

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT  
MAGNOLIA PLACE PROJECT  
(APNS 032-311-120 AND 032-311-130)**

106-110 & 120 TILTON AVENUE, SAN MATEO  
SAN MATEO COUNTY

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## INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings of a prehistoric archaeological assessment of the proposed Magnolia Place housing development located at 106-110 and 120 Tilton Avenue in San Mateo. An architectural evaluation of existing structures on the property was not conducted as part of this study. The work was requested and authorized by John Lucchesi of John Matthews Architects, on behalf of O’Riordan Construction Inc. who are seeking permits from the San Mateo Department of Community Development to construct a 50 unit condominium structure with two stories of underground parking. Because the proposed project is located in an area of high archaeological sensitivity and could impact prehistoric archaeological resources, an evaluation was required by the City of San Mateo to meet requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Section 21084.1 and CEQA Guidelines).

The archaeological evaluation included three steps. A review of maps and literature on file at the Northwest Information Center (NWIC) of the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS) at Sonoma State University was undertaken to determine whether the property and nearby areas had been previously surveyed and/or contained recorded cultural resources (NWIC File No. 07-1463). The second step of the evaluation consisted of a surface reconnaissance of the property, completed by Miley Holman and the author. Last, this report and recommendations provided below comprise the third step of the archaeological assessment for the Project Area.

Prehistoric archaeological materials were identified within the Magnolia Place Project Area, possibly associated with a previously recorded prehistoric site, CA-SMA-318, located at the intersection of San Mateo Drive and Tilton Avenue. At this time it cannot be determined whether the archaeological materials are redeposited or surface indicators of an in situ primary deposit. Because project construction could potentially adversely impact significant archaeological deposits, subsurface auger testing is recommended to complete the identification for significant prehistoric archaeological resources and provide information to formulate appropriate mitigation or avoidance measures.

## PROJECT LOCATION AND LEGAL DESCRIPTION

The Magnolia Place Project Area (MPPA) consists of two parcels located at 106-110 and 120 Tilton Avenue (south side of street), between Tilton Terrace and San Mateo Drive. The rectangular property measures 209.92 by 150.00 feet, totaling 33,472 square feet. The two MPPA parcels are designated by San Mateo County Assessor’s Parcel Numbers APN 032-311-120 [106 & 110 Tilton Avenue, also referred to in this report as Property A] and APN 032-311-130 [120 Tilton Avenue, Property B] (Figure 1). The MPPA is contained on the United States Geological Survey *San Mateo*, Calif.[ornia] topographic quadrangle, 7.5 minute series (Figure 2). Because the MPPA and adjacent lands are within the Mexican-era Rancho *San Mateo* Land Grant, they were not surveyed into the Township and Range system.

## PROJECT SETTING

The MPPA is situated near the boundary of flat flood plain and San Francisco Bay/estuary environs. San Mateo Creek, which originates in the coastal hills above Crystal Springs Reservoir, flows in an easterly direction approximately 200 meters south of the Project Area. Like other watercourses in the Bay Area, the channel and banks of San Mateo Creek may have migrated historically in response to subsidence and flooding. Consequently, landscape altering processes (particularly alluvial deposition) may obscure the visibility of prehistoric archaeological resources along San Mateo Creek. The archaeological landscape has also been greatly altered by urban development, and many of the archaeological sites recorded at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries along the banks of San Mateo Creek have been completely destroyed or obscured by construction of roadways, residential neighborhoods and commercial development. Often times the rich shellmidden was hauled off for use in gardens and planter boxes, possibly accounting for the widespread but diffuse distribution of prehistoric cultural materials (mostly shellfish fragments) in yards and gardens near the MPPA. However, despite the scale of urban development in the vicinity of the MPPA, intact subsurface cultural materials associated with some of the ancient shellmounds may be present under the built environment, and surface indicators may not be reliable for identifying the presence/absence of significant intact deposits.

