

Identifying and Responding to Community Concerns for Kendall-Frost Marsh

Public comment is an essential part of the development of restoration plans. The law requires it; previous attempts to make improvements to the marsh were scuttled by community objections; and a broad solicitation of public comment is an opportunity to encourage deeper involvement in the project.

We can make some assumptions based on the demographics of the region. Figure 1 shows the basic age distribution as of the 2000 census. You can see that this is a pretty young neighborhood, with the largest group being 25–34 year-olds, presumably recently out of college and entering the work force. These data are seven years old, but we don't expect there to have been drastic changes in the overall composition.

Figure 2 shows the age distribution of the buildings in the area, and the length of residence. Two things stand out in these graphs. First, there has not been much new construction in the area since 1980. With the housing boom, there may have been more since the 2000 census, but probably not a whole lot; developers prefer to go after cheaper land farther out. Second, while most homeowners have been in the area for at least five years (as of 2000), most

renters have been in the area for dramatically less than that. The area does have many rentable vacation homes, occupied for only a summer or so; this skews the rental tenure statistics to the short end, but probably only by a year or so. Also, we do not have data on the number of people who

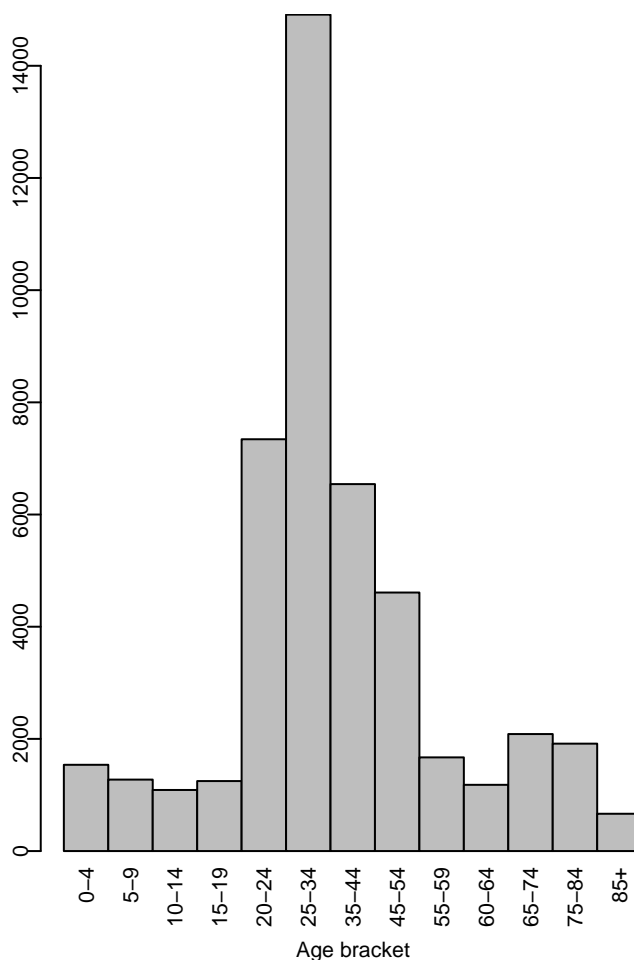


Figure 1: Age of residents (2000 census)

started out renting in the area and now own a condo or house. It seems a safe assumption that renter tenure will continue to be short relative to homeowner tenure.

Finally, figures 3 and 4 show the median age of residents and the proportion of homeowners as a function of location within the region, the former over a somewhat larger area than the latter. Age correlates with homeownership, unsurprisingly. The residences directly adjoining the marsh are largely rented, but there are clusters of owned homes not very far away.

