



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: September 2, 2015

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing: (a) conditional support of the proposed Andora Estates project; (b) entering into an agreement with the project applicant; (c) authorizing the acceptance of temporary and revocable conservation easements over portions of APNs 2724-007-002 and 004, up to approximately 66 acres; (d) authorizing the future acceptance of conservation easements and fee simple interests over the same land subject to the temporary easements; and (e) authorizing the future acceptance of easements over additional deed restricted portions and trails of APN 2724-007-004 up to approximately 13.5 acres, Simi Hills, Chatsworth, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing: (a) conditional support of the proposed Andora Estates project; (b) entering into an agreement with the project applicant; (c) authorizing the acceptance of temporary and revocable conservation easements over portions of APNs 2724-007-002 and 004, up to approximately 66 acres; (d) authorizing the future acceptance of conservation easements and fee simple interests over the same land subject to the temporary easements; and (e) authorizing the future acceptance of easements over additional deed restricted portions and trails of APN 2724-007-004 up to approximately 13.5 acres, Simi Hills, Chatsworth, City of Los Angeles.

Background: The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) adopted the attached comment letter on the Andora Estates project at its August 17, 2015 meeting. The 91-acre project is located (see attached map) in the Simi Hills in between Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park and Chatsworth Oaks Park (Chatsworth Reservoir Nature Preserve).

The Conservancy and many community entities have battled development on the subject property for over a decade. That lack of a secondary access held a sizeable subdivision in check. However, the current owner has obtained a secondary access and has convinced the Chatsworth Neighborhood Council to support a reduced

density 33-home project. The developer has done a solid job of restricting the disturbance footprint to a tight area that for all intents and purposes is fully shielded from existing public lands. The proposed subdivision footprint when combined with an additional contiguous, offsite 3.5-acre parcel provides an ample habitat linkage from the Simi Hills central core habitat area to the Chatsworth Reservoir Nature Preserve.

The developer's proposal to lock in the additional 3.5-acre parcel and conservation easements on approximately 31 of the 33 private parcels in a pre-entitlement agreement with the MRCA, along with other factors, convinced the Conservancy to conditionally support the 33-home project. The other factors included all of the public trail easements going to the MRCA as well as the large open space area. The developer has also agreed to provide \$15,000 to the MRCA to set up and maintain signage on the site. The marginal potential gains from further fighting the project were counter balanced by the reasonable secured project footprint and open space benefits. The proposed actions include the MRCA conditionally supporting the project.

The proposed action would first authorize the MRCA to accept temporary and revocable conservation easements on the large open space lot and the 3.5-acre parcel (APN 2724-007-002) that is not part of the tract map. The attached figure shows these as phase one acquisitions. If the 33-home tract map is approved (shown as phase two on the attached figure), both of these conservation easements would automatically convert to fee simple title for the MRCA. With such approval then as part of phase two, numerous conservation easements on the individual private lots will vest with the MRCA. The conservation easements would prohibit all uses other than brush clearance and habitat restoration. No fencing would be allowed off of the 33 development pads.

In agreement with the MRCA the developer also agreed to reduce the grading and pad footprint on lot 11 and for lots 25 and 26 to have reduced-height two-story houses to reduce the overall project height.

The project's Draft Environmental Impact Report is scheduled to be released in November.

The advantages to the applicant are for tax purposes and to get early project support. The advantages to the MRCA and the public are substantial guaranteed public benefits with zero reliance on City condition and mitigation measure enforcement to provide the open space and trail benefits. In addition the public receives 3.5 acres and \$15,000 of operations money that would be difficult to secure without a cooperative agreement with the developer.

A local public agency exercising joint powers of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation & Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation & Park District pursuant to Section 6500 et seq. of the Government Code.