



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Los Angeles River Center & Gardens
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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: September 6, 2017

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XVI: Consideration of resolution authorizing: (1) entering into an agreement with the City of Los Angeles regarding acceptance of approximately 1.80 acres composed of APNs 5565-030-005, 5565-030-008, 009, 010, 011, 012, 013, 5565-030-022, 023, and 032, and (2) acceptance of those APNs from the private landowners, Laurel Canyon, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing (1) entering into an agreement with the City of Los Angeles regarding acceptance of approximately 1.80 acres composed of APNs 5565-030-005, 5565-030-008, 009, 010, 011, 012, 013, 5565-030-022, 023, and 032, and (2) acceptance of those APNs from the private landowners, Laurel Canyon, City of Los Angeles.

Background: An at times high profile battle to stop or limit the development of cliff-perched houses on unpaved Bulwer Drive in Laurel Canyon has gone on for over twenty-five years. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) have been part of that effort from the beginning. The history and nuance is too extensive to summarize in a staff report. The key development that precipitated this item is a settlement agreement between the City and the developer (two ownerships).

A key element of that settlement is that the MRCA take title to the ten remaining undeveloped lots in and around two houses that managed to be constructed well over a decade ago.

Bulwer Drive is a narrow, predominantly dirt road in the upper reaches of the Laurel Canyon watershed that is exceptionally visible from both Mulholland Drive and Laurel Canyon Boulevard. The two houses that managed to be constructed are known as prime examples of viewshed marring structures in the Santa Monica Mountains and Mulholland Scenic Corridor. Bulwer Drive and its adjacent habitat are also part of a heavily used wildlife corridor that links the Laurel Canyon and Nichols Canyon watersheds. The attached figure shows how the subject area fits

into the Conservancy's 2017 adopted Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map. Further paving and development along Bulwer Drive would have resulted in unavoidable significant adverse visual and biological impacts.

The settlement approved by the City this month provides compensation to the developer in exchange for the fee simple transfer of ten vacant lots as shown on the attached map. In exchange the developer will be allowed to pave a remaining dirt section of Bulwer Drive (at its current substandard width) to Woodstock Road. That final section of paving brings the two existing houses into better conformance with codes and enhances their marketability. The City does not want to own the lots which highlights the importance of MRCA ownership to permanently protect the land and end the battles. The way the settlement is structured, the lots would transfer directly to the MRCA. The MRCA and the City would enter into an agreement to achieve that transfer.

The regional importance of the lots outweighs the potential brush clearance requirements. Fortunately, the City and landowner invested heavily in the City-approved stabilization of the four easternmost lots that slumped under unpaved Bulwer Drive. The stabilization of Bulwer Drive shall always remain the City's responsibility. All of that soil removal occurred above the only house that is downslope of the subject ten lots. Now just a gentle slope and flat pad remain in that fixed area.

Pending Governing Board approval, staff has agreed to use future dollars from Measure GG to help reimburse the City. Those funds will not be available until a few months into 2018, and the City is amenable payment over time from the MRCA. Staff is also seeking the commitment of private funding from adjacent homeowners that want this whole battle episode to finally close. The City hopes to close the transaction and transfer the land to the MRCA early this fall of 2017. The proposed action authorizes staff to enter into an agreement with the City and accept fee title of the ten lots. Pending obtainment of a few more details about the deal, staff will soon bring back an item to the Governing Board to authorize a contributing amount of funding. In the mean time the City will have assurance that the MRCA is willing to take title to the property.

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