From this information we can draw some tentative conclusions about the concerns of the local residents. Homeowners are generally in favor of anything that improves the value of their own property, whereas renters tend to care more about their rent not going up (much). Both these lead to

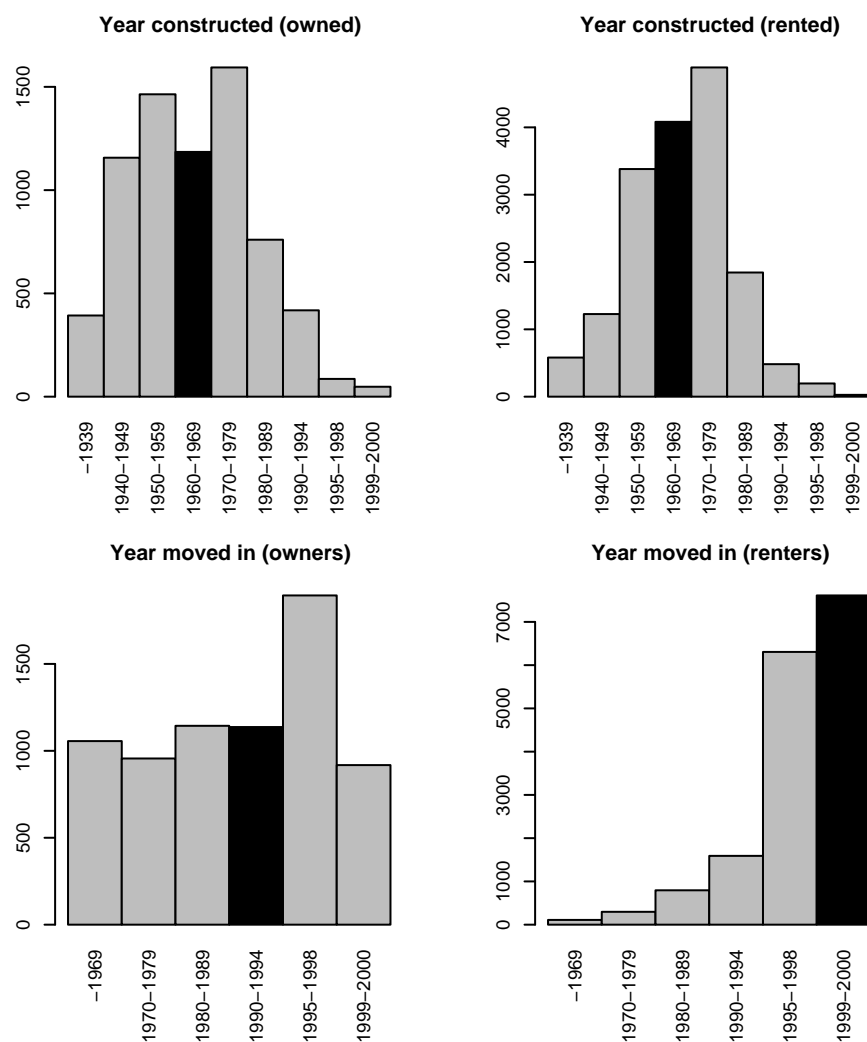


Figure 2: Age of buildings and length of residence (2000 census); black bars contain the median.

a preference for no more development in the area: homeowners because scarcity drives up the value, renters because new apartment buildings can charge more rent (because they are more modern), giving landlords cover for raising their own rent (probably without modernizing). Expanding the marsh, either by the two acres contemplated in this plan, or by the much larger region that might be returned to marsh after the removal of the RV parks, will not bring new development and should therefore be popular. Furthermore, residents are likely to be in favor of restoring the RV parks to marshland as opposed to building new houses or condos on them. However, as residents are not used to construction noise and traffic, we should take care to minimize the disruption of reengineering the Frost parcel.

The short-tenure, renting population is the majority, and in general, such populations cannot be counted on for much in the way of community volunteerism. Also, the dominant age group—25 to 34 years old—is likely to be occupied with work and family. It may make sense to target volunteer recruiting efforts at homeowners and retirees. However, volunteer activities that require no commitment in advance or on a long-term basis, such as invasive-plant removal work parties, should be able to draw on a broader population, perhaps even the vacation renters.

