

# PANIL Notes

Volume 34

Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League - PO Box 20375, Oakland 94620

April 2009

A DEVELOPMENT TO SING ABOUT!

## 412 Monte Vista Sold to Boychoir

By Valerie Winemiller

The mansion at 412 Monte Vista Avenue has been purchased by the Grammy Award-winning Pacific Boychoir Academy, reports Pamela Weimer, Academic Dean of the academy and Managing Director of the After-School Program. Plymouth Church had put the property back on the market after the condo development plan was abandoned.

The Oakland-Piedmont boundary is at the back of the yard, so use of the adjacent church parking lots as a playground required a Conditional Use Permit from the city of Piedmont. That permit was granted February 17. The academy held talks with Olive Avenue neighbors whose homes back up to the proposed playground. An amicable agreement on rules governing noise, program enrollment and hours of operation resulted in their support of the permit.

The Oakland zoning division has ruled that no special permits are required, since schools are allowed by right in the R-70 zone. Talks with Monte Vista Avenue neighbors will be scheduled in the future to discuss any issues of concern. Drop off and pickup of students are to occur in the parking lot, off the street.

In the meantime, PBA is engaged in fundraising for the renovations necessary for school use. Weimer

Continued on page 2

## AC Transit Line 51 Changes Proposed; Your Vote Wanted by April 15

by Valerie Winemiller

AC Transit Line 51 links our neighborhood with downtown Oakland, Alameda, UC Berkeley and the Berkeley Amtrak station from 5:00 a.m. to midnight. At 13 miles and an hour and 27 minutes travel time each direction, it is one of the longest routes in the system. Its length is one of the factors that make it subject to slow service, late buses and bus bunching.

AC Transit released a study with several recommendations for service changes to address these problems. It has held the comment period open until April 15 specifically to allow more neighbors in the Piedmont Avenue, Temescal and Rockridge to weigh in.

### The service and problems

The 51 line carries 19,000 riders per day, connecting them with

- Four BART stations,
- One Amtrak station, and
- 30 AC Transit routes, including six transbay, 22 local and two Rapid bus lines.

System wide, buses average a speed of nearly 12 miles per hour. Line 51 averages nine mph; even an increase to 10.5 mph would be very noticeable. Buses are normally moving only 52% of the time.

Continued on page 3

## PANIL Monthly Meeting: Wed., April 8

Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council — 7:30 pm

Paul Brekke-Miesner our Neighborhood Services Coordinator

Anthony Ramos, our Problem Solving Officer

General Meeting — 8:00 pm

**Working Together to Make Piedmont Avenue Businesses Thrive**

**A Frank Discussion among Merchants, Residents,  
Property Owners, Property Managers**

**Piedmont Gardens, 110 41st Street — 11th Floor Sky Room**

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## 412 Monte Vista Sold to Boychoir (Continued)

assures PANIL that the academy is committed to a careful restoration of the Walter Mathews-designed building. "We want it to be our public symbol of the Pacific Boychoir Academy commitment to excellence," she stated. PANIL has written a letter of support for PBA's grant application for funding.

The main floor will be restored most accurately, including reproducing a stolen mantel and removing an unsightly firewall in the entry which obscures the grand stairs. The firewall will be moved to the second floor, where it disrupts fewer architectural features. The required exterior fire exit will be moved to the back of the building. Numerous beautiful interior built-in storage cupboards will be used in place or relocated for use.

Weimer and her husband Richard are 33-year residents of the PANIL neighborhood and have lovingly restored their own Craftsman home on Terrace Street.

For further information about the academy and its programs, including some audio downloads of performances, see <http://www.pacificboychoiracademy.org>

The Boychoir is also on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RDXJOEykTA>.

## Pacific Boychoir with the Marcus Shelby Jazz Orchestra

On April 25, one of the country's leading boys choirs (soon to be based in the PANIL area) teams up with one of the country's leading jazz ensembles, the Marcus Shelby Jazz Orchestra. The



ensembles perform arrangements of spirituals and classics by Duke Ellington on the 110th anniversary of his birth. Original choral arrangements by Christopher Kula and original charts by Marcus Shelby. This evening's concert is so unprecedented, you'll have to come hear what happens.

