

Hi McLaren Park history buffs,

When googling around looking for old Mansell history I came across treasure troves of info concerning the history of freeways in the City, the Freeway Revolt back in the 1960's, and so on. Mansell Street and what was projected to become the John McLaren Parkway was an almost forgotten corner of those big-eyed plans in the 40's and 50's (and even earlier) to pave over half the City and smog over the rest. But if you zoom in on the southeast quadrant of the city in the old planning and survey maps linked to below, you can see the ever-changing story. Most every map has a different idea, so the Mansell we actually got in 1963 wasn't really in any of the previous plans, even as late as 1958.

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San Francisco Freeway Revolt

Though it didn't reach the level of revolt until the late 1950's, there were certainly ongoing efforts to curb the more outlandish proposals for development and "growth". The maps on the following pages show the various land disputes and development proposals in graphic form, but some general context about the historical forces both for and against ever-increasing automobile accommodations in the region is also helpful.

- [Revisiting the San Francisco Freeway Revolt | Streetsblog San Francisco](#)
- [Freeway Revolt set S.F. on NIMBY course - SFGate](#)
- [San Francisco's Freeway Plan](#) -- kurumi.com
- [California Highways \(www.cahighways.org\): San Francisco/Bay Area Freeway Development \(Part 1—The City of San Francisco\)](#)
- [Saving America's "last lovely city" : the San Francisco freeway revolt :: Institute of Transportation Studies Library](#)
- [streetswiki - San Francisco Freeways](#)

Special Thanks to Eric Fischer, who provides most of these images via “[Walking SF](#)”, his extensive and endlessly fascinating historical and contemporary image collection.

Notes about base maps and dates from Eric Fischer

In a lot of cases, these maps were made to show some particular plan, but for the rest of the map, they just used whatever convenient base map they had sitting around, so the base map may be several years older than the publication.

The "Proposed Policy Map" base map is a US Geological Survey map, which I think was fully revised for the last time in 1950, and had some updates in the 1960s from what the surveyors noticed had changed in aerial photos. For the revision they probably only noticed major roads and missed the changes in the park.

The Hunters Point Freeway map and the 1962 BART map both use AAA road maps, probably from a few years earlier, for their base maps.

The two versions from 1948 show competing visions: one from staff at the Department of Public Works and the other from consultants hired by the Department of City Planning.

I think you see three different philosophies reflected in the three major sources of base maps. The Department of Public Works maps reflect the official subdivision patterns of the city, whether or not any of the roads or lots were actually built, and miss any "informal" development outside of the system. The USGS maps attempt to show the actual "on the ground" conditions, but are infrequently updated, and are sometimes defeated by their attempt to show only "permanent" structures and roads and exclude "temporary" ones. The AAA maps are for drivers, so they try to show actual conditions and proposals that are well along in formal planning, but only those that are relevant for people in cars.

USGS Map Info

USGS has scans of all their old maps that they still have copies of available for PDF download at <http://nationalmap.gov/historical/> This document includes links below to some of the more interesting versions over the years, but there are many more available to the curious map hound. Search there for the San Francisco South quadrangle (or, for the older ones, the San Mateo quadrangle) to see what they thought was there at various times.

Mansell & McLaren Park Maps and Images

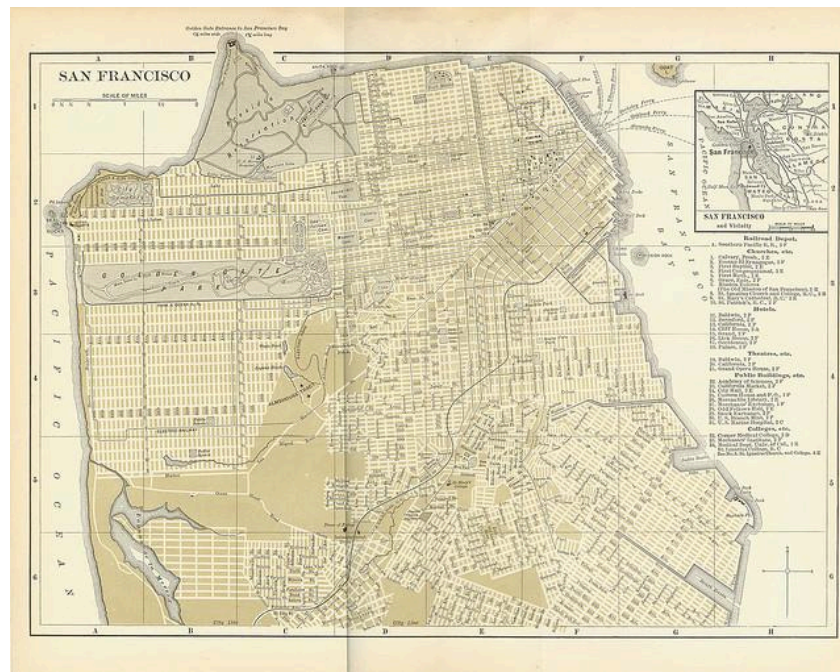
More or less in chronological order...

Click on the “small” map version to get image credit and other related info as well.

1869 US Coast Survey, San Francisco Peninsula ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Not much useful detail here but interesting backdrop to the whole story. If you look very carefully you can see "Visitacion Valley" labelled, and topographically you can see the hilltops and contours of what will become McLaren.

1894 Map of San Francisco Showing the Water Service of Spring Valley Water Works ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- Shows most of the McLaren Park area already platted but in reality little was actually built.