As noted, the MPPA consists of two properties. Property A (106 and 110 Tilton) occupies the northwest quadrant of the Project Area. This square parcel contains two single-family residences and a two-car detached garage (Figures 3 and 4); most of the parcel is obscured from the street and sidewalk by a high, bushy hedge. The small parcel is thickly vegetated with an assortment of introduced ornamental/fruit trees and shrubs, though several native Coast Live Oak and California Bay Laurel trees are present on the property. Because the houses were occupied at the time of the survey, the back yards were not accessed. Overall, visibility of the ground surface was poor. An exception was the northern portions of the MPPA immediately in front of the houses. The grass/weeds in front of 110 Tilton, and to a lesser extent 106 Tilton, had been cut short and visibility of surface soil was good, especially the planted area adjacent to the porch of 110 Tilton.

Property B (120 Tilton) is a larger L-shaped parcel that comprises approximately 70 percent of the MPPA. A two-story stucco apartment building consisting of approximately 20 units is positioned along the eastern side of the parcel. The residential unit is associated with a large single-story detached wooden garage complex, located at the back of the parcel extending behind Property A (Figures 5 and 6). Like Property A, property behind the apartment building is thickly vegetated with a combination of introduced trees and shrubs, and occasional native trees—e.g., Coast Live Oak, California Bay Laurel, and a single California Redwood. While much of the parcel behind the apartment building and around the garage is exposed, most of the surface is covered with asphalt and gravel, and areas where soil is exposed are obscured by shrubs, weeds, and a miscellany of modern trash. The narrow section of lawn and garden in front of the apartment building afforded limited visibility of the ground surface, as did a very narrow strip of exposed soil between the apartment building and fenced eastern property boundary.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A number of archaeological surveys have been conducted in San Mateo over the last 100 years. Probably the most important study was Nelson's 1908 survey along the margins of San Francisco Bay which documented more than 40 shellmounds in San Mateo (Nelson 1909). Between 1896 and 1936 Jerome Hamilton also recorded and mapped sites in San Mateo County (Hamilton 1936). Hamilton recorded numerous sites including nine shellmounds along the banks of San Mateo Creek between Highway 101 and El Camino Real. Hamilton's map is contained in a study commissioned by the City of San Mateo in 1983 (Chavez 1983). The Chavez study reviews the archaeological record for San Mateo and discusses cultural resource management and mitigation procedures; this document and Hamilton's map were probably the basis for the San Mateo Planning Division designating the MPPA archaeologically sensitive.

Documenting and understanding the local archaeological record is problematical. Frequently notes and records prepared by early archaeologists have been lost or contain incomplete and/or conflicting information (Salzman 1984:54). As discussed by Clark (2008) for a nearby archaeological evaluation, conflicting numbering and mapping of sites by different researchers is confusing, a situation that has been compounded by an evolving development landscape. By the time Hamilton published his findings in 1936 the area adjacent to San Mateo Creek had already been developed and many of the sites leveled. Nonetheless one should not conclude that significant deposits no longer exist in the vicinity of the recorded locations. Excavation of other shellmounds along the Peninsula thought to have been destroyed has revealed significant subsurface deposits. Thus, intact archaeological deposits and features (including Native American human burials) may still reside in subsurface deposits under streets and buildings in the vicinity of the MPPA.

One of the shellmiddens (designated H-11) recorded by Jerome Hamilton around 1930 was located at the southeast corner of San Mateo Drive and Tilton Avenue. As recorded by Hamilton, the site was elevated two feet above the surrounding land surface and measured approximately 50 feet wide, making it one of the smaller shellmounds recorded by Hamilton underlying downtown San Mateo. Hamilton also noted that much of the site had already been destroyed, presumably damaged when San Mateo Drive was graded. In 1990, H-11 was formally recorded (now designated CA-SMA-318) and a site record form was filed with the NWIC (Bocek 1990). Bocek recorded patches of ashy soil containing shellfish fragments (mussel and oyster) on the east side of San Mateo Drive, extending approximately 30 m (100 feet) south and east of the southeast corner of the Tilton Avenue-San Mateo Drive intersection; some archaeological materials were also noted on properties on the north side of Tilton Avenue.