**When:** Saturday, April 25, 2009, 7:00pm

**Where:** First Congregational Church, Berkeley

**Tickets:** \$20 general, available at 510-652-4722

## HOUSING PROPOSAL NOW POSTPONED

## Chapel of the Chimes' Parent Corporation Is For Sale

by Valerie Winemiller

Lifemark Group, the parent company of Chapel of the Chimes, has been listed for sale. As a result, the housing development proposed for Chapel of the Chimes properties is on hold, reports Harley Forrey, General Manager. Previously announced community discussions of the project have been postponed until further notice.

Lifemark Group is owned by Capital Southwest, an investment company. The Lifemark Group properties include the Chapel of the Chimes facilities in Oakland and Hayward, as well as cemeteries in San Mateo and Sacramento.

See [www.panil.org/newsletter](http://www.panil.org/newsletter) and click on the October 2008 issue for plot map and details of the housing proposal.

## AC Transit Proposed Changes to Line 51 (continued)

They dwell at stops 20% of the time, but are just plain delayed even more time: 28%. Delays are commonly caused by narrow streets, uncontrolled pedestrian crossings or turning vehicles. Dwell time is increased by passengers exiting via the front door, insufficient red curb, blocked loading zones and sidewalk hazards. Boarding takes 3 seconds per passenger, and paying fares adds time.

### The proposals

With the participation of a task force, AC Transit has proposed the following choices to address service problems:

**Send your comments by April 15**

- 1) A Limited/Local combination would add some buses which stop at only selected locations. The route is now purely local.
- 2) Split route. The route would be shortened by splitting it into two lines. Transfers would be needed to travel beyond the split point. The choices proposed are at Rockridge BART (delay is concentrated at College Avenue north of BART), at downtown Oakland, or at the MacArthur BART station on a revised route. A split route would make our connection to Berkeley become a two-bus trip.
- 3) A/B service would divide the stops into alternating groups. Route 51A buses would stop at the current 1st, 3rd, 5th stops, etc., and 51B buses at the 2nd, 4th, 6th, etc. Both A and B buses would stop at select transfer points. This method has been used in some other dense urban cities.
- 4) A fourth option would make no changes to the route. Instead, incremental improvements would be sought through operational changes, and through improvements to roads, traffic and pedestrian signals, and bus zones.

Public comments at a recent meeting added several other points. A bus driver criticized the schedule as unrealistic,

specially with wheelchair users, and with inadequate layover time at the end of the route. The latter forces drivers of delayed buses to choose between using the bathroom or starting the next run on time. Another speaker cited Boston, which speeds boarding by using prepayment and allowing riders to enter at any door.

Neighbors may download a report with maps at [www.actransit.org](http://www.actransit.org) (go to Planning Focus, then select Projects in the Works, and click on "Line 51 Service & Reliability Study"). Send your comments to [psarna@actransit.org](mailto:psarna@actransit.org) or call Puja Sarna at (510) 891-4867 by April 15.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NEWS

## TransLink — A New Smart Card

By Ronile Lahti

If you have a Regional Transit Connection discount card (RTC), your card may already be upgraded with TransLink, the Bay Area's smart card for paying transit fares. For over a year, AC Transit has been replacing expired RTC cards with cards that are enabled with TransLink features. You'll know your RTC card is TransLink-enabled if it has a [gold-colored microchip](#) and a [TransLink logo](#) on the front, to the left of your photo.

If you have an RTC card that is TransLink-enabled, you can use it to pay your fare once you load electronic cash ("e-cash") and/or a monthly discounted pass onto the card. If you don't have a TransLink-enabled RTC card yet, you can wait until your card expires and your replacement card will be an RTC TransLink card. Or, you can exchange it for a TransLink-enabled card now — for free.

For details about exchanging an RTC card, or about loading value onto a TransLink-enabled card, visit [www.actransit.org](http://www.actransit.org), or call AC Transit's Oakland ticket office at 510-891-4706.

## Calendar

For more neighborhood events go to [www.panil.org/calendar](http://www.panil.org/calendar).

