

Poll on Neighborhood Experience with El Mercado del Norte 2015

Shortly after the Fiesta was held in August this year, SNA undertook to poll the Samarkand neighborhood on its experience with El Mercado del Norte. This event is held at MacKenzie Park, which abuts our neighborhood. The poll was conducted by email with questions to 135 SNA members on the association's email list and through a posting on Nextdoor.com, available to the 195 Samarkand neighbors currently signed up.

As can readily be seen the responses vary quite a bit. The names of the respondents have been redacted; however, their rough locations have been listed as the tenor of the responses not surprisingly tends to correlate with proximity to MacKenzie Park. Some of the responses are quite detailed and thoughtful, particularly some of the later ones.

Posting on Nextdoor.com to the Samarkand neighborhood only (195 neighbors):

Neighborhood Experience With El Mercado del Norte
John DeVore from Samarkand

The Samarkand Neighborhood Association (SNA) would like to know about your experience with El Mercado del Norte held in MacKenzie Park as part of this year's Fiesta.

Please send us descriptions of your experience(s), both good and not so good. Please also send us any suggestions you might have for improving this event.

You may respond directly to this posting or email your response to SNA@sb-allied.org.

Thank you,

John DeVore, for SNA

Email to the SNA Email List (135 addresses):

Dear Samarkand neighbors,

The Samarkand Neighborhood Association (SNA) would like to know about your experience with El Mercado del Norte held in MacKenzie Park as part of this year's Fiesta.

Please send us descriptions of your experience(s), both good and not so good. Please also send us any suggestions you might have for improving this event.

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Thank you,

John DeVore, for SNA

Responses:

Respondent 1 (400 block of Stanley)

We had no problems at all with El Mercado del Norte: no parking on the street, no debris, no loud people walking, no music, etc. from El Mercado itself. Did you, living up the block from us, have problems? We even had our bedroom windows (at the rear of the house, nearer El Mercado) wide open all night, every night, and heard nothing to bother us.

Respondent 2 (100 block of Romaine)

We had a great Mercado del Norte experience, but we live on Romaine Drive, which is much further away. However, I do want to point out how fun it is to walk through the neighborhood from our house to the event during Fiesta.

Respondent 3 (3000 block of Hermosa)

Maybe there would be some interest in moving the event to a larger facility like Peabody Stadium or some other venue with more parking. As you will read, there was an entertainment event at "Peabody Bowl" during the 1926 Fiesta. Or perhaps Ortega Park? Or Chase Palm Park? Or Earl Warren? The Rodeo did not use much of the parking lot and perhaps consolidating the events might be more profitable for both. I simply wonder whether Fiesta has outgrown MacKenzie and whether there might be some win-win alternative.

Please do not let anyone get the idea I am the least bit anti-Fiesta. I am a historian and embrace events that celebrate history, including Fiesta. I do think however there are better and worse ways in doing so... and a discussion of that might be timely.

Respondent 4 (400 block of Samarkand)

This was the loudest fiesta yet...traffic was horrific, parking impossible, door to door salespeople knocking on door throughout the day... Overall a bad experience for Samarkand Drive residents. Please don't use my name if you plan on taking this to the city.

Respondent 5 (400 block of Santa Anita)

I went to this event on Thursday night, and it was sweet and fairly peaceful. We saw Area 51 and a few teenage rock bands, and bought some treats and clothes from the vendors. I liked being able to walk from my house, and enjoyed the event. We ate dinner at that awesome new Korean BBQ right there on State. It seemed a little smaller than previous years, although it was packed with teens at the carnival rides and middle aged folks like

me on the dance floor for Area 51. I didn't see any flamenco at all, and missed it from previous years. It was like an American fair, with some Fiesta Mexican artisan vendors and foods. We had a fun few hours and walked home.

I take it the folks who live closer had noise issues? Not from my house on Santa Anita.

Respondent 6 (2700 block of Clinton Terrace)

We were out of town but would very much like to hear the input from our neighbors.

Respondent 7 (3000 block of Lomita)

I live on Lomita Road and noticed a LOT of cars parked on my street this year. Also, I noticed, daily, cars parked in the clearly marked NO PARKING zone on Samarkand in front of the lawn bowling...this made it difficult to drive through there...several near misses due to road narrowing.

The Poller (400 block of Stanley)

My wife also is concerned about the cars in the no parking zones that increase traffic hazards. Your inputs might be useful to the City traffic department. Thanks for your input.