Another prehistoric archaeological site is recorded in close proximity to the MPPA. As currently recorded, CA-SMA-6 (corresponding to Nelson's Mound #364) is on both sides of El Camino Real, extending from Santa Inez to Crystal Springs Road (William Self Associates 1998). The site, another shell-laden midden deposit, is identified by a sparse, discontinuous scatter of shellfish fragments visible in planted strips and yards. The extensive shellmidden scatter encircles another Hamilton site (H-14), previously identified in yards and gardens on Chesterton Place just north of the MPPA (Chavez 1983). H-14 was recorded by Hamilton as a five foot high mound covering an area of  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre, a significantly larger and more prominent shellmound than H-

11/CA-SMA-318. It seems likely that the origins of the elongated deposit of shellmidden designated CA-SMA-6, as mapped by William Self Associates, represents the disturbed and scattered remnants of H-14 and possibly another site(s) that have been dispersed by urban development. Despite these findings, significant intact deposits may reside within the recorded boundaries of CA-SMA-6 and adjacent areas. For example, archaeological monitoring for the Versailles Senior Housing Project (10 Crystal Springs Road) at the corner of El Camino Real and Crystal Springs Road recovered disturbed Native American human remains and prehistoric artifacts (Basin Research Associates 2007a, 2007b). The presence of these materials confirmed the presence of CA-SMA-6 at this location. The locality is the former site of a gas station, and grading and excavation for underground storage tanks probably disturbed the archaeological site.

## **FIELD SURVEY AND RESULTS**

A surface reconnaissance of the MPPA for prehistoric archaeological resources was conducted by Miley Holman and the author on April 14; a second visit to the Project Area was made by the author on May 2 to assess and photo-document site conditions. On both occasions the surveyors encountered generally poor field conditions. Ground surface visibility ranged from bad to nonexistent over most of the property, reducing survey coverage to the level of a “general” reconnaissance. The footprints of the two houses and garage on Property A, and the apartment building and garage complex on Property B, cover large portions of the MPPA. As already stated the backyards of the two houses on Property A were not surveyed and paved/graveled driveways and parking lots, thick vegetation, and myriad debris/trash in the back of Property B restricted inspection of the ground surface.

While the MPPA is largely obscured by the built environment, the Project Area is only several hundred feet from the recorded boundaries of CA-SMA-318 (a prehistoric shellmound) and the field survey identified prehistoric archaeological materials on both parcels. Small shellfish fragments (oyster, clam and mussel shells) were observed at several locations where soil was visible, mostly in the northern (street) end of the MPPA. In general the shell scatter consisted of relatively scant shell fragments too small to identify, though a more dense concentration of larger shell fragments was observed in the planted area in front of the residence at 110 Tilton. This concentration was also associated with a darker grayish-brown soil that contained several fractured cobbles typical of fire-altered rock (FAR), a constituent commonly found in archaeological deposits. Less shell was observed in the front of the apartment building and the narrow strip of soil along the eastern side of Property B. The adjoining property (the San Mateo Orthopedic and Sports Therapy Center) was inspected to see if archaeological indicators extended easterly toward the recorded location of CA-SMA-318, but the medical building and associated asphalt parking lot completely cover the property. Aside from the shellfish fragments and possible FAR, no other prehistoric artifacts or archaeological constituents were observed.

