

City of Belmont  
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# Caltrain lots not living up to purpose

## City thinks skatepark, housing would better utilize southernmost parking

By Wes Bowers  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Two idle Caltrain parking lots could be the future site of affordable housing or a skate park.

The city is hoping to work with Caltrain on better utilizing of the southern portion of a lot on the corner of Harbor and El Camino. The lots are byproducts of the city's grade separation four years ago and are hardly used, said Mayor Dave Warden, who brought up the issue at the June 25 City Council meeting.

"I've rarely seen more than one car in that lot at a time," said Warden. "When there is a car there it's usually more like a really athletic person who doesn't mind walking from their car to the station, or it's some patrons of the Sunshine Cafe."

Since Warden's suggestion, the city drafted a letter to Caltrain asking them to partner in an effort to more effectively use the lot.

"We have drafted a letter to Caltrain that said, 'Hey, we've noticed this lot is underused and we might be interested in looking at turning that site into something useful,'" said City Manager Jere Kersnar.

Caltrain recently hired an outside consultant to look at all the stations along the Peninsula. When the consultant looks at Belmont, that

could be the opportunity for the city and Caltrain to come up with a better use for the site rather than a mostly-empty parking lot, Kersnar said.

While it is unclear if Caltrain will be receptive to the city's suggestions, Warden said ultimately something would be done to the underused lots.

"It's going to happen eventually," said Warden. "They're going to realize that no one is really using that lot, and if they find something else to put there, I think they'll realize that whatever they put there could help them raise money for projects like electrification."

One thing Warden wants to see on the lot is some more housing or a mixed-use building that could contain housing and retail or commercial uses.

"It would be nice to get some mixed-use buildings there," he said. "Maybe some retail on the ground floor and some housing above it. It could give us some sales tax revenue along with more housing. I think we could definitely support something like that."

Councilmember Terri Cook suggested the site be used for a possible skateboard park, an idea that has been around for years.

"When the idea of a skate park first came up a few years ago there were some middle

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school kids that did some surveys about park possibilities," said Cook. "And the biggest issue was and always has been location. But we did some brainstorming and that particular parcel of land got on the list as a possible site for a park."

Putting a skate park along the El Camino and Caltrain corridor is possible, Cook said, because it would be easy for kids to get to and would not bother residents who might be concerned with kids skating too close to homes.

"It seems like putting a skate park there could be feasible," she said. "It's easy to get to and away from residences. I don't know if it's the best use and I don't know if Caltrain would go for it, but it seems like a good place to put a skate park if we decided to build one."

Council will be looking at the issue of the underused lots at the July 23 meeting.

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# Belmont hopes Baby Bullet brakes at its station

City tells Caltrain its location and proximity to big employers make it a good candidate

By **WES BOWERS**  
Independent Newspapers

**BELMONT** — While Caltrain's new Baby Bullet line isn't scheduled to start running until 2004, Belmont is competing against cities nearly twice its size to be a stop.

Work on the Baby Bullet began last month. It will take nearly three years to build all the bypass tracks so that express trains can travel from San Francisco to San Jose in 45

minutes, making three stops along the way.

Belmont is currently drafting a letter to Caltrain explaining why the city's central location, proximity to big employers and accessible downtown make it a good stop.

"Every city is trying to get a stop on this Baby Bullet line," said Mayor Dave Warden. "We're very close to a lot of employment sites like Oracle and the entire Redwood Shores

area, and it would make a lot of sense to have a stop here for people that commute to these places of employment."

Although every city is being considered as a stop, Caltrain spokesperson Jamie Maltbie said Belmont's reasoning is not unique.

"There are a lot of good reasons to stop in Belmont," she said. "But there are a lot of good reasons to stop in other cities too. We have a lot of downtown access along the entire corridor. We have access to both major airports, BART,

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SUSAN CALDWELL

Work to install passing tracks for the express train called Baby Bullet began last month.

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light-rail and MUNI. We're going to try to accommodate every community."