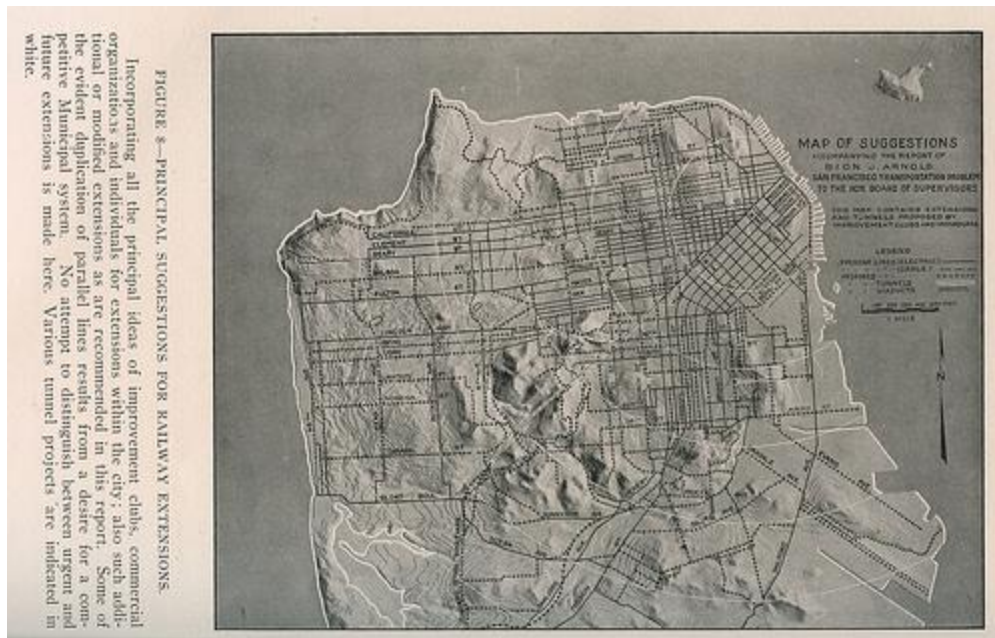
1899 San Francisco Map ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- This shows an almost unrecognizable street grid overlaying what we know as McLaren Park. Which of course was mostly never built. Can you imagine finding your way with a map like these old fictions? Half the streets on the map actually exist, the other half are in some developer's crazed mind yet on official paper as though they are real? Madness.



1899 SF Map

1900 Map of the City of San Francisco ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- This wonderfully illustrated map

The map displays a dense street grid in the University Heights area. Major streets shown include Marsha Ave, Silver Ave, and University Ave. Key landmarks and areas labeled are the University Mound, Old Ladies Home, and the Western Development Company. Several ranches are identified: Rancho Canada de Guadalupe, Rancho Rodeo Viejo, and Rancho Rincon de las Salinas y Potrero Viejo. The map also shows the locations of C. Crocker, W. Clark, P. Somps, J.A. Mason, and the Bay Park Homestead. The map is a historical or archival document, likely from the early 20th century.



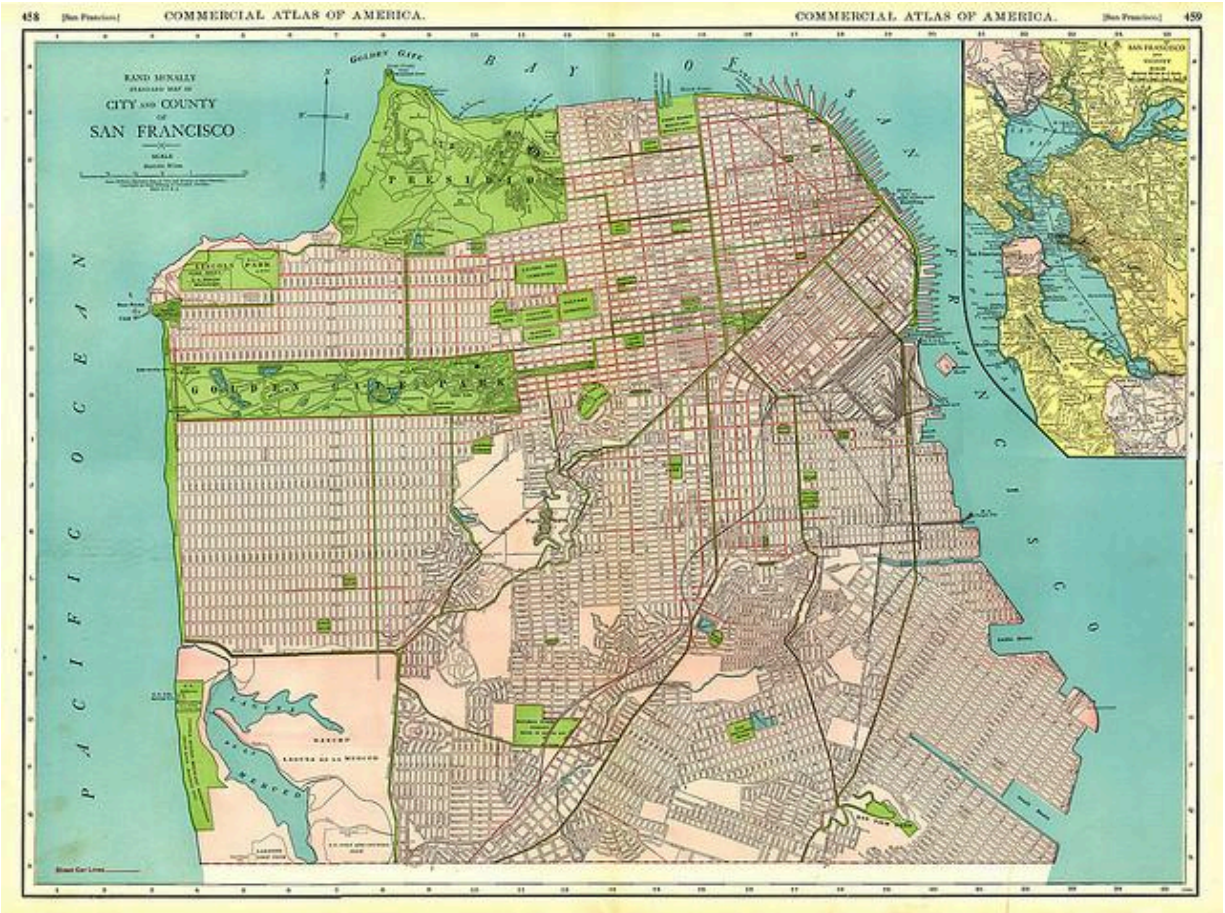
1912 Railway Extension Map

1914 Map of the City of San Francisco (Eastern Half) ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- More platted streets with no basis in reality, much like the 1899 map and others of the era.

1920 The Boulevard System of San Francisco ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- This map shows a proposed major thoroughfare across the relative southern “flats” of the McLaren region. This continuation of Ocean Ave (originally Ocean House Road) veered onto Onandaga, then across Mission to Russia and then a one-block sig-zag to France, which then connected with what is now Sunnydale Ave. to cross Visitacion Valley towards the Bay.

