

# City Lights

6

## A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud

An internal memorandum issued by a landscape architect for the federal department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) does not bode well for the Mariner's Cove housing development in Ocean Beach. Wedged between Interstate 8 and West Point Loma Boulevard, the government-financed project is almost completed, but for Robert H. Smith, proprietor of Irri-Scape Construction, the subcontractor who handled the landscaping, the job may be far from over.

The conclusion of the report, part of an extraordinary HUD investigation of the project, reads: "An extremely poor installation and inspection job has taken place on this project in regards to fine grading, irrigation, hardscape, and landscaping. For whatever reason, timely and knowledgeable installations and inspections as required by contract documents did not take place. Unfortunately, the HUD inspection system deficiencies produce similar results on many HUD projects."

The author of the report, Robert H. Shaw, a regional

landscape architect with HUD, finished his inspection a couple of weeks ago and turned in the document to a regional inspector general for HUD. Shaw had made his inspection of the site, which had been previously inspected and okayed by the regular HUD inspectors, in response to the

complaints of a pipefitter who is an employee of Irri-Scape Construction. (This worker asked that his name be withheld because he fears being blacklisted from future jobs.) "We built a slum down there," he says, referring to the project's landscaping, "and the only thing it needs now is the graffiti." The pipefitter first contacted HUD officials last November, and he says he had to withstand threats and intense harassment from other HUD inspectors and architects while he continued his complaints.

The report from Shaw seems to corroborate his points. It notes "illegal" splices in control wires, improper grading, shrub and tree holes too small and not containing required soil amendments, many broken and misdirected sprinkler heads, newly planted ground cover that was dead or dying, no fertilizer or soil amendments under much of the sod, a modification in a main pressure line by the contractor that completely changes the authorized design concept of the irrigation system, and recommends that all the sod be

removed and replanted properly. It further recommends that "the entire [irrigation] system should be excavated circuit-by-circuit" and reinstalled according to specifications. Shaw concludes by writing, "It is my opinion that [the pipefitter] is a brave, knowledgeable and concerned worker. All of the allegations that he pointed out to me were found to be true. If allowed to remain as is, the landscaping and irrigation systems will present future risk to [HUD] in the form of increased water usage, excessive landscape and irrigation maintenance and repair costs."

The internal report hasn't reached subcontractor Robert Smith yet, but he says, "It's a bunch of unwarranted hearsay. Plenty of other inspectors have looked at it and said it's a good system. It's a politically motivated report. . . . That inspector just spot-checked a few areas." Smith, blames the report on "some disgruntled employees. . . . That job is one of the nicest in the area."

- N.M.



Mariner's Cove

