



BARGAIN BUY: Whittier will buy back the 200-acre Hellman Park, a portion of which is seen here Tuesday, from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for \$1.

KEITH DURRENGER / STAFF

Hellman Park sells for \$1

Whittier buying 200-acre site it previously leased

By MIKE SPRAGUE
STAFF WRITER

WHITTIER — This could be the greatest deal ever on a piece of property.

For the price of a fast-food restaurant's dollar-menu item, Whittier is buying a 200-acre park, which it leased from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority since 1996.

Conservation authority officials are only too glad to sell back Hellman Park, which the authority purchased from the city for \$2.3 million.

"There's no reason to simply maintain our name on it," said Joe Edmiston, executive director of the authority, adding that Whittier City Councilman Bob Henderson approached him and suggested ending the lease arrangement.

"I said, 'Good. Is it OK if we can make a buck on it,'" he joked.

When it bought the park a decade ago, the authority was looking to help Whittier and also to provide better access to Hellman Park, which is in the Whittier hills. After it bought the park, the authority began providing rangers to patrol it.

"The purchase was necessary if our rangers were to be there," Edmiston said.

Whittier officials needed to sell the park in order to provide a loan of \$2 million to the Whittier YMCA. The nonprofit group was never able to repay the loan.

The authority then leased Hellman Park back to the city at no charge. And the city forgave the YMCA its loan.

"We now have the right to buy it back for \$1, and I think it's a pretty good deal," Henderson said.

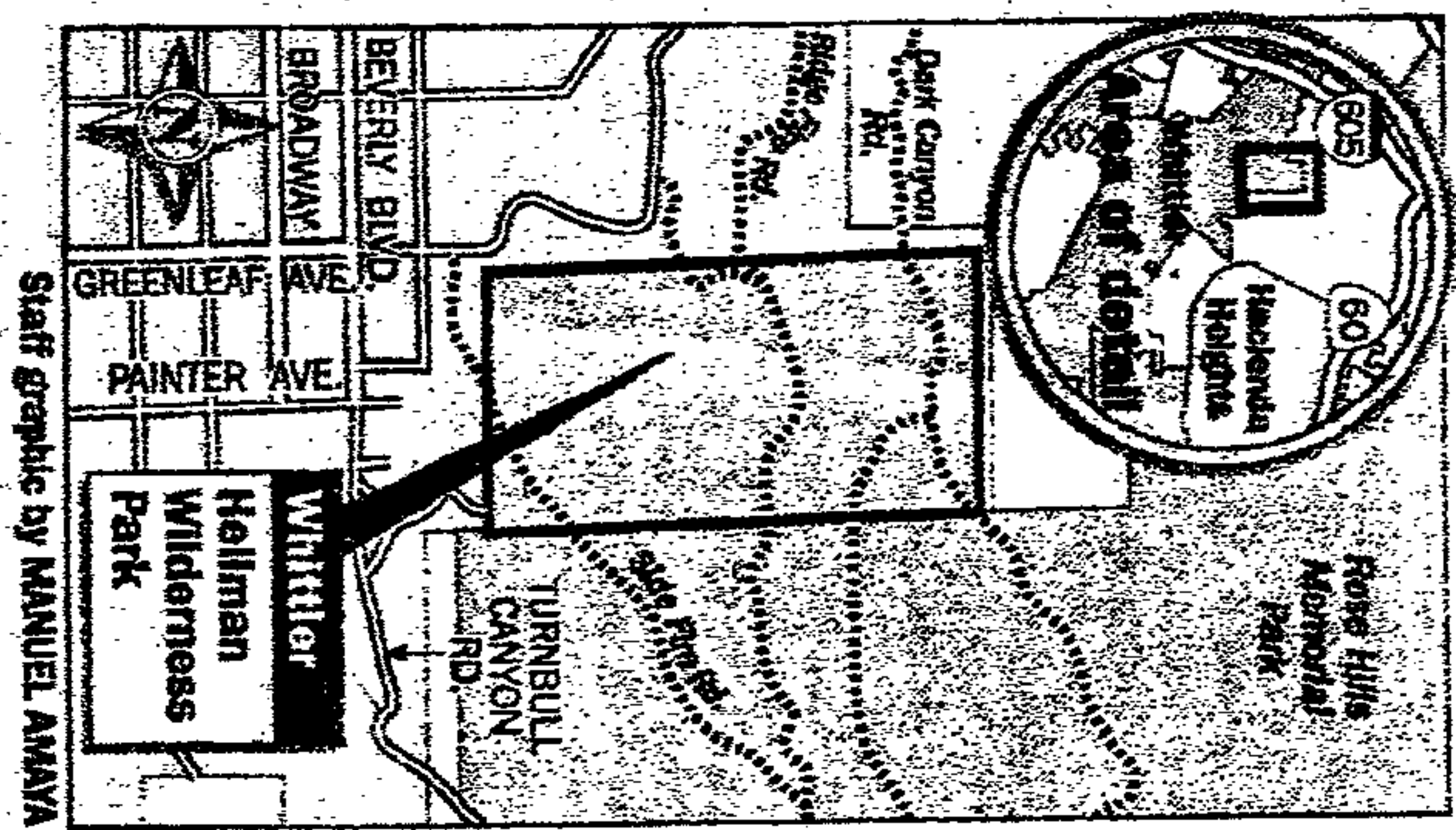
Whittier originally purchased Hellman Park in the early 1970s for about \$350,000, Henderson said.

"It set a precedent for trying to save the rest of the hills," he said.

Since then, about 3,850 acres of about 4,000 acres in the Whittier hills have been acquired. The Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Authority owns some of the land and manages all of it.

"We manage [Hellman Park] for the city and will continue to do so at the same price," said Andrea Cullio, executive director of the habitat authority.

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