1925 Rand McNally Street Map of SF ([full size](#), [smaller with commentary](#)) -- This map shows the McLaren area just before the bond campaign to make it a park in 1926. That was "The People Need This Breathing Space" campaign. It shows all the platted but mostly not built streets that were planned for the McLaren area. The commentary talks about how much of this map, like the previous one, is quite ambitious that way all over the City, showing loads of streets that weren't in actual existence.

It's interesting to see the old street alignments, though -- "Sunny Dale" sort of connected through to France (this is way before the Sunnydale housing project), and Visitacion went straight west across to Russia rather than up the hill to join Mansell across from University as it does today. Where we now call the southern slope (everything south of Mansell) there is a void, as it was deemed too steep to develop (this is discussed in the [1951 Redevelopment Plan](#)).



1925 Rand McNally Street Map of SF
showing platted but mostly unbuilt streets in McLaren

1922 Map of the City and County of San Francisco (small, huge)-- This isn't a very good reproduction, but it is issued by "M. M. O'Shaughnessy, City Engineer" which is kind of cool. Shows basically the same streets as the previous 1925 map with much less detail.

1924 Map of the City and County of San Francisco: Contemplated Projects (small, huge) -- similar to previous 1922 map, shows "Bay Shore Highway" along what is now 101 route as a contemplated project.

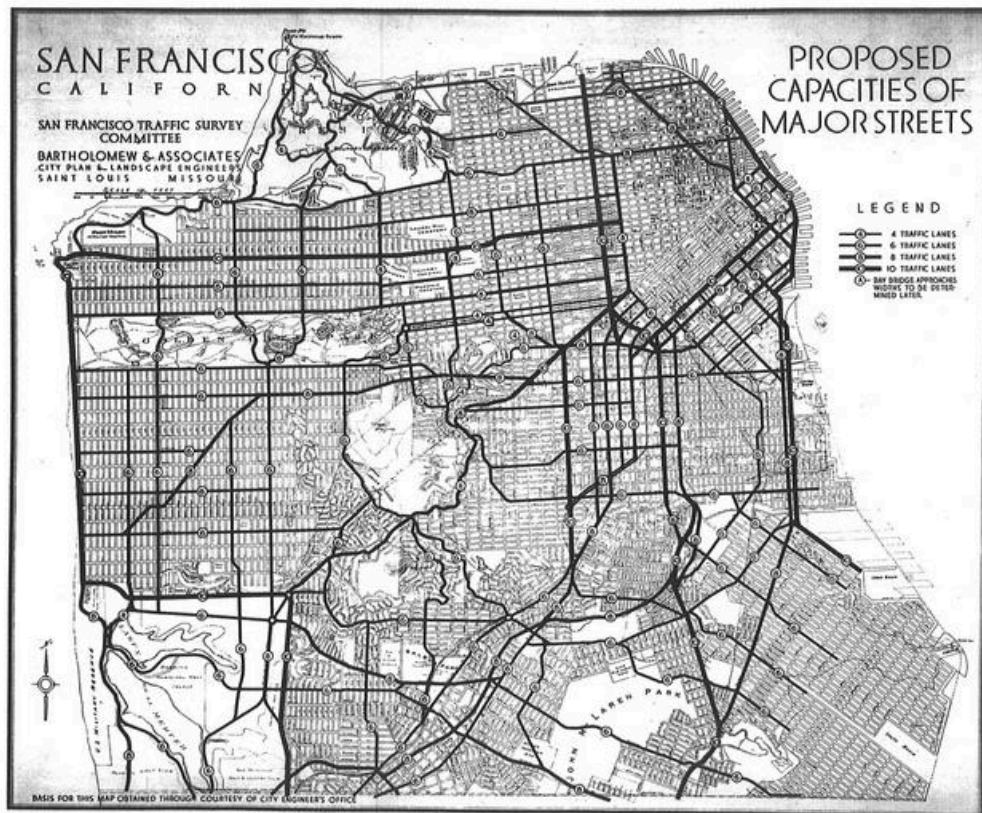
1927 Recommended arterial streets for San Francisco (small, big) -- Shows Visitation as a major street going across southern part of the park, also Cambridge and a few others crisscrossing what is now McLaren Park.

1927 map showing the location of retail grocers and druggists (small, big) -- Vis Valley, San Bruno Ave, and the Excelsior, mostly.

1928 Present Capacities of Current Streets (small, big) -- Shows 4-lane road on Raymond up to the eastern edge of the park, then another 4-lane on what is now Russia? on the western side of the park, with no obvious connection through the park. Geneva was already 8 lanes. In 1928. Sheesh.

1928 A System of Major Streets (small, huge) -- Another variation on the theme of cross-town highway networks. This one suggests a path across McLaren similar to the present Mansell route on the western side of the park, but connecting instead with Raymond in Visitacion Valley towards the east. Also proposed is a highway diagonally from Cambridge to Woolsey and another connecting Naples to Geneva, through what is now Crocker Amazon Playground.

1928 Proposed Capacities of Major Streets: Report to the SF Traffic Survey Committee (small, big) -- For one thing, it proposes a frightening grid of 6, 8, and 10 lane streets in a rough grid across the city. But more than that, it shows a route through southern McLaren, from Persia on the West to Raymond on the east. This seems to make a lot of sense geographically but, somehow the wall between the Excelsior and Visitacion Valley grew higher instead.



1928 Proposed Capacities of Major Streets showing Persia/Raymond route

1928 Street Car Flow Diagram ([small](#), [big](#)) -- This is interesting for two reasons in particular. For one, it shows the old streetcar lines on Geneva (!) and San Bruno Ave (!!), as well as several surrounding "motor coach" lines in the Excelsior and Portola, and the old 3rd street line all providing transit service to the boundaries of McLaren Park.

Also, note the much larger eastern boundary to the park. This is the original 500-ish acre boundary, which got whittled down 421 in 1932, and whacked again to the current 317 in 1946. Fortunately, a plan to "redevelop" 75 acres of the park and adjoining areas into housing and shopping centers in 1951 failed.