The RV park residents are unaccounted for in this analysis. Some of them are vacationing, but the controversy over removal of the Campland and De Anza RV parks stems from the presence of longer-term residents, who may not have anywhere else to go. All else being equal, we want to remove both parks eventually and restore that land to marsh, but no one is going to like a plan that includes mass evictions. We consider it a priority to determine the status and probable outcome of the lawsuit filed by the De Anza homeowners' association against the city in 2003.¹

Surveys are a standard procedure and have reached the status of cliché, but they work. We have developed a draft survey (shown on page 21) which should be offered to every resident in the vicinity of the marsh before construction begins at the site. We think it would be wise to have a “pilot” round of public comments first, in which the survey is offered to a limited group of already-interested residents, e. g. the Friends of Rose Creek and the local Audobon chapter, and then discussed at the next general meeting of that organization. We would revise the survey according to the feedback we get then, before offering it to the general public by mail. The survey contains a few questions

¹SD Superior Court civil case #GIC821191; there was a summary judgment hearing on March 2, 2007. Case documents appear to be available from the plaintiffs' lawyers' website, <http://www.tatrozamoyiski.com/deanza.html>.

intended not so much for data collection as to raise awareness of the plan, what goes on in the marsh already, and the opportunity to get involved. It would be good to include a copy of the main blueprint, and an artist's rendering of the end result if we can get one.

It is probable that we will want to make minor changes to the restoration plan based on the results of both rounds of the survey, but we don't think the broad outline of the plan for the Frost parcel will need to change. During construction, we should have occasional checks to make sure no one is being put off by the parade of dump trucks—this might be best done with people knocking on doors.

Community input will be more important in the longer term, as we move from focusing on the Frost parcel to the marsh as a whole and on future additions. The proposed Friends of the Kendall-Frost Marsh organization should take the lead on long-term monitoring of community interest, for instance by periodic advertising/survey mailouts. Docent-led tours offer the possibility of direct feedback from the people taking the tour, although those are a self-selected group with elevated interest. We should also solicit feedback from educators using the materials we prepare.

Appendix: Maps

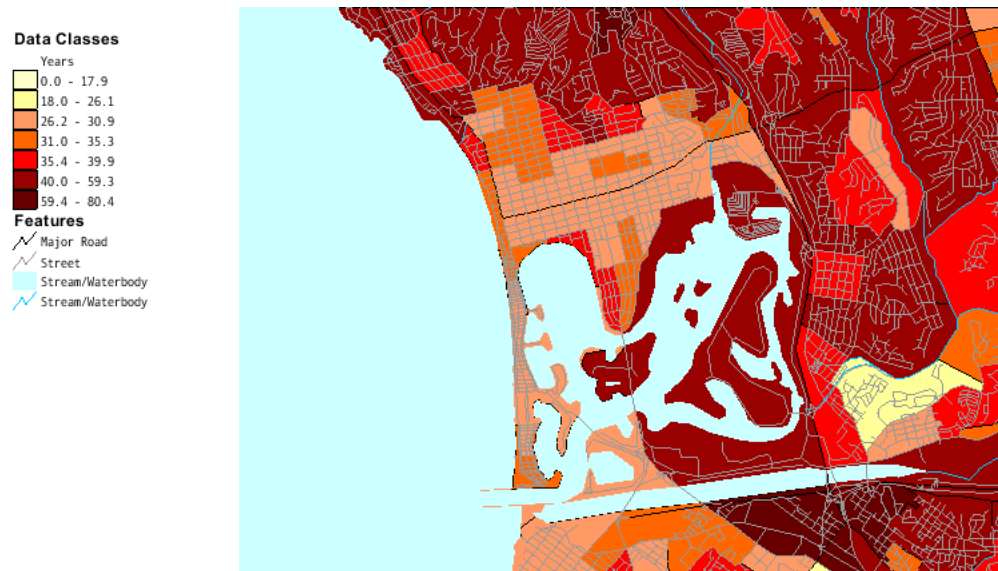


Figure 3: Median age of residents by block group (2000 census)