Respondent 8 (400 block of Stanley)

I emailed our SB Police beat coordinator and Rob Dayton of City transportation shortly before Fiesta and told them about the parking on red in front of the lawn bowling courts during previous Fiestas. I suggested that the whole curb needed to be painted red and/or there needed to be more No Parking signs (not such a good option from the view standpoint) on that long stretch of curb.

Maybe if you also wrote to them something would be done? They have already heard from me and nothing has happened. Thanks!

Respondent 7 (3000 block of Lomita)

Will do.

Respondent 9 (3000 block of Samarkand)

Our primary complaint about the Mercado is that many of the families who park on our street and walk to the park leave trash behind when they leave. They have a bad habit of dropping at the curb soda cans, food wrappers, napkins and food remnants. It really is quite disgusting.

The Poller (400 block of Stanley)

Hi, this is an interesting observation. Those in our neighborhood who live near Earl Warren Showgrounds used to have a similar complaint about the carnival help annually there. Then Earl Warren was convinced to take responsibility for cleaning up afterwards. I wonder whether we might suggest something like this as a potential improvement for the El Mercado.

Respondent 9 (3000 block of Samarkand)

By what mechanism do we make such a suggestion?

The Poller (400 block of Stanley)

I expect that it will be part of the report that we assemble.

Respondent 10 (2700 block of Cuesta)

Good idea. (Re asking about clean up) I assume the responsible party is Old Spanish Days. We could not get them to stop the carnival but maybe we could get them to take responsibility for cleaning up. It would make the neighbors a little more tolerant of the carnival and mercado.

Respondent 10 (2700 block of Cuesta)

We heard nothing. We did not walk the neighborhood during the mercado, so don't know of any problems.

The Poller (400 block of Stanley)

We're in roughly the same boat, although we have been bothered by seeing cars parked in no parking zones, i.e., where Samarkand turns the corner near the Lawn Bowls court. So this will get mentioned.

Respondent 11 (3000 block of Samarkand)

No complaints in the least with the fair at Mackenzie Park. What I do think is a neighborhood problem are the transients who park their old mobile homes day in and day out along State at the curb by Mackenzie, and the city officials seem to do nothing about it. The owners of these vehicles are living in them and the park, and the city's inaction means they condone the practice, which seems very short-sighted to me.

Respondent 11 (3000 block of Samarkand)

Just wondering: If the folks in the RVs pitched a tent in the park, they would probably be asked to leave. Instead, they "pitch their tent" at the curb, and are allowed to stay. Doesn't make sense. Thanks!

The Poller (400 block of Stanley)

The City does have a number of regulations in force, e.g., no overnight parking or time limits on parking RVs in park parking lots, a limit on the number of RVs than can congregate (I don't remember the term the City uses) in a block, etc. However, I understand that there are limits as to what the City can require. It is indeed unfortunate that people are driven to living in such conditions.

Respondent 11 (3000 block of Samarkand)

Of course it is unfortunate that people are living in (on) the street. What I'm trying to understand is, what is the city of Santa Barbara's program to assist people in this situation? Is it to ignore them, or do they have a program that can help them find permanent shelter off the street and out of the parks. This afternoon, I was given the name of an officer who works a program called Restorative Policing, and I will try calling him tomorrow. He was out of the office today. Many thanks.

The Poller (400 block of Stanley)

Please let me know what you find out. Perhaps SNA should consider inviting him to a neighborhood meeting to let more of us know what our city is doing.

Respondent 11 (3000 block of Samarkand)

Good point. Will do.

Respondent 12 (300 block of Samarkand)

Here is our reply to the request for input on El Mercado del Norte in August 2015.

"Good:" It was quieter this year.

1. Monitoring DBA levels.
2. Turning stages away from houses.
3. Music stopped right at 10:30 PM.
4. The set-up was less noisy.
5. The take down took just one day and was less noisy.
6. The ferris wheel was much less noisy than the previous roller coaster.

"Not so good:"

1. The amusement zone expansion makes El Mercado del Norte feel more like a County Fair carnival rather than an event that reflects the spirit of Fiesta. It has nothing to do with early California history. Note that the Ventura County Fair was going on at the same time and offers carnival rides.
2. Impacts park usage for recreation, sports and dog agility training. The park is closed for weeks after Fiesta.

