

# GRASS ROOTS

by **mike sweeney**



Grass Roots is an effort to do something about the use of land in the midpeninsula.

Grass Roots was started by local radicals who took their noses out of the sky and stuck them in the ground ... in grass, if you will. Our politics is the politics of self-defense. It's radical because we have to reach people -- lots of people -- about corporate capitalism, private property, and the decisions that control their lives.

We have thought some about local events. Here's a summary.

A plan to make big money exists in the heads of certain bankers, industrialists and landlords. They are the Interests who are busy transforming the midpeninsula into a congested, exclusive metropolis. Since their scheme will benefit practically none of the people who live here, the Interests have had to resort to all kinds of economic and political pressures to overcome the natural resistance of the people.

The skirmishes and battles of this long campaign are going on all the time. Every rent increase in the super-tight housing market serves the purpose of driving the poor people and free people to make way for luxury apartments, high-rise offices or expressways. Every Palo Alto City Council meeting features

a proposal for road "improvements", to carry the new traffic that will be generated by an expansion of the area's war-based industry. The road improvements are often opposed by anguished homeowners, but they usually pass, since the Interests purged most opposition from the City Council in 1967.

The popular opposition to the Interests includes almost everybody, at one time or another. The Free University has joined with a residential group to fight Russel V. Lee's plan for a rich people's hospital in the center of Palo Alto. The upper middle class ghettos in the foothills have mobilized to oppose Stanford University's excavation of Coyote Hill. Palo Alto shopkeepers banded together against the downtown "traffic loop" which had the thinly-disguised purpose of starving them out. Black people, by far the worst victims of the housing squeeze, are demanding the construction of low-rent units. And so on. But the fatal weakness of the people in this struggle has been their disunity.

How do we get it together? Grass Roots believes that the first step is to spread an awareness that all these problems are the same problem: use of land in the midpeninsula. We will soon publish a 50-page booklet with wide distribution. It will emphasize the key role of the largest landowner -- Stanford University--in transforming Santa Clara County's economic base from agriculture to war. The development of the Stanford Research Institute and the Stanford Industrial Park brought an influx of aerospace-electronics firms which specialize in military contracts. By conscious decision, Stanford allowed only a few high-priced residential developments on its land, and built no housing for the thousands of workers it brought to the midpeninsula.

Stanford, with large holdings of vacant land, continues to determine the pattern of development in the midpeninsula. The Interests that control Stanford are now pushing the University to continue rapid development of the Industrial Park. This is expected to provide the industrial base for a complex of high-rise office buildings along University Avenue (converted to a mall) and El Camino Real. Land values will soar, and cheaper housing will be demolished to make way for expensive high-rise apartments, like Stanford's Oak Creek (two bedrooms: \$350.).