Based on the NWIC literature review and a surface reconnaissance it appears that archaeological materials associated with CA-SMA-318 are present on the MPPA, though only a small portion of the property could be adequately examined. At this time it cannot be determined whether the archaeological materials observed are redeposited or an indication of an *in situ* primary deposit,

possibly badly disturbed by past development but still capable of containing pockets of intact archaeological deposit, artifacts, and even Native American human remains.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

CEQA requires a Lead Agency to determine if a project will have a significant effect on the environment and to assess possible impacts. In terms of cultural resources, a project is considered to have a significant effect if it would adversely affect properties of historic or cultural significance (Section 21084.1 and CEQA Guidelines). MPPA construction could result in significant impacts to archaeological deposits and loss of irreplaceable information. A sparse to moderate scatter of prehistoric archaeological materials is present on the two parcels comprising the MPPA, possibly associated with CA-SMA-318 which is recorded at the intersection of San Mateo Drive and Tilton Avenue. Because the original mapping of sites along San Mateo Creek are often not precise and the built environment obscures much of the Project Area and adjacent properties, and project construction could potentially adversely impact important archaeological deposits, further work is recommended to complete the identification of archaeological resources within the MPPA.

Subsurface testing is needed for the MPPA. A program of hand-augering is recommended to test for the presence/absence of significant archaeological materials on the MPPA, and map the horizontal and vertical distribution of any deposits. The subsurface testing will provide information needed to formulate appropriate mitigation and cultural resource management measures, including the need for any further evaluative testing and/or archaeological monitoring of construction. Auger borings should be mapped and logs maintained recording soil characteristics, the presence and depth of prehistoric materials, and evidence relevant to deposit integrity. The testing program should be documented in a report of findings prepared to professional standards, detailing site conditions, testing methods and results. The report and recommendations should be submitted to the City of San Mateo for approval and filed with the NWIC at Sonoma State University. Based on the findings, project permits issued by the City of San Mateo should be conditioned to provide for adequate mitigation of impacts as per CEQA.

In the event that human remains are encountered on the MPPA, provisions of State law must be abided by: the County Coroner must be notified and appraised of the circumstances and context of the discovery of human remains. If determined the remains are prehistoric Native American, the Coroner should contact the Native American Heritage Commission for designation of a Most Likely Descendent (MLD). The MLD will be empowered to make recommendations regarding the treatment and disposition of any human remains and associated artifacts.

## REFERENCES CITED

Basin Research Associates, Inc.

- 2007a Site Record Supplement for CA-SMA-6 [Nelson # 364]. On file at the Northwest Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System, CSU Sonoma, Rohnert Park.
- 2007b Archaeological Monitoring Closure Report, Versailles Senior Housing Project (PA 02-034), 10 Crystal Springs Road (formerly 36 and 94 South El Camino Real); City of San Mateo, San Mateo County. On file, Basin Research Associates, San Leandro.

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Chavez, David

- 1983 DRAFT: Citywide Archaeological Investigations, City of San Mateo, California. Report prepared for the Department of Community Development, Planning Division, City of San Mateo. On file at the Northwest Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System, CSU Sonoma, Rohnert Park.

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Hamilton, Jerome

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William Self Associates

1998 Cultural Resources Assessment Report, Willow Partners Project, East Santa Inez at El Camino Real, City and County of San Mateo, California. On file at the Northwest Information Center, California Historical Resources Information System, Sonoma State University.

## ATTACHMENTS

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### LIST OF FIGURES

- FIGURE 1. MPPA Property (City of San Mateo Zoning Map)
- FIGURE 2. Magnolia Place Project Area (USGS Map)
- FIGURE 3. Property A, 110 Tilton Avenue
- FIGURE 4. Property A, 106 Tilton Avenue
- FIGURE 5. Property B, 120 Tilton Avenue (Apartment Complex)
- FIGURE 6. Property B, 120 Tilton Avenue (Garage Complex)