Larger cities in the county such as Redwood City or San Mateo would seem appropriate for these new stops along the line, but Warden believes size doesn't matter.

"Just because they're larger communities doesn't mean they deserve stops," he said. "Some of the larger cities in the county don't have as large a train stop as we do, so it would seem we would be in the running for one."

Factors being considered for possible stops include on-station boarding and access to other modes of transportation such as SanTrans buses and BART, said Maltbie.

Trains won't be making stops at just three solid sta-

tions like San Mateo, Redwood City or Mountain View, she said.

"Trains won't just originate in San Francisco or San Jose and then make three or four designated stops along the entire line," she said. "We could have a 7 a.m. train that makes stops at X, Y and Z, and then we could have an 8 a.m. train that makes stops at A, B and C. There are lots of opportunities for every community to possibly get a stop."

"Even in the first round of designating stops, if a station doesn't get one, it doesn't mean it will never get one," she added. "We could add more stops sometime in the future."

Councilmember George Metropulos hopes Belmont is chosen, but realizes that if

## lobbies for stop

the train were to stop in every city it wouldn't be an express.

"I think we definitely have the ridership and usage to warrant a stop here," he said. "But I also understand that if they put too many stops along the line it won't be a bullet train and won't get from A to B in the 45 minutes they want it to."

*City of Belmont  
Understand  
Aug. 6, 2002*



# City hopes to build 317 affordable homes

## Officials approve document to meet tough California mandate

By Wes Bowers  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Over the next five years, the city must work to provide affordable housing to meet a tough state standard.

California requires that every city make room for affordable housing and Belmont has quite a bit of work to meet that mandate.

Last week the Planning Commission voted 6-0 to adopt

a revision to the city's housing element through 2006, agreeing to make an effort to build 317 units of affordable housing as required by the state.

The 317 units are what the state deems as Belmont's "fair share" of affordable housing contributions in the Bay Area by 2006.

Although the city has acknowledged it probably would not be able to build all 317 homes by that time, officials said they are committed to meet state requirements.

"There's a target we're trying to hit of meeting state require-

ments for housing. But we're also trying to stay with Belmont's vision for housing," said City Planner Craig Ewing. "It's a balancing act that is not easy to achieve."

Of those 317 units the city is required to show it could find room for 57 units that would be for very-low-income families, 30 for low-income, 80 for moderate-income and 150 for above-moderate-income households.

Very-low-income households are those making less than \$37,450 a year, low-income make from \$37,450 to \$58,300, moderate make \$58,300 to

89,900 and above-moderate-income families make more than \$89,900.

Planning commissioners were satisfied with the staff's effort to meet the requirements and agreed that the city should adopt the revision.

"This is a good-faith plan that shows we've tried to accommodate housing in an area that has lack of affordable land," said Commissioner Kenn Parsons.

Commissioner Alicia Torre was pleased that the city had drawn up several approaches to try to meet the 317-unit requirement.

"It's good we're not relying

on just one strategy and we should move forward to start providing affordable housing," said Torre.

From 1990 to 2000, the U.S. Census shows Belmont gained 237 housing units from new construction, less than the 718 units required by the state from 1988 to 1995.

Staff believes economic conditions played a large role in the slow housing growth, along with delayed projects and projects that could not obtain proper financing in the early 1990s when many

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## HOMES: City plans for affordable units

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savings-and-loan companies folded and were taken over.

While Belmont did not produce the number of units needed during that time, the city believes that the housing element did not fail, and that over the past 10 years it has been active in expanding housing in numerous ways.

Ewing said the city is currently looking at providing affordable housing at Ralston Village for seniors, as well as housing on the Notre Dame de Namur University campus

for college students. "One out of every five households in Belmont has a senior citizen living in it and one out of every 10 household has a college student living there," said Ewing. "And right now we're looking at Ralston Village and the Notre Dame Campus to develop 32 units of affordable housing."

Additionally, Ewing said 25 units for disabled citizens could be built on F Street, behind the Neptune Society.

