

# 'Dogpatch' slowly dying of official neglect

By Bob Hayes

A realtor's sign lies among the debris in an empty lot where a battered and stripped auto serves as a target for rockthrowing kids.

Pockmarks in the street swell into ankle-deep pits unsuited for jogging, or even walking.

Downtown city planners have officially designated the area Lower Potrero Hill, and in 1960 they rezoned it for heavy industrial use.

The 300-odd residents reluctantly acknowledge the community's unofficial name, "Dogpatch," but refuse to be labeled "heavy industrial."

In 1967 and 1968, the community reached its peak. Students at I. M. Scott, the neighborhood's predominantly black elementary school, scored first among all city elementary schools in reading.

"Administrators and teachers came from all around the Bay Area and throughout the country to visit our school," recalls Virginia Seymour, who taught kindergarten at Scott for 27 years.

Community awareness was high in this low-income area. Neighborhood coalitions were formed, converting empty lots into temporary playgrounds, demanding that City Hall reroute its street sweepers to include this three by five block enclave.

Now I. M. Scott is closed. The weeds grow up through its asphalt playground, and a no trespassing sign seals off a front door that once stood open to every parent.

Novella Lumbert, who served as head teacher and taught at Scott for 23 years before retiring in 1969, took pride in her role in the community.

"We were proud of our program because it worked" she recalls. "The children were aware and secure regardless of their nationality. We tried to give them confidence that they could achieve, and they did.

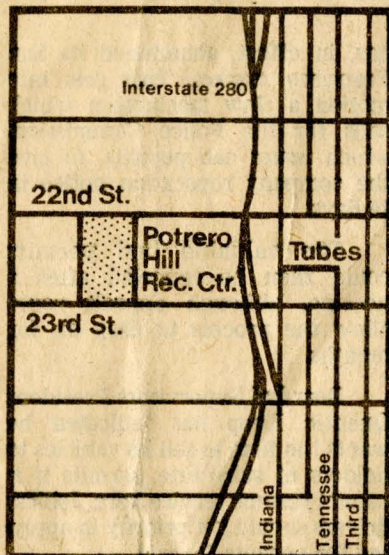
"The key," she explains, "was the beautiful cooperation between parents and the school."

The parents came because they were invited to become a part of

the children's learning, and they stayed because they were convinced the teachers were sincere.

It was a small school (seven teachers), where teacher turnover was virtually unheard of. Teachers knew the students and their parents, and children realized that parents and teachers were working together to insure their learning.

When The City released its 1967 test scores, with I. M. Scott at the top of the list in reading, the school district's research director said he believed the scores were



Square block known as "Dogpatch"

mistaken. The message was clear—that kind of thing couldn't happen at a school like I. M. Scott.

When the school repeated its performance the following year, there was no official comment.

In 1975 the school failed to meet state earthquake standards and was abruptly converted to house district office personnel until a fire finally shut the building.

Now I. M. Scott takes its place alongside the community's numerous eyesores. Its charred exterior serves as a stark warning that the neighborhood's future is in jeopardy.

"I'm sure it will never be used as a school again," says associate superintendent Milton Reiterman. "We might demolish the building and sell the land, sell it as is, or possibly think of a lease.

"We realize the effect a school building can have on a community. Whenever we rehabilitate a building, it has a positive effect on the neighborhood. If we beautify a building, it motivates homeowners to follow suit.

"Likewise, when we leave a dead piece of property, it has an adverse effect on the community."

Approximately 300 people, mostly blacks, now live in the Lower Potrero Hill area. But despite the fact that their protests brought about the modification of the heavy industrial zoning code, the community is being phased out.

Property owners, particularly the many absentee owners, are reluctant to finance major renovations until City Hall decides the area's future.

Muni is completing \$11 million maintenance and operations facility near 22nd and Minnesota streets.

When the project was first announced in 1971, community residents were told that part of the Muni agreement involved construction of a mini-park in the area.

They're still waiting for the park. Muni says insurance problems forced a delay of the park until construction is completed. But no one ever bothered to explain this to the community.