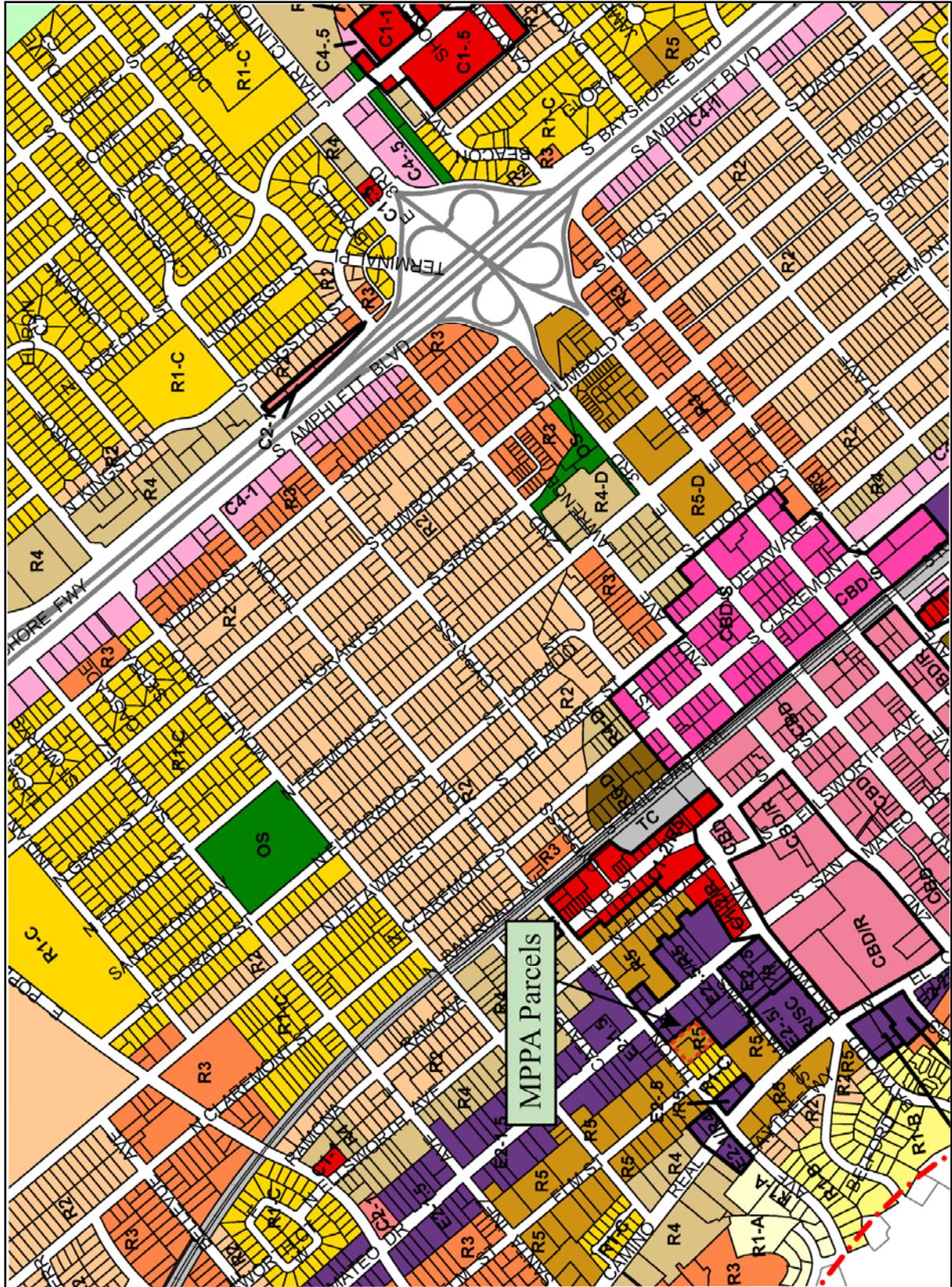


Figure 1. MPPA Property (source: City of San Mateo Zoning Map, June 2007).