Another strategy the city is banking on is providing sec-

ondary dwelling units in some areas. Secondary units could include in-law structures, or guesthouses on some pieces of property.

Although not too popular in Belmont, Ewing said building a few in-law units could help the city make an effort to meet state requirements.

"Secondary units don't work well in some neighborhoods," said Ewing. "But we think they will here, and we're planning on building at least five within the next five years."

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# Traffic calming unnerving

## City considers new measures to reduce speeding on street

By Wes Bowers  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Speed humps and additional stop signs may be installed on some city streets to solve the ongoing problem of failing traffic calming devices.

Mayor Dave Warden suggested city staff look into the matter of incorporating signs and humps into some sort of policy after attending a meeting held by Hastings Drive residents earlier this summer with Public Works Director Ray Davis.

Earlier this year the city installed temporary stop signs and traffic circles to slow traffic along the busy street. But residents said the measures were more of a nuisance than a success.

With the measures set for removal later this year, city officials are considering other methods for solving the area's traffic problems.

"The residents up on Hastings had done a survey there about the conditions of the traffic calming tools we put in. And they just really are not happy and don't like what's there," said Warden.

The measures included

large traffic circles, dots and street-narrowing inserts designed to prevent motorists from speeding straight through. Residents were upset that motorists could still maneuver around some of the devices and that some even prevented them from getting out of their driveways.

Originally, Warden said residents just wanted more stop signs and possibly speed bumps or speed humps, which are longer and higher than speed bumps and can actually force motorists to drive slower.

But Davis said those measures are not practical on the street.

Several of Belmont's streets are too narrow, which means the possibility of placing speed humps is slim. But Warden wants to investigate the speed humps anyway.

"With stop signs, we're not going to put one where they are not warranted," he said. "And speed humps aren't acceptable because emergency vehicles have to get in there and they can slow down the response time. But we should still look at signs or humps or something because that's what people want rather than these huge concrete slabs in the middle of their road."

Councilmember George

Metropulos agreed that the devices currently in place need to be looked at a little more closely, and the option of possibly putting humps or signs in place should seriously be considered.

"A lot of people have asked for stop signs and humps or bumps up there that can't be used," he said. "But I think this issue of unhappy residents who can't get out of their driveways ... yet traffic is so bad up there that it warrants a closer look at appropriate places for signs or humps."

Hastings Drive resident Sonny Wai, who first brought the traffic calming issue to the city, said he and his neighbors are willing to listen to any ideas the city may have.

"Nobody's really happy with what's put in right now and about 80 percent of us just want them taken out," he said. "We're not willing to give up on a solution, but we don't like what was incorporated as a solution. We're all for trying these other things that won't detract from property values or create a problem just trying to get in and out of our homes."

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# Council adopts policy on art in public places

## New rules answer questions on installing works

By Wes Bowers  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — What type of art, where it goes and for how long it's on public display will rest in the hands of the Arts Commission, now that the City Council has approved a formal policy on public art.

Following a recommendation from the Arts Commission, the City Council unanimously voted to implement guidelines for displaying donated or acquired pieces of art.

The new rules address issues like the need for the art, installation costs to the city, maintenance requirements, safety hazards and potential for vandalism, proposed sites and artistic quality.

All donated or acquired pieces of art will be reviewed by the Arts Commission, which will then recommend the council accept or deny the work, much like the Planning Commission recommends the council approve a design project.

The same process is also going to be used for removing a piece of art. The city will remove pieces of art from its collection if the work presents a threat to public safety; if it requires

excessive or unreasonable maintenance, if it is deteriorated or of poor quality; if there is no suitable site for it; or if it is a forgery.

Other issues that might require the art's removal included inadequate storage or significant adverse public reaction to the work.

"Our art is sometimes, but not always, controversial to some people," said Councilmember Terri Cook. "So you're talking about the council making a final decision on what art to accept, and we could take the heat if someone finds a piece of art controversial or unacceptable."