3. We found litter on Samarkand Drive on Sunday morning after the event. Usually there is none in our area.
4. We have heard from many neighbors that they are no longer attending.
5. The food at the booths was "not very appetizing."
6. Possibility of drunk drivers on local streets.
7. There was little acoustic music. Most of the bands were loud and electric.

Suggestions:

1. Keep the food, music and merchant booths related to the Fiesta theme. Make it a more authentic Mercado.
2. Minimize the amusement/carnival zone. Less "screaming rides." People can go to the County Fairs for this.
3. Stop loud music and rides at 10:00 PM.
4. Include more acoustic music.

Thanks for your consideration.

Respondent 10 (2700 block of Cuesta)

Thanks for your thoughtful report and suggestions. Let's work from this.

The Poller (400 block of Stanley)

Thank you for your very thoughtful inputs. I think that they're a great contribution to our collection.

Respondent 13 (3000 block of Hermosa)

We live half a block from McKenzie Park, so our street was pretty parked up. But so what? It was fun to walk down for interesting food from local charities and to dance to "Area 51". The music stopped at 10:30, which seems like the right time to me.

Respondent 14 (? Block of Samarkand)

We live on Samarkand and have more issues with the SB Fair and other events at Earl Warren than with Fiesta activities. We also love walking through the neighborhood to enjoy the SB cultural food, dance and festivities.

Respondent 15 (3000 block of Serena)

I love fiesta, but liked it better when the rides were at the beach and McKenzie park was more a local neighborhood party. And the people attending were respectable of the neighborhood and cleaned up after themselves. But times are changing I guess I should get use to it.

Respondent 16 (3000 block of Hermosa)

I live at 3xxx Hermosa Rd and look forward to El Mercado del Norte every year. I love all the hubbub and fun! That being said street parking becomes very difficult on Hermosa during the late afternoons and evenings of Fiesta, and I do wonder if the City might consider a shuttle service to try to relieve some of the Samarkand congestion--park at La Cumbre Junior High for example and take a free shuttle to El Mercado.

The timing of Fiesta should usually mean that there is street sweeping the Monday immediately following it, and that's great since there's a lot of confetti on the street. There's trash in the verges that gets missed, though, and it would be helpful to have that picked up under City direction.

Years ago, Hermosa would close the street and have a block party associated with Fiesta. I wonder if we could consider having a Samarkand Neighborhood Party Fiesta block party for residents only on say that Sunday evening...it could be on Hermosa but open to the entire SNA for a potluck or whatever. Could be a fun way for us to reclaim the neighborhood and enjoy each other.

Respondent 17 (3000? block of Hermosa)

As a resident on Hermosa drive I noticed more litter in the streets and sidewalks. I did pick up some of the litter, but wonder if litter removal could be handled by the MDN. I was trapped in the lawn bowls parking lot. The attendant waved us on, suggesting there was parking, but instead it was a road block. Crazy drivers wanting to leave the area - scary.

I think there needs to be a better traffic system/monitors. Luckily, no one blocked my driveway this year. My neighbor had a sign posted...do not block driveway. Is there any supervision re parking?

Respondent 18 (3000? block of Hermosa)

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to respond as well as your assistance in reviewing and processing the information. I have lived on Hermosa Road for over 30 years. During that time El Mercado del Norte has gone from a relatively small neighborhood event to a very heavily attended celebration by people from all over the county, far exceeding the capacity of MacKenzie Park. Further compounding the situation are the amusement rides which are more in keeping with a venue such as Earl Warren Showgrounds.

I certainly sympathize with those occupying houses along Samarkand Drive. However, I do concede that over the past few years those responsible for the noise levels seem to be doing a much better job at attenuating the noise from the carnival rides and bands.

Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for the traffic, parking and litter. The streets can not safely handle the traffic and parking. Certainly one answer is to place temporary no parking signs throughout the neighborhood as they do for large events at Earl Warren.

The impact could be offset by using the parking at Earl Warren with a shuttle service. Inconvenient? Perhaps; but not as inconvenient as the 4 days of unsafe driving, cars lining the street and blocked driveways that the neighbors of Samarkand have to suffer for 4 days.

With respect to the issue of the litter, this would also be greatly reduced by simply preventing parking in the Samarkand neighborhoods where many of the participants of El Mercado believe our neighborhood trees can be used as urinals and our yards as trash cans.