1928 Density of Population, Report to the SF Traffic Survey Committee ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Also shows the larger eastern park boundary. But not much population density.

1930 Comprehensive Plan of Rapid Transit Routes, SFDPW Bureau of Engineering ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- Shows an enormous McLaren Park outline, north almost to Silver Ave.

1935 San Francisco Rapid Transit proposal map, Board of Public Works ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- This map shows the larger eastern boundary of the earlier park and no other roads within the park, as well as a rapid transit line more or less exactly where the BART line is now.

[1937 San Francisco Traffic Survey: A Limited Way Plan](#) -- This was a WPA project to suggest effective cross-town traffic routes. This is interesting as it is pretty much the same streets as the 1925 map above, but John McLaren Park is labelled across the newly designated area, and the street outlines within are "dotted" suggesting they are on the way out.

[1937-38 WPA builds view road and trails, plants trees in McLaren Park](#) -- from The Living New Deal at UC Berkeley.



[1938 Standard Oil Street Map of San Francisco](#) -- the whole map is fascinating, but McLaren is a Mystery, a green blob without even the old view road showing (which was built about the same time, so maybe that's why).

1939 USGS Survey Map of San Mateo section ([full map](#), [McLaren section](#)) -- A small image but shows the new paved view road across McLaren Park (solid outline), as well as a few other unpaved roads (dashed outlines).



1939 USGS Survey Map
showing paved (solid lines) and unpaved roads in McLaren Park (dashed lines)

1941 Market Street Railway Company Map of SF ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- This shows vaguely familiar bus routes around the perimeter of the park, but nothing through the park like we have today with the 29 route.

1945 Master Plan of the City and County of San Francisco: Classification of Areas for Redevelopment, City Planning Commission ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Shows McLaren as a blank slate, with only the old Sunnysdale/Persia street alignment through the park, no other roads shown. This only shows plans for what was surrounding McLaren but this precedes the [1951 McLaren Park Redevelopment Plan](#), which called for taking about 75 acres of the eastern side of the park and turning it into housing.

1945 Postal Districts Map of San Francisco ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Nothing much different from

other maps of the era, except that it doesn't show any roads through the park at all that have anything to do with reality according to aerial survey images of the era.

1945 SF Department of Public Works Post War Program Streets and Highways Preferred Projects ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- Not much McLaren detail here except it shows most of the platted streets faded away as in the following 1948 map.

1946 MUNI Map of Transit Routes ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- There's no 29 bus line on the then "new" Mansell like there is now, but a few bus routes encircle the McLaren Park region during this era.

1947 USGS Survey Map of Southern San Francisco ([full map](#), [McLaren portion](#)) -- An accurate assessment of what was actually existing in McLaren, rather than a platted but unpractical street grid. Paved roads have solid outlines, unpaved dirt roads have dashed outlines.



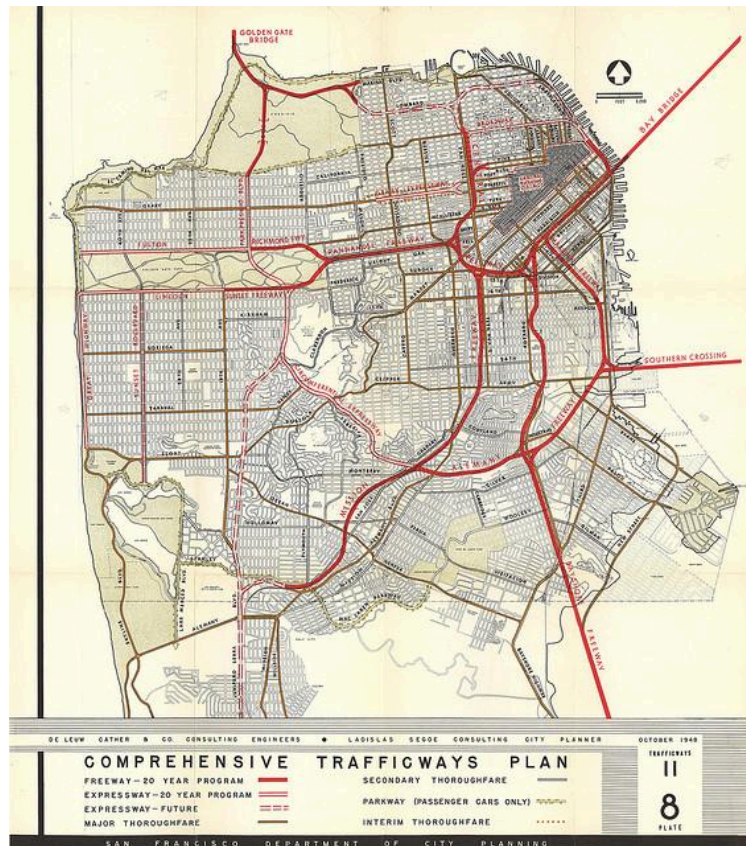
1947 USGS Survey Map

showing paved (solid lines) and unpaved roads in McLaren Park (dashed lines)

1948 Comprehensive Trafficways Plan, Dept. of City Planning ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- This map shows a curious hybrid of part of the old view road squiggle through the "quarry" near the current twin water tanks, connecting with Woolsey to the east, and continuing south across what is now Crocker-Amazon playground to become "John McLaren Parkway" connecting with Lake

Merced.

The other curiosity is the old Visitation is realigned with Persia and cross-connected to the Woolsey/Parkway route. I actually kind of like this idea, as it doesn't become a "parkway" until it's actually out of the park. Interesting to note that the old platted but unbuilt streets are now shown faded away almost, but not quite completely.



1948 Comprehensive Trafficways Plan

1948 Suggested Trafficway System, SF Dept of Public Works, Bureau of Engineering (**small, huge**) -- Now this is very curious, as it is the exact same year as the previous map yet it shows an entirely different plan. It shows Sunnydale realigned with Persia, but no other roads through the park. Hmmmm... Maybe this was not a comprehensive map but only focused on major thoroughfares?

1948 Through Street Traffic Control Plan, City Planning Commission (**small, big**) -- Similar to previous map.

1949 Trafficways Plan, SF Dept. of City Planning (**small, big**) -- Like the second 1948 plan, Sunnydale realigned with Persia, but with the first appearance of a proposed John McLaren Parkway around the edge of the park.

