases to determine how

much it is possible to tell about an area's history, its present and probable future dynamics by the simple method of field observation. It would seem that a significant amount can be reasonably concluded this way; the field observations and diagnosis were largely correct, at least to the extent that verification has been possible.

At the same time, it is important to remember that observation and diagnosis "in the real world" would rarely happen as it has in this "test." In that world the observer might be an urban planner responsible for a neighborhood or he might be a city planning director. In those situations a time constraint for looking at an area and drawing conclusions would not, in all likelihood, apply. Rather, the observer might become familiar with a Naglee Park over time and within an historic and social context of greater knowledge and deeper understanding of the local situation. Reflection about an area would occur naturally, over time.

Indeed, in this case it is clear that the field observers, in a synthetic situation, spent very little time thinking, digesting and mulling over what they had seen before drawing conclusions and presenting them to the San Jose planning staff. For example, they spent no time thinking

about or wondering what their observations might suggest about the market for housing in San Jose at different times or into the future. They neither saw nor reflected upon adjacent areas in relation to Naglee Park. A city official responding to a specific, location-specific complaint, or an outside consultant getting the lay of the land would want to be very careful about coming to conclusions about an area and its dynamics immediately after one brief field trip.

Nevertheless, even a brief observation such as this would give some strong indications of the dynamics of an area (including the possibility of nothing much happening) and would suggest areas for more detailed research, such as into population changes, sales activity, pricing changes, and the like. At the least, the field observation would be a strong indicator of subjects that should be looked at more carefully. In that sense, the field observation is used to help direct additional research. Further, one could be alerted and prepared for possible future issues such as conflict between the university and the neighborhood, whether or not socially oriented programs (for mentally handicapped, for example) would continue to be welcome in the face of a changing population, and the likelihood of

increasingly restrictive zoning proposals in relation to a need for housing for not too affluent people. Going one more step, one might begin to consider whether it was time to develop or reconsider a policy that would permit second units in large old houses or on large parcels.

In sum, the case lends credibility to the notion that looking, as has been described, can be a useful tool for urban planning and policy-making. It is possible to tell a lot about an area just by looking, a lot that one would have a hard time determining otherwise, or without spending a great deal of time and money. Then, too, the whole process is fun, and that's not bad for professional work.