Respondent 19 (2900? block of Hermosa)

My family and I have lived on “baja” Hermosa Road for 20 years. Annually, we have watched the Mercado del Norte experience grow away from the quiet family fiesta that was its origins. The Mackenzie Park venue was perfect for families where De la Guerra venue was possibly too rowdy with adult oriented fun. Now, every year my wife and I walk up the street and are surprised that the organizers have somehow figured out how to fit even more revenue generating concessions into that small park. The event has clearly out grown the venue. Amusement rides, beer gardens, two sound stages with battling bands. What happened to the petting zoo? Too much noise for the animals? There is less and less old fiesta and more crass carnie show every year.

This year had far more traffic than in the past. We were experiencing parked cars all the way down to the Wyola intersection. My neighbor was compelled to print a sign requesting her driveway not be blocked. The litter and noise was not a huge issue for us, but we could see the impacts on neighbors closer to the park. Could the city put up no parking signs like they do for the Fair? Could there be a shuttle from Elings Park or Earl Warren?

Could the entire Mercado del Norte be moved to Earl Warren where there are facilities to support it?

Respondent 20 (500 block of Samarkand)

I agree with most of the other ideas such as no parking, a shuttle to Earl Warren, and even moving the event. I particularly dislike the rubbish left on the street and in the median strips. But I think there may be another argument that questions the use of McKenzie Park.

The park is unavailable for about three months after the mercado. The children’s playground is open and the meeting hall is open but the rest of the park, including the baseball fields, are closed. It might be useful to compare total usage during the four days of the mercado with the approximately 13 weeks of closure during repairs. On an average weekend there are 6-8 baseball games in the park with roughly 200 players, coaches, and family attending. That is between 2500 and 3000 people that might have benefited from the park while it was closed. If baseball is not scheduled during this time then what other

activities are precluded by the closure. The remaining 65 weekdays probably see at least 25 people per day in the park for an additional 1600 to 2000 users who are unable to use the facilities due to damage. So perhaps 4100 and 5000 people are kept out of this public park while it recovers from the damage inflicted by the mercado. How does this number compare with the number of attendees during the four days of the mercado and which usage better suits the public.

It is also worth noting that while the park opens after about 13 weeks it is far from totally repaired. There remain large areas of dirt and mud that seem to grow larger year by year. Over time there will likely be irremediable damage to the park. There is also a serious question as to whether restoration will even be possible considering the amount of water required and the drought.

These numbers are approximations. Someone must know how many people attend the mercado each day and if that number is very large one can make a case that the park is well used. It may, however, be quite small. It may also be the case that optimizing park usage for the public is not an important consideration. If this is the case it would be useful to know what other considerations drive the decision to use McKenzie in the face of this data.

Respondent 3 (3000? block of Hermosa)

The traffic, parking and trash problems in the Samarkand Drive and Hermosa Road area have dramatically increased in the last three years. It is largely if not entirely on account of the addition of the carnival rides, multiple stages and traffic and parking control mechanisms employed. In the past, volunteer parking monitors would simply admit cars until the upper and lower parking lots were full and then post a lot full sign at the Las Positas parking lot entrance. As cars departed, cars were allowed to enter. It worked very well. Persons not able to park in these lots were dispersed through the major streets to the various other neighborhoods to find street parking.

Now, the parking monitors accept all of the cars hoping to find parking in the two lots and are immediately directed out through the small alley way at the rear of the upper parking lot and out on to Samarkand Drive and Hermosa Road. Hundreds of cars are queued in a serpentine bumper to bumper fashion where they spill out into a single concentrated area of one neighborhood. When parking is found, the arriving parties then must walk through the small alley way in the opposite direction of the traffic. They then have to walk a distance on the steep connector driveway or hike down the steeper hillside trails causing erosion.

After enjoying the event and many partaking in alcoholic beverages, they reverse this passage finding full trash cans in the park and resort to littering both the trails, alley and streets where they park. The noise and disruption of this in a small area is palpable.

Questions:

1. Why does the City allow amplified music after 10 pm when the County Bowl abides by this curfew?
2. Why is the traffic allowed to be directed into a concentrated portion of a single neighborhood rather than dispersed through all of the neighboring streets to the park?
3. Why do neighbors have to daily pick up Mercado trash and avoid having visitors during the 4 days of the Mercado?
4. Why is a fragile park being damaged in the midst of a drought?
5. Why are alternative locations not considered as required by the City and State environmental laws for such an event?
6. Why is there no discretionary permitting required for this event which has such impacts?