

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD
MALIBU, CALIFORNIA 90265
PHONE (310) 589-3200
FAX (310) 589-3207
WWW.SMMC.CA.GOV



Agenda Item VI(l)

MRCA

10/2/13

March 18, 2013

Mr. Isidro Figeroa
Department of Planning
City of Calabasas
100 Civic Center Way
Calabasas, California 91302

Request for Additional Project Conditions
Bsvercom LLC, Three-Lot Housing Project, 23401 Mulholland Highway

Dear Mr. Figeroa:

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) offers the following comments and recommendations on the above-referenced project within the Mulholland Highway Scenic Corridor. The site is also situated directly within the habitat linkage that connects the Wild Walnut-Dry Canyon Creek Park habitat block to the southeast, and a large block of undeveloped open space (Park South/ Calabasas Ridge) to the northwest.

Our staff met with the project applicants to discuss numerous significant concerns related to the extent of fuel modification, habitat connectivity, loss of native trees, and the Mulholland Highway viewshed. The principle remaining unknown issue is if the Fire Department will sign off on the spatial extent (footprint) of the fuel modification plan in the MND. The plan relies heavily on irrigated zones on the flat pads as opposed to graduated 200-foot-wide clearance zones from habitable structures. If the fuel modification plan as proposed is allowed, the net result will be less permanent habitat disturbance.

The Conservancy recognizes the applicants' rights for larger single family homes on large lots. The Conservancy also recognizes that fully restrictive conservation easements over all of the undeveloped portions of the property cannot be achieved without the owners' cooperation. Such conservation easements eliminate all future concerns about fencing, agriculture, lighting, appurtenant facilities (including equestrian), easements, and project expansion. They also guarantee adequate wildlife movement capability, in perpetuity. The applicants have agreed to grant such all encompassing conservation easements to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) as part of the City's project approval if the proposed project does not have to be modified. The Conservancy urges the City to work with the applicants and the Conservancy to make sure these conservation

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easements and other additional conditions are solidly integrated into the project approval in their full strength and breadth. Without these conditions the project could have a significant adverse impact on biological resources.

If the City is willing to incorporate the applicants' request to include these conservation easements and other below-described measures as additional project conditions, the Conservancy would go on record that the project provides a fair balance between development and open space protection given the site's unusual constraints. The attached figure shows the approximate boundaries of the proposed conservation easements which in some cases include manufactured slopes. The easements would prohibit all uses except fuel modification, planting vegetation indigenous to the Santa Monica Mountains, and drip irrigation. Lighting, fencing, materials storage, permanent irrigation, grading, herbicide, rodenticide, and non-native vegetation would be prohibited. We respectfully request that the City's conditions of approval require that all conservation easements be recorded by the MRCA prior to the issuance of any grading permits. The applicants have agreed to provide all necessary preliminary title reports and recordable legal descriptions for all relevant conservation easements. We would appreciate if that additional requirement is included in the conditions. The MRCA has agreed to prepare the grants of conservation easement deeds.

The other additional conditions agreed to between the applicant and the Conservancy include a special east-west oriented conservation easement section across the cut slope along the northern boundary of the central lot (Lot 2). This would be a minimum 20-foot-wide easement for wildlife movement. It would be free of all fencing, lighting, and facilities other than paths to reach proposed solar panels and underground utilities.

Additional conditions mutually agreed upon include a permanent prohibition on the planting or maintenance of any plants in the City right-of-way that are not indigenous to the Santa Monica Mountains, and a requirement to plant and maintain replacement black walnut trees onsite with a ratio and success criteria to be determined by the City. These additional conditions volunteered by the applicant will add greatly to both the ecosystem and the view corridor. We look forward to successful implementation of these conditions with the City.

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Please contact Paul Edelman, Deputy Director of Natural Resources and Planning, at 310-589-3200, ext. 128 with any questions and future correspondence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'IRMA MUÑOZ', with a long vertical flourish extending downwards.

IRMA MUÑOZ
Chairperson