1951 Trafficways Plan, SF Dept. of City Planning ([small](#), [big](#)) -- This scheme is similar to the one outlined in the 1951 Redevelopment Plan, except that it also proposes a major east/west thoroughfare on a Visitacion/Persia/Ocean Alignment. The common element is the John McLaren Parkway around the north and western edge of the park, then heading south and west towards Lake Merced. Looks like the old WPA view road is left more or less as is in this plan, there is a faint outline of it but hard to tell for sure.



1951 Trafficways Plan showing proposed John McLaren Parkway and Visitacion/Persia/Ocean “major thoroughfare”

1951 McLaren Park Redevelopment Plan ([pdf](#)) -- This bombshell of a document proposes “improving” (developing new housing subdivisions) about 75 acres of the eastern side of the park, along with some adjoining “blighted” residential areas with new housing developments. Fortunately this plan never came to fruition, or McLaren Park would now be considerably smaller. However, this document is a loaded with historical context, footnotes, and maps, so

don't miss it.

This plan also includes yet another variation on the theme of a John McLaren Parkway, this time around the northern and western edges of the park boundary, continuing south and the west towards Lake Merced. The WPA view road would have been retained and integrated into the new perimeter roadway.

Strikingly, this extensive planning document, which spends some pages discussing transportation options in the park and surrounding region, does not mention the word “pedestrian” or “bicycle” even once!



1951 Redevelopment Plan showing perimeter parkway and renewed view road

1955 San Francisco Highways Plan, SF Dept. of City Planning ([small](#), [big](#)) -- This shows a

McLaren Parkway plan sort of like the 1948 Comprehensive plan, but the parkway goes through the park as well, implying higher speeds.

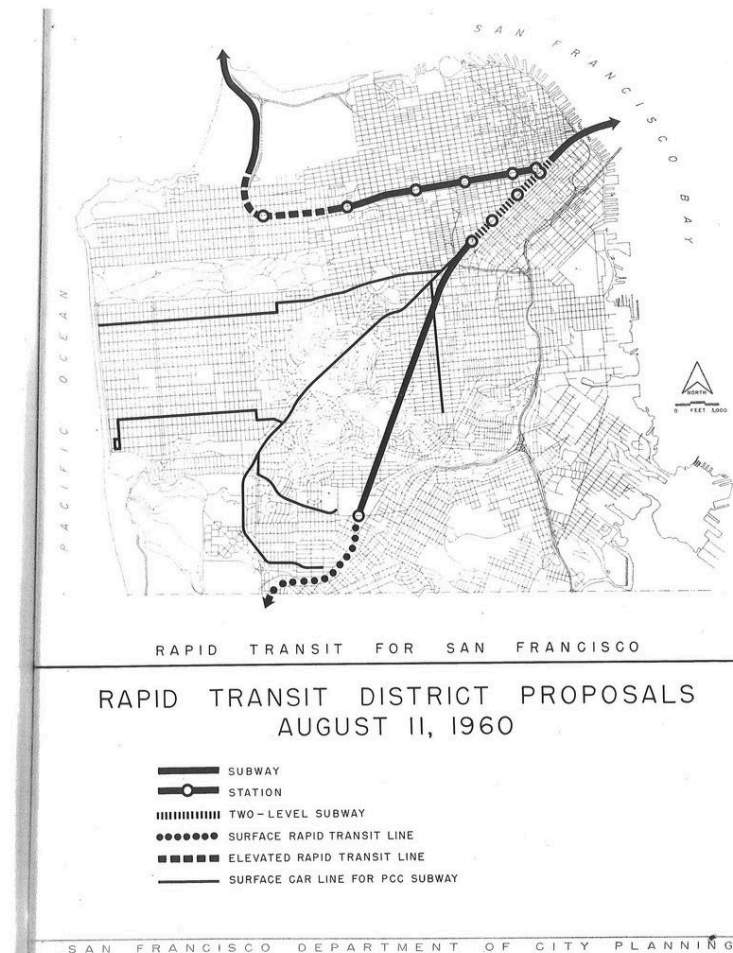
1956 USGS Survey Map of Southern San Francisco ([full map](#), [McLaren portion](#)) -- An accurate assessment of what was actually existing in McLaren, rather than pie-in-the-sky platted but impractical street grid. Paved roads have solid outlines, unpaved dirt roads have dashed outlines.



1956 USGS Survey Map

showing paved (solid lines) and unpaved roads in McLaren Park (dashed lines)

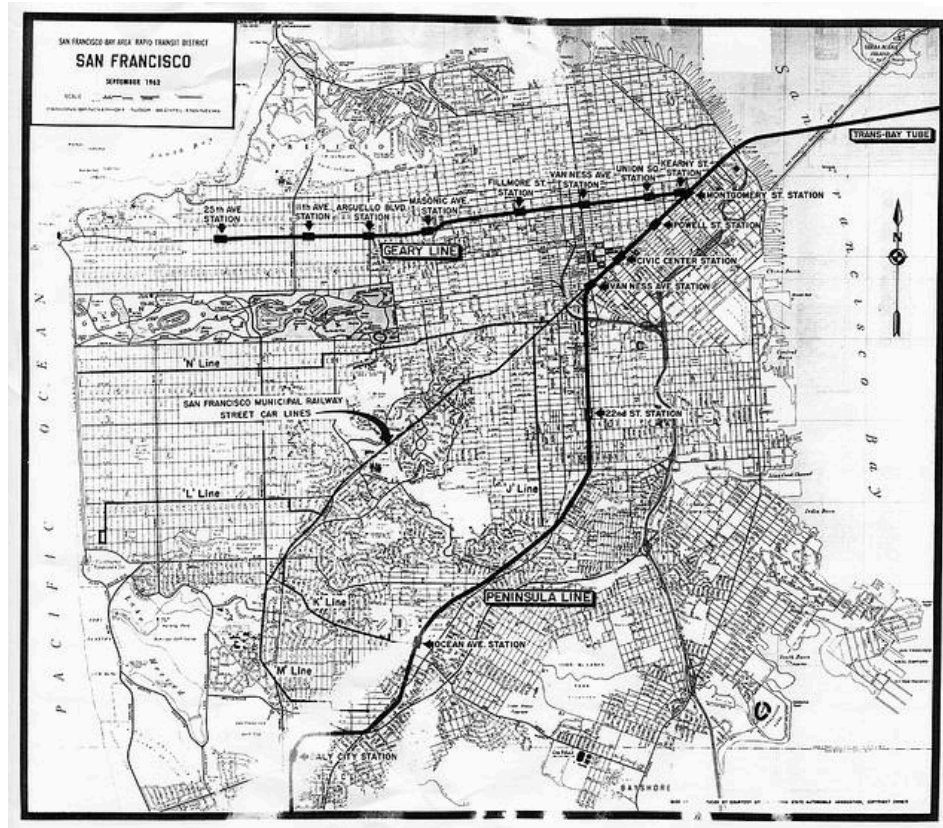
1960 Rapid Transit for San Francisco: Rapid Transit District Proposals ([small](#), [big](#)) -- This one is noteworthy because it's from 1960, three years before the new Mansell was built, yet it shows the new Mansell route instead of the old view road. Also shows Brazil merging into Persia as it does today (albeit now without auto traffic).