Meanwhile, city planners, politicians and special interest groups are busy deciding the fate of the community's 300 residents.

The East Shore Park Project Corporation decided three years ago that Lower Potrero Hill could be converted into a financial boon—a mixture of residential townhouses in the \$40,000-\$70,000 range, commercial buildings, and industrial complexes.

Principals of the corporation include: Burton Rockwell, architect; Gerald Hill, attorney; Emory Curtiss, planning consultant; Joe Holsinger, administrative assistant to Congressman Leo Ryan; and Jack Crowley of the S.F. Labor Council.

According to Holsinger, ESPP proposes planned-unit development with flexible, mixed zoning that stresses jobs, production, light industry, and residential priorities. ESPP also plans a coordinated jobs-industrial program with nearby port facilities.



Houses are falling apart as city planners ponder massive renewal programs

include this three by five block enclave.

Now I. M. Scott is closed. The weeds grow up through its asphalt playground, and a no trespassing sign seals off a front door that once stood open to every parent.

Novella Lumbert, who served as head teacher and taught at Scott for 23 years before retiring in 1969, took pride in her role in the community.

"We were proud of our program because it worked," she recalls. "The children were aware and secure regardless of their nationality. We tried to give them confidence that they could achieve, and they did.

"The key," she explains, "was the beautiful cooperation between parents and the school."

The parents came because they were invited to become a part of

patch"

mistaken. The message was clear—that kind of thing couldn't happen at a school like I. M. Scott.

When the school repeated its performance the following year, there was no official comment.

In 1975 the school failed to meet state earthquake standards and was abruptly converted to house district office personnel until a fire finally shut the building.

Now I. M. Scott takes its place alongside the community's numerous eyesores. Its charred exterior serves as a stark warning that the neighborhood's future is in jeopardy.

"I'm sure it will never be used as a school again," says associate superintendent Milton Reiterman. "We might demolish the building and sell the land, sell it as is, or possibly think of a lease.

Meanwhile, city planners, politicians and special interest groups are busy deciding the fate of the community's 300 residents.

The East Shore Park Project Corporation decided three years ago that Lower Potrero Hill could be converted into a financial boon — a mixture of residential townhouses in the \$40,000-\$70,000 range, commercial buildings, and industrial complexes.

Principals of the corporation include: Burton Rockwell, architect; Gerald Hill, attorney; Emory Curtiss, planning consultant; Joe Holsinger, administrative assistant to Congressman Leo Ryan; and Jack Crowley of the S.F. Labor Council.

According to Holsinger, ESPP proposes planned-unit development with flexible, mixed zoning that stresses jobs, production, light industry, and residential priorities. ESPP also plans a coordinated jobs-industrial program with nearby port facilities.

"The whole idea," says Holsinger, "is to avoid land speculation, to prevent a select group of individuals from cleaning up financially."

But in order to put its plan into motion, ESPP needs the approval of The City and the cooperation of the community's prime land owners.

Holsinger says The City has been reluctant to support such a massive development.

To the residents of Lower Potrero Hill, townhouses and industrial complexes in a "new town in town," seem remote.

Residents like John Knox and James Scallion feel they have an immediate stake in the community, and their greatest concern is to make City Hall aware of what needs to be done now.

They, along with some neighbors, meet each Saturday to push community improvement ideas through the Lower Potrero Hill Association.

"One of our main problems is neglect," says Knox, "just letting people know we're here and that we want to remain a community."

How much time does "Dogpatch" have? Will it become another victim of contrived urban removal, sacrificing low-income rentals for upper-middle-class townhouses?

It's difficult to get a "yes" or "no." But when you see the neglect and scan the many pages of proposals, you get the feeling that the funeral is under way, and everybody — except the people who live there — know the community is dead.