"I appreciate the comment that we'd take the heat for accepting a controversial piece of art," said Vice Mayor Paul Wright. "A lot of times we take the heat for other things as well, so this would not be anything new."

Overall, the council was satisfied with the commission's proposed guidelines.

"I'm comfortable with this process," said Cook. "All of our other commissions are recommending benches and the Arts Commission should be making recommendations to us when it comes to artwork for the city."

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# City schedules cultural awakening

## Arts Commission plans new event next summer

By Wes Bowers  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Plans are in the works to showcase the wide diversity of artistic talent in the city next summer.

In recent years, the city has worked hard to promote arts with festivals and its summer concerts in the park, officials said.

But now the Arts Commission would like to combine all forms of art produced in the city and showcase it in one cultural arts festival next summer.

Arts Commissioner Judi Allen created the idea of a cultural arts festival after seeing an advertisement for Ralston Middle School's annual cultural diversity fair.

"Last year I saw a flier from Ralston Middle School advertising a diversity event," said Allen. "I thought it would be great if the Arts Commission could participate in something similar and show the artistic and cultural diversity of Belmont."

After talking with staff at

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# ARTS: Cultural festival

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Ralston and school district officials, Allen began working to create an event that would showcase the artistic talents of the entire Belmont community.

"We didn't want to steal their [the school's] thunder," she said. "So we came up with the idea that they would continue putting on their cultural event each year, and we'd do something similar, but have not only art from students, but from local adults, teachers and professional artists as well."

While the city already has an annual Art and Wine Festival in late September, which showcases work by artists from all over the Bay Area, this new project will focus on local talent.

"We just want to bring the importance of and appreciation for arts back into the community," Allen said. "We have a lot of great artists and

might have art sales and interactive artistic opportunities," said Allen. "Carlmont has a performing arts program they're collaborating with Kollage that we might have, and we'd also like to showcase teacher artwork and any other private artists in town as well. We want to have a wide variety of art to show."

Currently, the festival is scheduled for June 1 of next summer and will use all the facilities in Twin Pines Park. Allen hopes that future festivals could expand to other areas in town and get more people involved.

A steering committee has been formed, comprised of members from Notre Dame de Namur University, the Belmont-Redwood Shores School District, Artshare of San Mateo County, the Parks and Recreation Department and Carlmont High School.

"I'm hoping that we could establish groups of volun-



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# City's hospitality ranked

## Officials review resident survey results, plans minor changes

By **WES BOWERS**  
*Independent Newspapers*

BELMONT — Belmont is a nice place to live and a generally helpful city, according to the results of the city's most comprehensive resident survey in seven years.

City officials recently reviewed the answers of 702 residents who participated in a survey distributed to approximately 3,500 residents last April.

"This is the first comprehensive survey done in Belmont since 1995," said Assistant City Manager Dan Rich. "Staff thought it was time to conduct another to see how the city is doing now."

Of the 702 respondents, Rich said 362 submitted their results through the Internet, while 416 wrote or verbalized their responses.

Overall, he said, 91 percent of those who responded to the survey rated Belmont as an above-average place to live, while only 1 percent gave the city a poor rating.

"I think that's pretty remarkable and shows that the majority of our residents love living here in Belmont," Rich said.

However, Rich said that of the 416 respondents who verbalized their results, 218 mentioned the word traffic. Results from the survey showed that 49 percent of the residents said the biggest problem was traffic, followed by traffic safety at 41 percent and street maintenance at 38 percent.

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As for city staff's overall helpfulness, Rich said 72 percent of residents were very satisfied. Some of the more important issues on residents' minds were police and fire services, which also received the most favorable satisfaction rating, he said.

The city clerk position and parking issues were the least important to residents, while building permits and traffic concerns had the lowest satisfaction rating.

"I think it tells us that people are pretty satisfied with the way things are going," said Councilmember Terri Cook. "There's always room for improvement and this will be a good tool for us to make those improvements. The areas that really need those improvements, like traffic and parking, are no surprise to us. But it definitely reiterates that's what we need to focus on."