1960 Rapid Transit for San Francisco

1962 Hunters Point Freeway: A Digest of Location Studies ([small](#), [big](#)) -- This one is interesting as it is dated just one year before the new Mansell was built, yet it seems to propose a new view drive based on the old meandering one. McLaren is chopped off the map here as Hunters Point is the real focus, but it's a curious clue.

1962 Bay Area Rapid Transit District: San Francisco ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Now you wouldn't guess that a BART map would have anything to do with McLaren, but this one is interesting as it shows the old Mansell/Brazil meandering view road and the old Sunnydale/Persia alignment. The new Mansell was built in 1963 so this documents the last gasp of the view road.

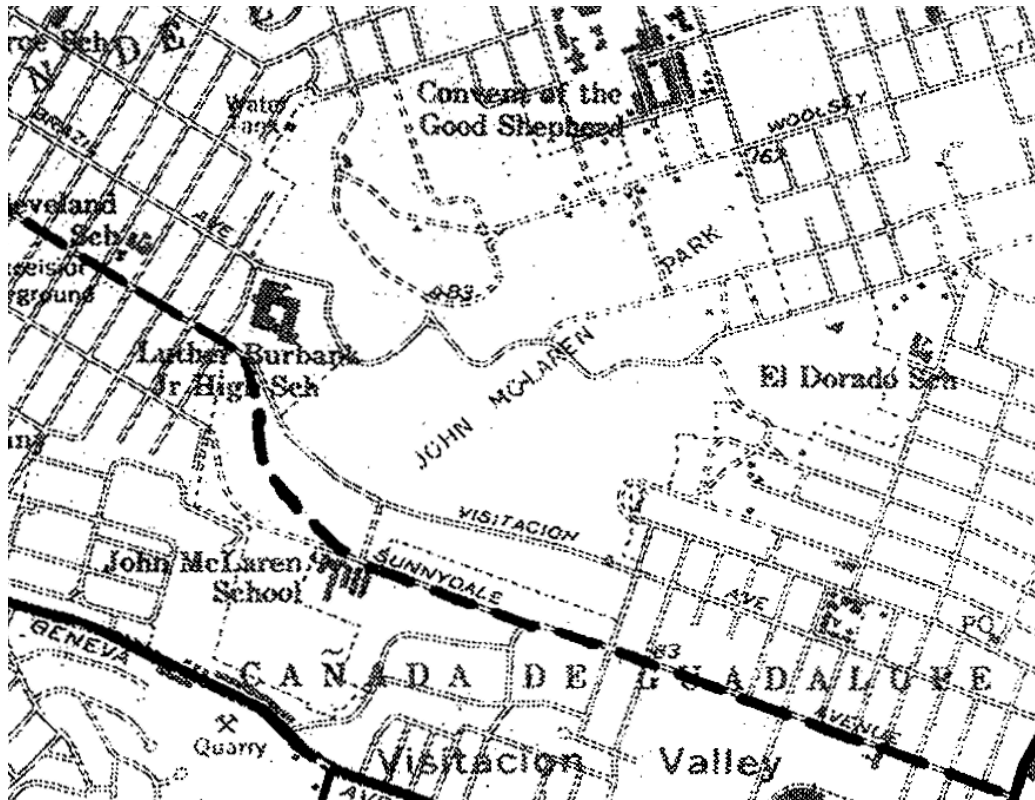


1962 Bay Area Rapid Transit District Map showing old view road

1961-64 Land Use Survey, Vacant Land, SF Dept, of City Planning ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Supposedly published in 1964, it shows the old Sunnydale/Persia alignment and no view road or Mansell at all. Hmmm.

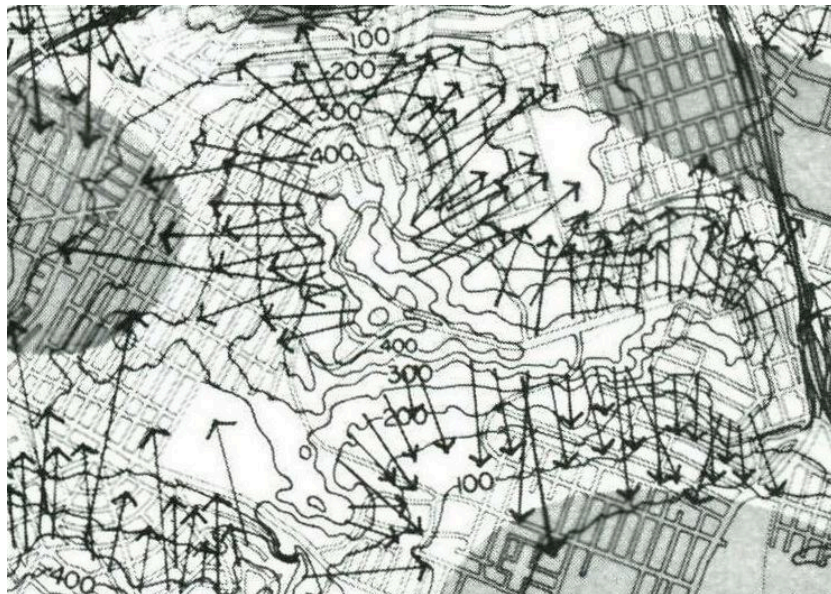
1968 Proposed Policy Plan 3: A major reliance on the auto throughout the City ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- This is another astounding find. I think the date is wrong, as it shows not only the old view road, but some of the other actual old roads in the park. Not the platted ones in a grid, but the actual roads that folks made themselves to get around to the various scattered farmsteads, according to the [1951 Redevelopment Plan](#).