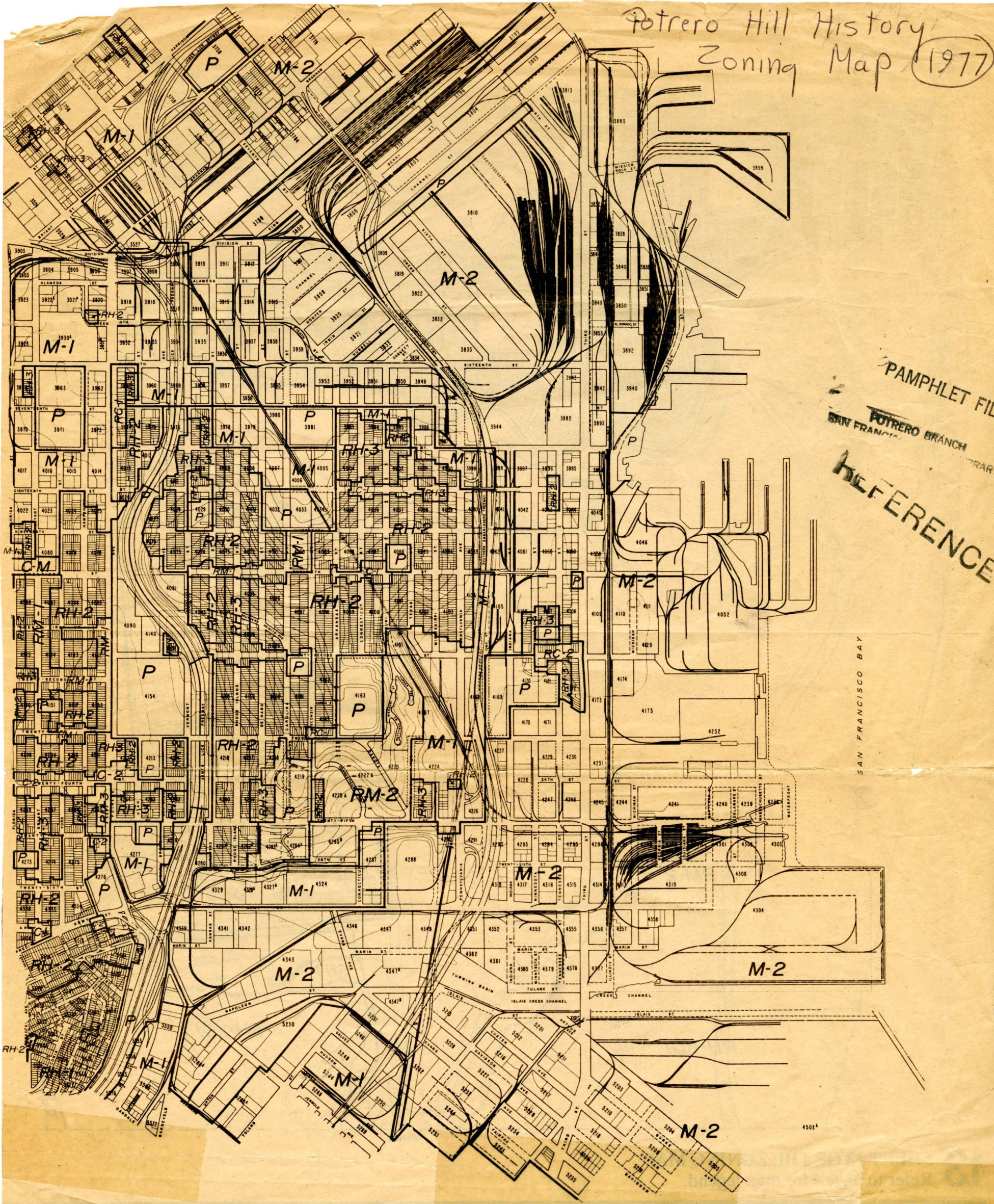
Examiner Photos by Paul Glines

Houses are falling apart as city planners ponder massive renewal programs



Zoned as 'heavy industrial,' the area's future is bleak

Potrero Hill History  
Zoning Map (1977)



PAMPHLET FILE  
POTRERO BRANCH  
SAN FRANCISCO  
REFERENCE

SAN FRANCISCO BAY