The results were compared to 25 other cities that conducted similar surveys in the last few years, Rich said. Belmont fared the same or better than the others in several categories.

"Compared to other cities, we're above average in several categories like garbage, feeling of safety and obtaining city information," he said. "But we're below average in street maintenance, traffic safety, animal control and library services, although we'll be remedying the library situation in a couple of years. And we have a fair comparison when it comes to police and fire services, utilities and the overall quality of city services."

Staff will conduct another citizens' opinion survey in two years, Rich said. In the meantime, it will start working on some of the concerns raised by citizens through this survey.

"We're going to start looking for strategies to improve service and satisfaction," he said. "We'll look for trends and major issues. In those 67 pages of survey results there may be buried treasures like a broken light on a certain street corner, so we'll look for specific things we can solve right away and get to work on."

The city may also send their results to other cities similar to Belmont that could be interested in conducting their own citizens' opinion survey.

"I think it would be helpful to send press releases to other cities to let them know we have this data," said Mayor Dave Warden. "That way if they do a similar survey in the future they can look at it and use it to compare to their own results."

Look for the complete survey results on the city's website at <http://www.belmont.gov>.

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# Belmont's vision for its downtown looks up

## Bay Area Council's study is catalyst for city to move on plans

By Wes Bowers  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Input and suggestions from an outside agency on the city's downtown may be the catalyst to finally improve the neglected area.

The Bay Area Council, a regional organization looking to promote economic growth in various communities, has requested to take a tour of downtown on Aug. 9 to evalu-

ate the area's potential housing and job growth.

Plans for the western corners of El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue have been put on hold indefinitely after City Manager Jere Kersnar told the council that Belmont needed a vision for the area first.

Now, the Bay Area Council wants to make some suggestions to improve downtown and the quality of life, but some officials worry that the group's ideas may not be what they want.

"Several times we've talked about a 20-year vision for

Belmont and I don't see how this fits into our vision," said Mayor Dave Warden. "My intent was that our city should conduct our own visioning process. I'm a bit nervous that this would bring too much of an outside voice into our plan, and will also delay our own visioning process."

The Bay Area Council recently began examining several sites scheduled for redevelopment and is considering how these areas could improve the quality of life over the next few decades.

"With this project we've

gone around the region asking the public agencies how they envision job and housing growth in the next 20 years," said Andrew Michael, the council's vice president of sustainable development. "We want to look at this community, ask how much housing and commercial land use is possible and compare it to what the people think it should be."

The organization has chosen 14 sites around the Bay Area for this project, with downtown Belmont being one of them.

"The reason for choosing Belmont is unique," said Michael. "Our task force looked at several Bay Area sites with criteria like was it close to a transit stop or in an area where there was likely to be a significant amount of job growth and if it's a community similar to other communities."

Once the Bay Area Council reviews Belmont's downtown, it will make suggestions to the city.

Belmont Councilmember Terri Cook was willing to listen

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to what the Bay Area Council might have in mind.

"I want to figure out how can we find a balance between what the community wants for itself and how we fit into the region's vision," she said. "We can't be isolationists, but there is always suspicion when an outside group comes in and tells us how we should be and what we should do. I'm not sure how we can participate working with the council when we haven't gone through our own visioning process yet."

Councilmember Dave Bauer said the city doesn't have to follow through on Bay Area Council suggestions.

"I think this is an extremely valuable tool for us and could potentially add to what we want for a vision in Belmont," said Bauer. "I look forward to what they have to say about us and feel fortunate they've chosen to look at us."

## Council sets sites on area

The project could give the city both good and bad ideas, said Councilmember George Metropulos.

"We could get two things out of this," said Metropulos. "We could get suggestions and ideas that the city knows it doesn't want, but we could

also get a few ideas for downtown that we didn't think of before. We should at least listen to what the council has to offer."

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