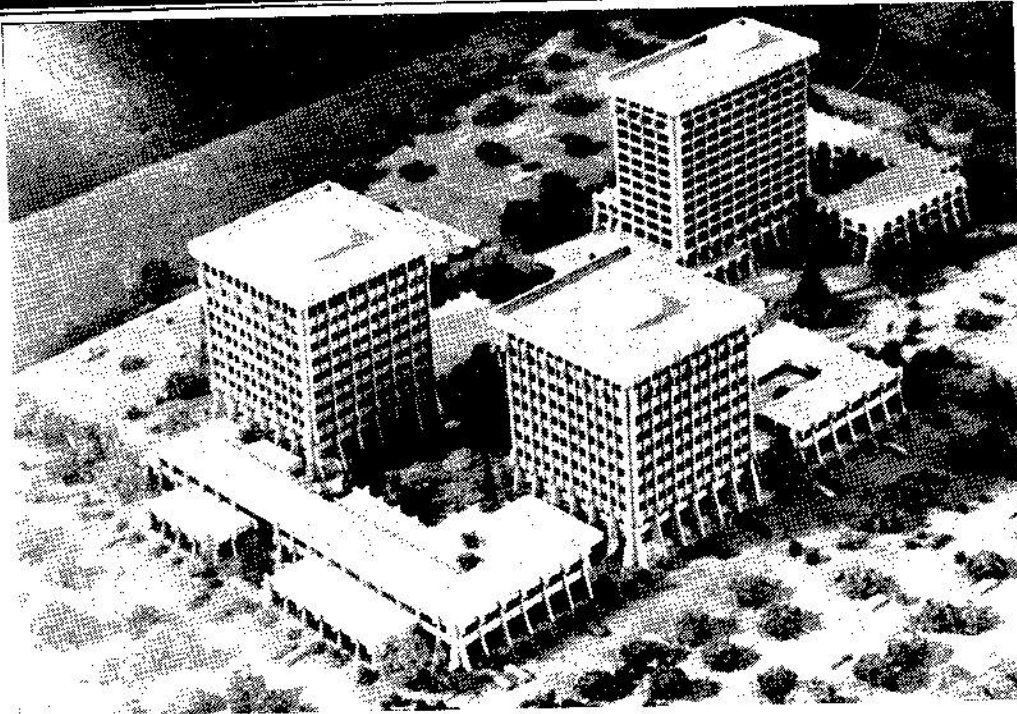
New expressways are essential for maximum profitable congestion of the midpeninsula. As the low-rent housing supply continues to dwindle, workers will be forced to commute from distant communities to reach their jobs in the midpeninsula. The Willow Expressway, for example, is designed to open easy access to the East Bay.

In describing this nightmare, the Grass Roots booklet will argue that there is a natural alliance between all those who are concerned over the use of the land. Clean air, virgin foothills, decent housing, the end of University complicity in the war, the growth of the Free culture, and the basic quality of life in the midpeninsula are all at stake. The analysis reduces to two Grass Roots slogans:

"House People, Not Profits"  
"Stop Overdevelopment"

With the booklet as a basic organizational tool, Grass Roots will start talking to people about the land. Political action--a redundant expression, because all acts are political--can focus on a number of related issues:

1. DILLINGHAM -- Grass Roots made some noise January 12 by marching on the site of "Palo Alto Square", a office-hotel complex planned by the mult



million dollar Dillingham Corporation on Stanford land at the corner of El Camino Real and Page Mill Road. The complex would provide financial services for the corporations in the Industrial Park. By bringing 1,500 more employees to the area, it would worsen the housing shortage and increase traffic, smog, and rents.

2. COYOTE HILL -- Stanford wants to put 12 factories (the lease isn't signed...yet) on the site, bringing as many as 5,000 more employees to the area. Committee for Green Foothills is trying to block development by a lawsuit. Besides the problems of traffic, smog and rents, Coyote Hill and other Industrial Park expansion will have a direct impact on Palo Alto by providing the economic "need" for the high-rise offices that are to fill University Avenue.

3. LOW-RENT HOUSING -- The midpeninsula needs at least 4,000 units of low-rent housing immediately, according to a study by faculty and students at

Stanford. The university and the City of Palo Alto are trying to de-fuse the demands for housing by a big fanfare over vague plans to build a model project of 400 to 800 units.

4. HOSPITAL-- Can you dig tearing down four blocks of housing to make way for a hospital with no pediatrics or obstetrics, designed exclusively to allow rich doctors to exploit richer old people? The Free U didn't, and it joined with the Association for a Balanced Community (ABC) to circulate a petition that will challenge the Medical Research Foundation hospital in a June referendum.

Grass Roots - an open, communally-democratic organization-- has an unlimited need for people who want to talk to other people about land. We also have an unlimited need for money to pay for the booklet and other materials in the coming months. Grass Roots, 424 Lytton Avenue, Palo Alto.

**Palo Alto Square**

A Dillingham

FINANCIAL

HOUSE

PROFITS

HOTEL

LEASING:  
THOMAS W. FORD  
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