This is pre-Shelley Drive as we know it, although I think the loop shown there may have been the old "Shelley Drive" referenced in the 1951 [Redev Plan](#), and it's fascinating to see how it overlaps with the existing infrastructure in the park. This map also shows the old Visitacion/Persia alignment, with the "new" Sunnydale/Persia alignment drawn in. And no clue of the modern Mansell. In 1968? Hmmmmmm! At any rate, stare at this one for a while or take it with you into the park and you may have some aha moments.



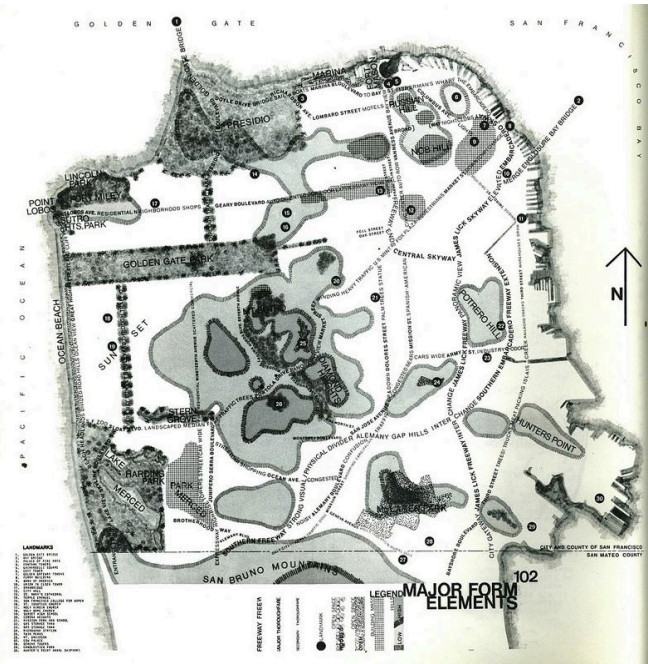
1968 Proposed Policy Map showing old roadbeds in McLaren Park
(this map seems to be based on an 1947 USGS map)

1969 View Districts, SF Department of City Planning ([small](#), [big](#)) -- This is interesting as it shows a lot of views that are gone now due to trees. In particular, views from along Mansell to the north and east.



1969 View Districts Map

1969 Major Form Elements, SF Department of City Planning ([small](#), [big](#)) -- This is an astounding abstract "graphic poem". It doesn't show anything too profound for McLaren, but take a look at the whole thing, it's kind of jaw dropping how "right on" it is. It also marks the location of the old Geneva Towers (#28).



1969 Major Form Elements Map

1969 Neighborhood Associations, SF Department of City Planning ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- Shows that McLaren Park is surrounded by: Visitation Valley Improvement Association, Portola & McLaren Park Improvement Association, Excelsior District Improvement Association, Excelsior Businessmen's Association, and the Crocker Amazon Improvement Association. That's a lot of Improvement going on!

1969-1973 City & County of San Francisco Twenty-Four Hour Traffic Flow on Principal Streets & Highways, DPW Bureau of Engineering ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Seems to show more traffic on Sunnydale than Mansell.

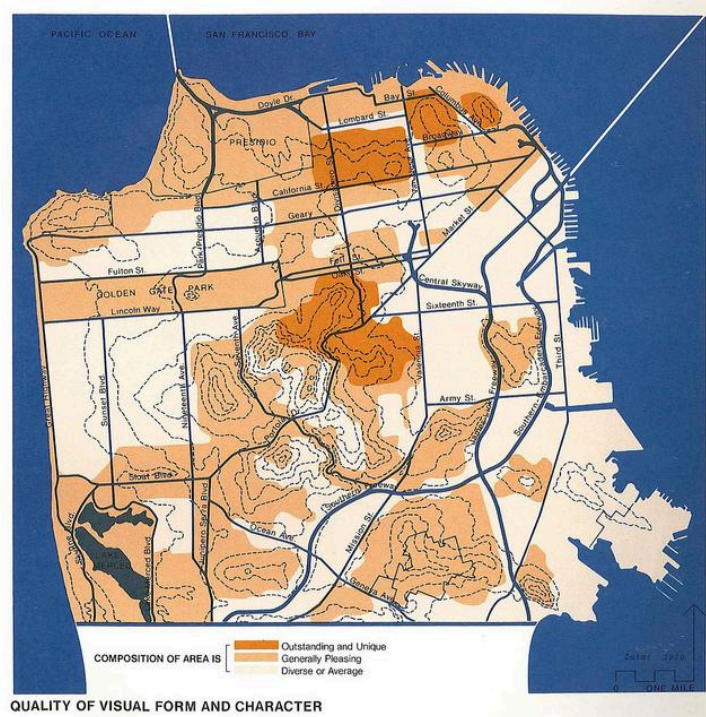
1969-1973 City & County of San Francisco Evening Peak Hour Traffic Flow on Principal Streets & Highways, DPW Bureau of Engineering ([small](#), [big](#)) -- Similar to above with somewhat warped street layout and traffic counts for each one.

1970 MUNI Map of Transit Routes ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- There's no 29 bus line on the then "new" Mansell like there is now, but plenty of other bus routes encircle the park during this era.

1971 Distance to Open Space, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF ([small](#),

bigger) -- This shows McLaren as the primary and obviously crucial open space in the southeast quadrant of the City, which also seems to be the quadrant with the least open space overall.

1971 Quality of visual form and character, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF (**small, bigger**) -- This shows the whole McLaren Park region as having a "generally pleasing visual form and character". Can't argue with that.



1971 Quality of visual form and character map

1971 Where tall buildings could enhance views of the skyline, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF (**small, bigger**) -- YIKES!

1971 Where tall buildings could help define districts & centers, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF (**small, bigger**) -- The horrors multiply.