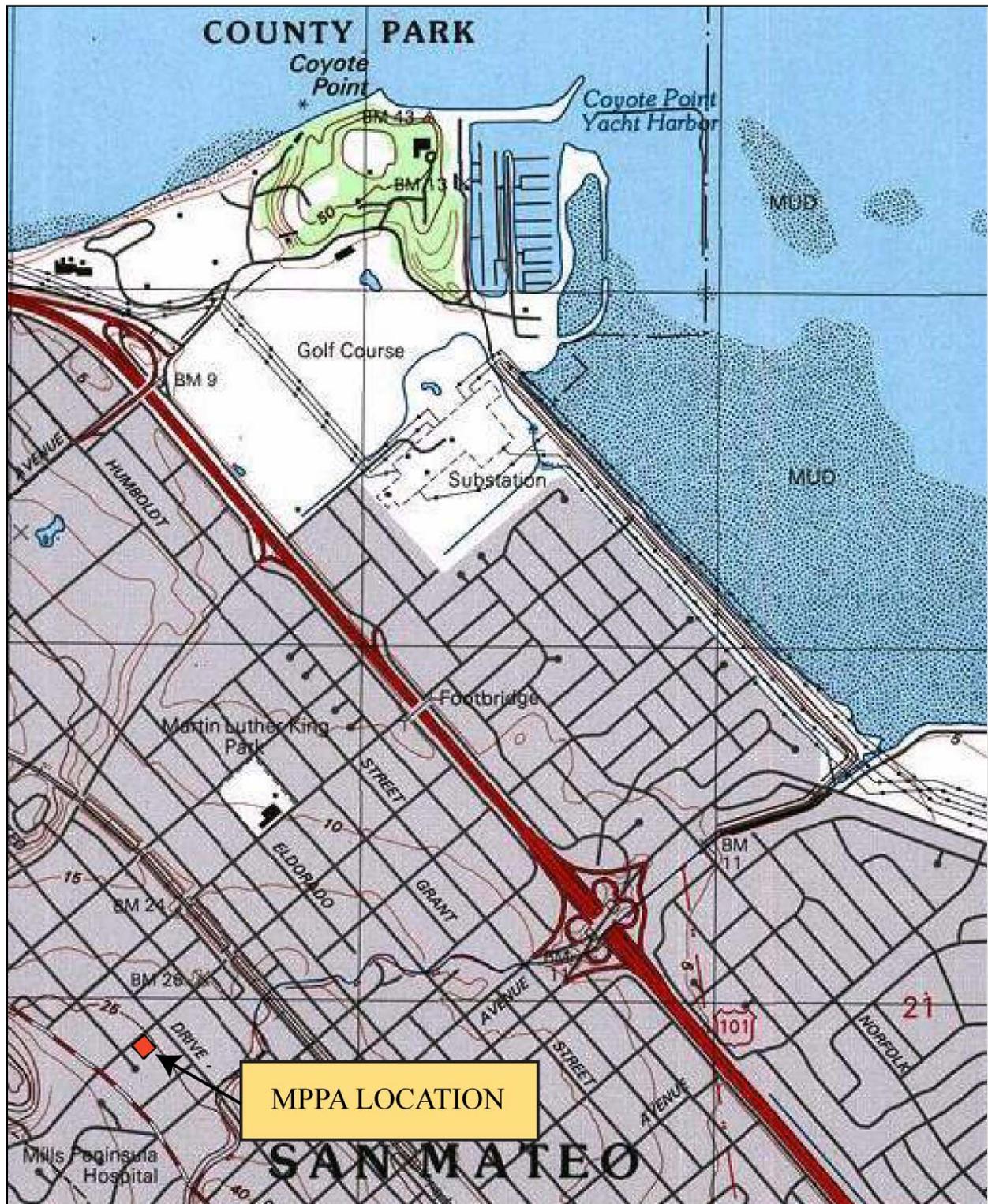


Figure 2. Magnolia Place Project Area Location (source: USGS San Mateo 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle [National Geographic TOPO, 2007]).



Figure 3. Property A, 110 Tilton Avenue; house at front of parcel.



Figure 4. Property A, 106 Tilton Avenue; house in rear of parcel.



Figure 5. Property B, 120 Tilton Avenue: front of apartment complex.



Figure 6. Property B, 120 Tilton Avenue: detached parking structure.