



Fall 2010 Newsletter

Westwood Highlands Association
www.westwoodhighlands.org

Solar panels make more electricity than we use

by Jennifer Dees
and Neil Chase

Thinking about solar panels? We highly recommend them. Even here in the fog zone, we've had great success with ours, for six years.

In 2004, we enhanced our home in Westwood

Highlands with rooftop solar panels. They make more electricity than we can use, and now, finally, PG&E is legally required to pay us for the extra electricity we put into the grid.

We have enough panels to generate 5 kilowatts of power if the sun is shining right down on them on a sunny day (see an image of our rooftop from Google Maps, at right).

The panels start slowly in the morning, becoming more effective at midday when the sun is overhead. Power is measured in kilowatt hours, the delivery of one kilowatt for an hour. So in one hour of full sun, our system can generate 5 kilowatt hours.

Of course we don't get lots of hours of bright, direct sun up here, but the panels are very effective.

In six years, we have generated 47,000 kilowatt hours of power. At the roughly 20 cents per kWh that many homes pay, that's more than \$9,000 worth of power.

Because PG&E buys from us at a higher rate during the day, when demand is highest, we've been credited for more than that amount, effectively reducing our power



This satellite view of our roof from Google Maps shows the solar panels we had installed over five years ago.

bill to zero, after the \$6 per month that PG&E charges every home just to be connected.

Our extra power goes into the electric grid during the day (and it's fun to see our electrical meter running backwards when that happens), and at night we draw power from the grid like everyone else. We could store the day's extra power in batteries and use it at night, but that would have been more expensive to install and not as efficient because batteries lose 10 percent or more of what they store.

Until this year, PG&E got the extra production from our system for free. Under a law passed in Sacramento, we're now being paid for that extra power, though at a reduced rate, so we'll get some money back at the end of this year.

There has never been a better time to do a new solar panel installation. Prices have come down on systems, and there are state, federal, and San Francisco subsidies for installations. For information, see the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission's "Go-SolarSF" site at sfwater.org (click "Power" in the lefthand menu, then "Solar...", then "GoSolarSF.")

To see the growing number of houses and other buildings with solar panels in San Francisco, check out the "solar map" at www.sf.solarmap.org.

This is a big year for solar power. A group called "Put Solar On It" is urging President Obama to put solar panels back on the White House (President Carter installed them; President Reagan removed them). See www.putsolaron.it.

CALENDAR

Westwood Highlands Annual Neighborhood Garage Sale

Sept. 11 & 12, 2010

Interested in cleaning out your basement? Making a few bucks? Meeting some neighbors? All you have to do is put items out for sale in front of your garage on September 11 and/or 12 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Westwood Highlands has ads on Craigslist thanks to Anya LeGault, so buyers will be circling the neighborhood all weekend. It's been a big success in the past. Please contact Charley (vp@westwoodhighlands.org) if you can volunteer to put up signs on Monterey and Yerba Buena.

**Westwood Highlands
Association Meetings**
120 Brentwood Ave.,
7:30 p.m., Sept. 21 and
Nov. 16, 2010 — anyone
is welcome to attend.

President's Message

New sidewalks, updated signs, and gophers

As always, the Westwood Highlands Board of Directors wishes to congratulate and welcome all new residents to Westwood Highlands. Vice President Charley Leach has welcome wagon packages for you (see right column, this page).

As summer's ending, there's not that much to report. We have lots of nice new sidewalks here and there; hopefully many of the new squares will fade with time and match the existing ones. I'm sure the city is quite pleased with the sidewalk permit fees they've been collecting. Maybe someday we'll even get completely repaved streets and not just the patchwork jobs we're left with now.

The Westwood Highlands border markers are being redone. Several needed "powder coating." All are being repainted and re-hung. We chose a dark moss-green color this time.

Front lawns seem to be making a comeback. They've always been my favorite, especially since the neighborhood was originally designed for them. The problem is that gophers and moles are making an even bigger comeback. Our lawn had a gopher; a big dark brown one, creating holes all over the place. We found out there are at least a dozen different methods of gopher elimination. You can poison them, skewer them, smoke them out, dehydrate them, carbon-monoxide them, squish them, and even drive them crazy with tapping noises.

I was mocked every morning by one gopher in particular. To get him, I chose the famous "black hole" trap, a kind of tube with a hole on the end. But my furball friend kept stealing the carrots out of it, packing it with dirt, and escaping. I got him the third time, though. Then I left him out on the lawn for a day to scare off all of his little gopher friends, and with the hope that one of those giant ravens that hang around here would snatch him and fly him off somewhere. But the ravens didn't take him. I think the gopher was too dead.

All residents are welcome to attend and participate in our bi-monthly meetings (see my column about our meetings on the next page). We discuss a lot more than lawns and gophers.

— Dave Bisho, President
Westwood Highlands Association

West of Twin Peaks Central Council Report

Congratulations to WHA Director Blue Mudbhary. She has been elected to the board of the West of Twin Peaks Central Council as the Recording Secretary for 2010-11. Westwood Highlands has been a member of this umbrella group since 1936. Now there are 15 neighborhood associations that belong, mostly those single-family groups that make up District 7. The Council does not meet in the summer time. The first meeting will be held at the end of September. Discussions will include Jeff Adachi's ballot proposal which would require that union members contribute to their own retirement plans. See also westoftwinpeaks.com.