### PANIL Meeting

2nd Wednesday of the month  
7:30 to 9 p.m.  
Piedmont Gardens  
110 41st Street  
11th Floor Sky Room

**PANIL Steering Committee**  
email [contact@panil.org](mailto:contact@panil.org) for time, date and place of monthly meeting

### Glen Echo Creek Work Day

2nd Saturday of the month  
Monte Vista Avenue, 9:30 a.m.  
654-1930

### Mt. View Cemetery Tour

Docent led tour  
2nd and 4th Saturdays of the month  
10 a.m., FREE

### Events at the Chapel of the Chimes

4499 Piedmont Avenue  
654-0123

### Historical and Botanical Tour

3rd Saturday of the month  
10 a.m. to noon, FREE

### Oakland Heritage Alliance Lecture Series

2nd Thursday of each month  
\$8 OHA members/\$10 non-members  
For more information contact:  
[www.oaklandheritage.org](http://www.oaklandheritage.org),  
763-9218

### Piedmont Avenue Branch Library

160 41st Street, 597-5011

#### Storytimes

Toddlers  
Wednesday, 10:15 a.m.  
Pre school  
Wednesday, 11 a.m.

**Saturday Knitting Club**  
Every Saturday 3 to 4 p.m.

To place an item on PANIL's calendars, send e-mail to:  
[contact@panil.org](mailto:contact@panil.org)

## A Look Back at the MacArthur Broadway Center: A Space Age Shopping Center

By Valerie Winemiller,

"There are few buildings for which the highest and best use is demolition," said the late developer Frank Stern of the then failing MacArthur/Broadway Shopping Center, "That's one of them."

The original storefront window areas have been filled in over the years making the building more and more of a concrete fortress on the streetscape. Few will miss it after demolition for Kaiser's hospital replacement Phase 2. But few today would imagine the number of laudatory words written about it when it opened Sept. 7, 1965.

At opening, the mall contained ten restaurants, 26 stores and a branch of Bank of America. Topped by a six-story office tower, the complex was an early example of a completely enclosed shopping mall, using innovative concrete technology. The office tower portion was given an Award of Merit in the year it opened by the Prestressed Concrete Institute Awards Program. The Oakland Tribune called the mall "space age."

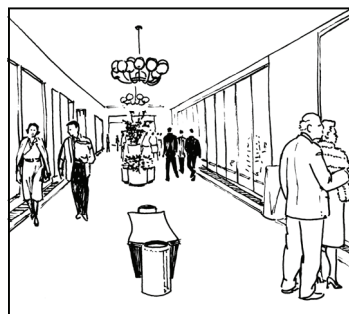
An electric walkway ramp connecting the stores with the 750-space rooftop parking lot was said to have been inspired by the 1964/1965 New York World's Fair. The ramps were equipped with grooves that locked onto shopping cart wheels, allowing their safe transport to and from the roof. There, the space-age theme was continued as "Astro Busses" shuttled shoppers to their cars.

Mall interior hallways, lined with shop display windows, were decorated with chandeliers, planters, and space-age free-form cast concrete benches, touches that would be very hip in today's revival of interest in mid-century modern design.

The atrium of the mall contained a 600-seat International Food Bazaar designed to serve up to 4,000 hungry patrons a day. Even the food bazaar's mechanical dishwasher was



*Concrete floor girders extend beyond the glass "curtain" wall, forming a honeycomb pattern with interesting shadows. Architect Irving Shapiro won an award for the innovative design in 1965.*



described as "space-age." Anchor tenants included F. W. Woolworth, with a 35,000 square foot department store, and Mayfair Market, successor to an earlier highly successful grocery store on the site.

The project's architect was Dr. Irving Shapiro of Los Angeles, noted architect and urban renewal economist. The \$10 million mall was said to be the result of 20 years planning by attorney, merchandiser and developer Edmund E. Herrscher. A San Leandro native, Herrscher was past chairman of Mayfair Markets, a supermarket chain second only to Safeway at the time. He advocated using good taste in decor over the era's hard sell market ambiance and decried the "quick buck attitude" that led to building "future slums."

In the 1980s, the famous Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley ("the Co-op") bought the Mayfair Market at the M/B Center and two others in Oakland. The shopping center itself was already in decline, from competition from larger, newer malls and from real and exaggerated perceptions of crime in and around the Center. The failure of this venture was partially blamed for the Co-op's bankruptcy in 1988. By 1990, the mall still advertised 48 shops in a back-to-school promotion, but it struggled. In the early 1990s, Mayor Elihu Harris personally escorted executives of Lucky supermarkets through the site, hoping to sell them on occupying the empty Co-op store. "Timing is everything," he sighed wryly at a PANIL meeting the next night. The execs had seemed interested until they returned to their car on the rooftop lot and found it had been broken into.