1971 Where tall buildings could help define districts & centers

1971 Where tall buildings could improve orientation for travel, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF ([small](#), [bigger](#)) -- even more silliness, with many imagined highrise buildings around the western and northern edges of the park.

1971 Where tall buildings could enhance topographic form, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF ([small](#), [bigger](#)) -- the madness reaches fever pitch...

1971 Existing street lighting, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF ([small](#), [bigger](#)) -- Shows mercury vapor lighting all along Mansell, Shelley Loop, and Sunnydale, and Visitacion. Mansell now has mostly no lights except at or near intersections, but Visitacion does.

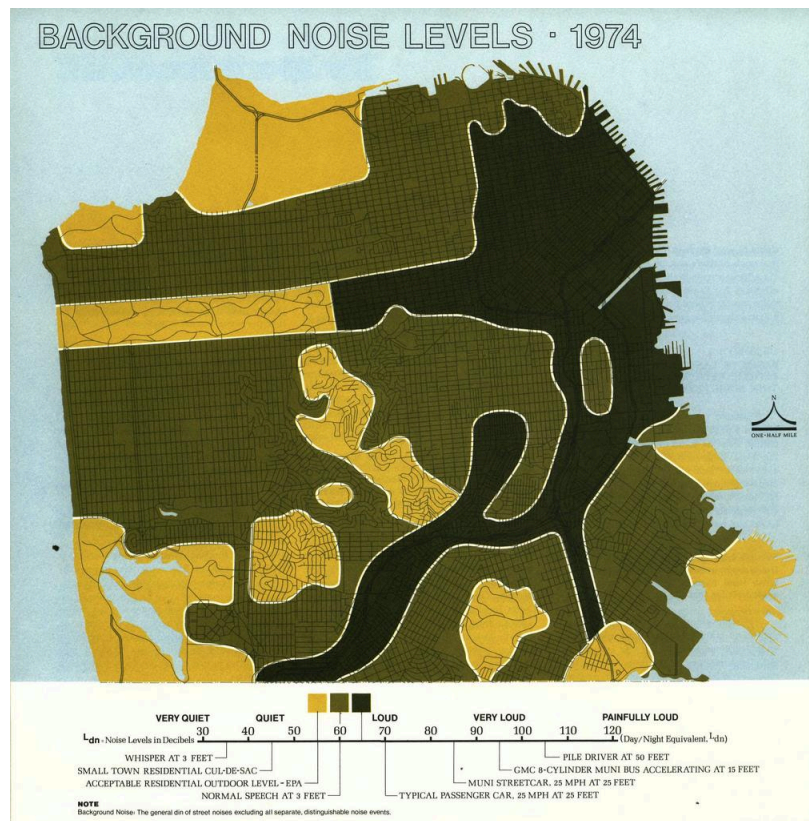
1971 Plan for street landscaping and lighting, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- Shows plans for new “buffer plantings” and “highest intensity”

lighting all the way from Persia/Mission connecting to Mansell through the park and across to Bayshore. Never happened, thankfully.

1971 Undeveloped natural areas and bay fill, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF ([small](#), [bigger](#)) -- Shows McLaren's central region as pretty much the only "natural area not significantly altered by development" in the southeast quadrant except for a bit of Bay View Hill and the tippy-top of Bernal.

1971 Recent Capital Improvements Affecting Environment, Urban Design Plan for the Comprehensive Plan of SF ([small](#), [bigger](#)) -- Apparently in 1971 there were over \$1M capital improvements in McLaren Park. Back when a million bucks meant something.

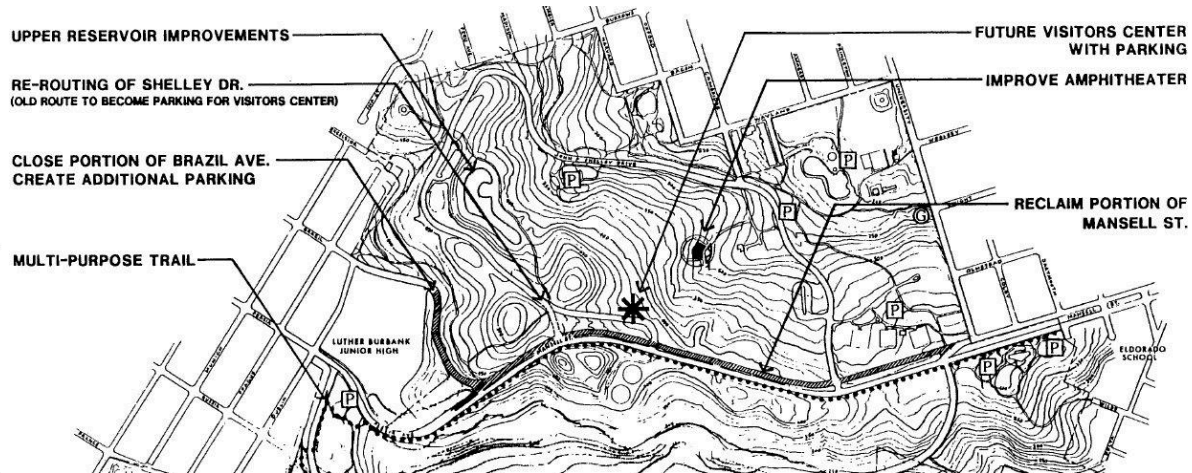
1974 Background Noise Levels, from Environmental Protection: The Comprehensive Plan, SF ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- Shows McLaren Park as a large zone of relative silence in the midst of a buzzing city.



1974 Background Noise Levels Map

1974 Thoroughfare Noise Levels, from Environmental Protection: The Comprehensive Plan, SF ([small](#), [huge](#)) -- Noise in the obvious places.

1988 John McLaren Park Master Plan -- Among other things, suggests closing one side of Mansell to vehicular traffic and reclaiming as a pedestrian promenade/multi-use trail (similar to the recent community-proposed “One-Sided Traffic Alternative” for the Mansell Corridor Improvement Project).



1993 USGS Survey Map of San Mateo section ([full map](#), [McLaren section](#)) -- A small image but shows paved roads in McLaren Park as they are now.



1993 USGS Survey Map
showing paved roads in McLaren Park as they are today