



# MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

DATE: October 7, 2009

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item IX: Consideration of resolution authorizing the use of Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation Assessment District No. 2 (Area G) funds to acquire APN 2290-025-020 comprised of 1.73 acres in Encino, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the use of Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation Assessment District No. 2 (Area G) funds to acquire APN 2290-025-020 comprised of 1.73 acres in Encino.

Background: The subject 1.73 acre parcel is located in the core of Assessment District Acquisition Area G between Encino Reservoir and Ventura Boulevard. The parcel has access on Louise Avenue and Charmion Lane. The wooded site formally supported a residence and now provides a central level dirt pad area with a narrow (20-foot-wide access) paved driveway to Louise Avenue. Most of the site is shaded. In preparation to sell the lot, the bank that owns it did extensive brush clearance and tree trimming. There is no understory vegetation where people can hide. Superb access to the site and perfect existing fuel clearance conditions should lead to minimal annual maintenance costs. The result is an unusual, scenic, accessible open space area available to Area G residents and wildlife. The mix of large, mature native and non-native trees should be particularly valuable to owls and hawks. The evergreen tree canopies screen the park from the surrounding houses.

The option remains to create a shortcut neighborhood trail through the property to connect Louise Avenue to Encino Reservoir. Staff anticipates that the DWP's Encino Reservoir 1,000-acre open space area will ultimately be open for public access. Because of the nature of the broader area street layout, such a trail would make the reservoir a short walk for hundreds of additional homes.

The proposed use for the site is as immediate public open space with foot access from Louise Avenue. A gate at Louise is necessary and the Assessment District can fund that improvement. Future use could include the construction of a trail from the central pad to Charmion Lane. Fencing needs to be removed along Charmion Lane.

The District No. 2 Citizens Oversight Committee approved the acquisition in August 2005. It has been difficult to consummate Area G transactions both because of cost, geotechnical constraints, brushing burden, and limited parcel ability. Area G is bounded by Mulholland Drive, the 405 Freeway, Vanalden Avenue, and a line one quarter mile south of Ventura Boulevard. No fee simple acquisitions have occurred since the initial acquisition of the portion of the Eastport-Tucker property located north of Mulholland Drive. One conservation easement transaction closed approximately four years ago in the northeast corner of Area G. Many properties have since been developed. However, the drop in real estate prices has resurrected the affordability of a good set of properties.

Staff has appraised nine Area G properties this year and hopes to use the remaining approximately \$1,750,000 available to acquire several of these properties that spread special benefit and provide both good public use and wildlife resource value. The transaction and appraisal details for the subject parcel owned by the National Bank of Arizona will be discussed in closed session. The seller has been patient with the MRCA and has verbally agreed to a bargain sale. Nonetheless if the now available "bottom of the market" prices begin to rise, the quality of land acquired with the Assessment District funds to rapidly plummet.

A second item on the MRCA's October 7, 2009 agenda addresses a second adjacent property that the National Bank of Arizona has agreed to donate to the MRCA. Although this second property has some encroachments, the majority of it combined with the subject parcel would result in a full two-acre public open space area.