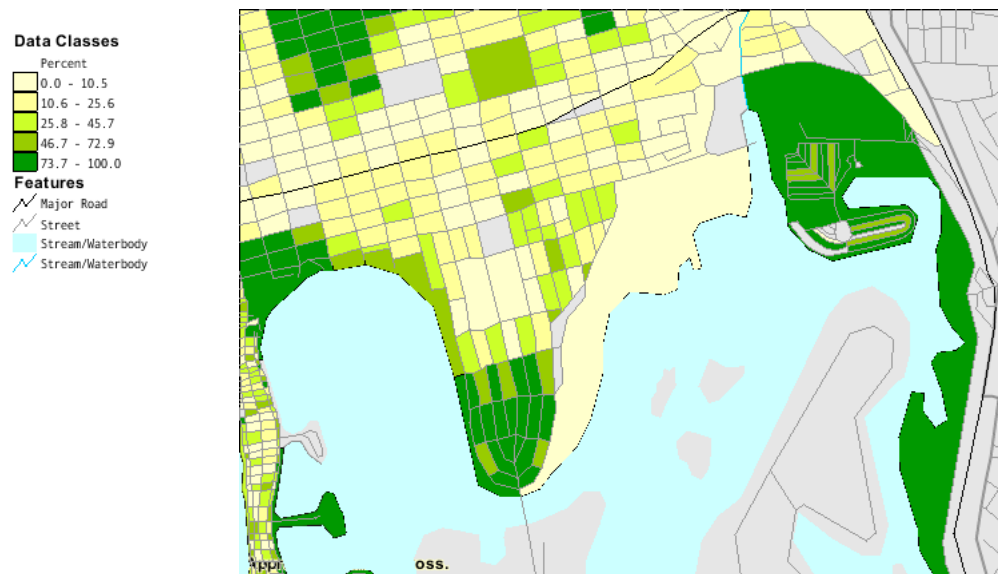


Figure 4: Percentage of owned homes (2000 census)

Appendix: Community Survey

The Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, in conjunction with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UCSD and the City of San Diego, is making plans to restore part of the salt marsh at Crown Point Dr and Pacific Beach Dr, near your house. We would appreciate your participating in this survey, so we know your opinions and interests.

Please note that our current plans are only for the area along Pacific Beach Drive between Crown Point and Campland. However, we are interested in your opinions regarding all parts of the marsh.

Your responses to this survey may be published in a compilation of public comments on the project, but your name will not be used nor will any of your personal information be revealed. If you would rather not answer a question, please just leave it blank.

Background

- Have you ever seen the marsh that runs along the bay side of Crown Point Dr and Pacific Beach Dr?
- Do you walk or drive past the marsh regularly?
- Can you see the marsh from your house?
- Can you smell the marsh from your house?
- Can you hear seabirds from your house?
- Do you enjoy watching seabirds or other wildlife?
- Did you know that endangered bird species nest in the marsh?
- Did you know that scientists from UCSD do research in the marsh?
- When it rains, does any part of your building flood?

Main survey

In one or two sentences, please tell us:

Would you be interested in signs near the marsh describing the plants, birds and other animals that live there?

Would you be interested in signs near the marsh describing the research that UCSD scientists are doing there?

What else could we do to improve the existing signage?

Would you be interested in an overlook or viewing platform on Pacific Beach Drive?

Should there be nature trails or boardwalks through the marsh?

Would you come to a visitor center that focuses on the marsh and surrounding bay? If so, what kinds of activities or materials would you like to see?

The fence surrounding the marsh is necessary to keep out predators such as cats and raccoons. Do you feel the appearance of the fence should be improved? If so, how?

We are considering replacing the trailer at the corner of Pacific Beach and Crown Point. We might put a visitor center there, or a viewing platform, or more restored marsh. Which would you prefer?

What else could be changed to improve your enjoyment of the marsh?

Demographics

- Your age?
- Gender?
- Do you own your home?
- How long have you lived in this area?
- How long do you plan to live in this area?
- May we contact you if we have more questions?
- Would you be interested in volunteering your time to help out with marsh restoration, such as by removing invasive species?
- Would you be interested in joining a group that supports the Kendall-Frost Marsh with activities such as education or plantings?

If you would like to be contacted for any or all of the above reasons, please write your name and preferred contact information below.