PANIL began urging Kaiser to buy the mall rather than to tear down more housing for expansion in the late 1980s, during the planning process for the Fabiola Medical Office Building on Howe St. Early plans for the site were a set of low-rise clinics, but the final project will be nearly a million square feet of hospital and related diagnostics and clinics, a central utility plant, and a garage with eight levels above ground and two below.

*Thanks to the staff of the Oakland History Room and the Periodicals Room of Oakland Main Library.*



## Piedmont Avenue Survey

In an effort to understand how well the business district meets the needs of our community, **Piedmont Avenue Merchant's Association (PAMA)** and **Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League (PANIL)** are conducting this survey to help ensure that we are putting our efforts into the right place.

**1. How often, on average, do you patronize any of the businesses on Piedmont Avenue?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Daily      \_\_\_\_\_ Weekly      \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly      \_\_\_\_\_ Yearly

**2. How do you most frequently get to Piedmont Avenue? (Check no more than two.)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Bus      \_\_\_\_\_ Car      \_\_\_\_\_ Bicycle      \_\_\_\_\_ Walk

**3. When you visit Piedmont Avenue, what are your 5 most frequent stops?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What type of retail (i.e., clothing, home décor, toys) would you like to see on Piedmont Avenue and how many miles do you currently have to travel for a similar business?**

Retail Business	Miles Traveled
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____

**5. What type of food services (i.e., restaurants, fast food, cafes) would you like to see on the Avenue and how many miles do you currently have to travel for a similar business?**

Food Services	Miles Traveled
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____

**You can fill out this form and return it to Piedmont Systems on Piedmont Ave., or complete it online at either [www.panil.org](http://www.panil.org) or [www.piedmontavenuemerchants.org](http://www.piedmontavenuemerchants.org)**

6. What type of professional services (i.e., dentists, accountants, insurance agents) would you like to see and how many miles do you currently travel for a similar service?

Professional Services	Miles Traveled
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____

7. When deciding where to shop, how important is it to you that a business be:

	Very important	- Somewhat import			- Not at all important		
Locally owned	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Regional brand	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
National chain	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

8. PAMA is considering a study of two capital improvements for the district.

1. **Historic Lamp Posts Addition**

Historic lamp posts like those that existed on the Avenue pre-1960 would be added to existing lighting to improve street and storefront illumination. Are you in favor of this study?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

2. **Sidewalk Widening**

Sidewalks on the south side of Piedmont Avenue would be widened from Glenwood Avenue to MacArthur Boulevard to create an improved pedestrian zone. Are you in favor of this study?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

The following is used for classification purposes to help us better understand our community.

9. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Number of children in household: \_\_\_\_\_

11. Housing: \_\_\_\_\_ Rent                      \_\_\_\_\_ Own

12. Why you come to Piedmont Avenue (Check all that apply.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Live                      \_\_\_\_\_ Work                      \_\_\_\_\_ Shop/Dine                      \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Please share with us any additional comments.

*You can fill out this form and return it to Piedmont Systems on Piedmont Ave., or complete it online at either [www.panil.org](http://www.panil.org) or [www.piedmontavenumerchants.org](http://www.piedmontavenumerchants.org)*

Please return your completed survey to:  
**Piedmont Systems**  
3871 Piedmont Avenue  
Oakland CA 94611



Sign at 40th and Cerrito Avenue

PIEDMONT AVE PHOTO GALLERY

**A View of the Avenue**

Our neighborhood is filled with interesting sights.

Paper signs like this one appear near the church at 252 40th Way. They change often, as exposure to the elements takes its toll on the paper.

This photo is by Gail Robinson.

We invite photographers to send photos taken on the Avenue or in the neighborhood to [contact@panil.org](mailto:contact@panil.org).

**My neighborhood gym!**

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*Piedmont Avenue*  
**4th Annual Tulip & Art Festival**  
*April 2009*

Avenue Merchants  
hosting  
Local Artists  
all  
month long

Take a stroll  
through the Tulips  
at  
Mountain View Cemetery

*Spring on the Plaza*  
music, dance, fun, food, artisans & merchants  
Saturday - April 25th  
11 am to 3 pm  
Key Route Plaza—41st & Piedmont

performances by students from  
**Piedmont Avenue Elementary School**  
music by  
*Cascada de Flores*

Sponsored by the Piedmont Avenue Merchants Association  
Mountain View Cemetery  
SHOP OAKLAND  
L'Amx Tea Bar and Piedmont Systems