Update on Fire Hydrant Repainting

WHA Director Charley Leach has surveyed our thirteen neighborhood fire hydrants. Here are his findings:

- Hydrant 13 at 301 Ridgewood (corner of Ridgewood and Joost) is the best. It should be an example for what we want in the other hydrants.
- Hydrant 5 at 94

Brentwood (corner of Brentwood and Yerba Buena) is in need of painting.

- Hydrant 6 at 166 Brentwood (Brentwood and Colon) is okay but needs touching up.
- Hydrant 1 at 496 Hazelwood (corner of Hazelwood and Casitas) and Hydrant 3 at 92 Brentwood (corner of Brentwood and Hazelwood) need to have their bases painted.

All the remaining hydrants have rust spots on them and show no signs that prep work was done. Jobs should be done correctly the first time so there is no need for a second or third effort, Charley said. He will be following up on the situation with the City.

Welcome New Neighbors

Westwood Highlands Directors would like to welcome new neighbors to the Association. Any new residents of Westwood Highlands who have not been welcomed, please contact Charley Leach, VP and welcome wagon chairperson, at crleach@sbcglobal.net, to receive an information packet that includes Westwood Highlands Covenants, Controls, & Restrictions, local information, a local map, and store discount information.

Westwood Highlands Web Site

Check out our Web site at www.westwoodhighlands.org. It has a collection of our newsletters, historical photos, and other important neighborhood information.

Westwood Highlands Association: Why we exist, and why we meet

by Dave Bisho

Westwood Highlands was established in 1924. According to the by-laws set up at the time, if the organization was to exist, regular meetings must be held.

All right, why should we exist then? One good answer is the old "strength in numbers" concept. In this city, especially, departments and politicians pay far more attention to neighborhood organizations than they do to individuals. Individuals can easily be ignored, but good neighborhood groups generally do represent the majority of their constituencies and, presumably, do city officials a favor by advising of their constituencies' wants and don't-wants.

Unfortunately, it seems like we've always had to respond to more of the don't-wants. I can cite many examples but I'll list a couple off the top of my head.

Over the last 15 or 20 years, there have been four separate attempts by the city to legalize in-law units which, if approved, would have negated one of the most important articles in the Westwood Highlands Covenants, namely, one residence only is allowed per lot. After each attempt, Westwood Highlands protested and each time those proposals were cancelled. In one of those cases we joined with 14 other like-minded neighborhood groups, hired a lawyer, and sued. We won that case, too.

Also during that time, there have been two attempts by the Department of Parking and Traffic (DPT) and the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition to stripe a bike lane down Monterey Boulevard and reduce the car lanes to just one in each direction.

Sound great? I'm a big bike rider, too. The problem was, a couple of years ago DPT inadvertently created a dangerous situation when they tried it out. In the afternoons, frustrated drivers, backed up all the way down Monterey, began scrambling up Hazelwood and Valdez and all through Westwood Highlands trying to short-cut over to Yerba Buena and get home. Westwood Park also had the same problem as the stopped traffic fanned out over their neighborhood trying to get down to Ocean Avenue and home. The quick appeal to DPT by both of our neighborhood associations prevailed and automobile lanes on Monterey were restored the following Monday.

Then, there were two separate attempts by the city to raise the height limit on West Portal to allow for more housing, eliminate the parking place requirement for those new residences, and allow for fast food restaurants. Westwood Highlands and other neighborhoods complained. We won. Plan cancelled.

Finally, there was the recent attempt to have

the West Portal parking meters remain in effect until 10 p.m. at night and on Sundays, in an effort the MTA/DPT claimed was for our benefit, as it would free up parking places. I think it was more of an attempt to free up our wallets, if you know what I mean. We asked the MTA to please not do us any favors. They backed off. Plan cancelled.

In the city's defense, though, why shouldn't the city attempt some of these revenue-generating projects? If nobody cares, who cares? Maybe residents actually want some of those things. How are they to know unless neighborhood groups weigh in.

Look at other neighborhoods without homeowner representation. Take that big one down towards the beach, with many of the homes quite similar in size to those here in Westwood Highlands. However, since the Sunset district was never actually organized, over time much of it has turned into a kind of free-for-all of converted garages, businesses of all kinds, cemented-over front lawns, homes and apartment buildings of all different sizes and types, in-law apartments, and, of course, no parking and plenty of congestion. The Sunset's District 4 Supervisor Carmen Chu is doing a great job, but she has inherited a hand-ful.

Realizing how valuable representation is,

especially now with high property values and the constant pressure to develop, a couple of the former west-side neighborhood groups listed below are making attempts to resurrect themselves: Mt. Davidson Manor (behind the Church of the Pentacost on Ocean Avenue); Laguna Honda Homes (near Forest Hill Station between Woodside and Laguna Honda Boulevard); Claremont Properties (between Portola Drive and Claremont); Forest Knolls (between Clarendon and 7th Avenue); and Lakeside Homeowners (between Sloat Blvd, Eucalyptus, Junipero Serra, and 19th Avenue). Good luck to all of them.

My strong recommendation to future Westwood Highlands Boards of Directors and residents/homeowners: Don't let Westwood Highlands Association die out. If it ever does, the legalese needed to regroup will be very expensive, but worse than that, obtaining the 100 percent agreement required of all homeowners to do it would be difficult to impossible.

Just my opinion.

HELPFUL LINKS

Westwood Highlands Association
www.westwoodhighlands.org

West of Twin Peaks Central Council
www.westoftwinpeaks.org

San Francisco City Government Services
www.sfgov.org

120 Brentwood Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94127

