



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: May 4, 2016

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing the exchange of up to a total one-acre combination of APNs 2428-028-900 and 5549-001-900 and additional road easement for APN 5549-001-001 (4.53-acres) for habitat linkage purposes, Cahuenga Pass, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the exchange of up to a total one-acre combination of APNs 2428-028-900 and 5549-001-900 and additional road easement for APN 5549-001-001 (4.53-acres) for habitat linkage purposes in the Cahuenga Pass.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) authorized acquisition of seven parcels in the apex of the Cahuenga Pass totaling approximately 8-acres in 2002 under a loan agreement. As part of the final pay off on the acquisition in 2004, the Governing Board adopted Resolution No. 04-31 which authorized separation of an approximately one acre portion of now APNs 2428-028-900 and 5549-001-900 for future sale. The subject one-acre future sale area has the foundation and garden terraces of a former house that took access from Viso Lane. Staff has been frustrated for years to find a buyer for the site because the parcel frontage on Viso Lane does not meet the minimum 20-foot City of Los Angeles requirement.

For the separate purpose of protecting the habitat linkage to the Mulholland Drive bridge over the 101 freeway, staff approached the owner of the large adjacent parcel (APN 5549-001-001) to see if he was interested in a bargain sale. That conversation led to the owner's interest in MRCA's adjacent carved out one acre which has superior views.

APN 5549-001-001 (4.53-acres) is a regionally significant habitat linkage and viewshed parcel. The basis of the proposed land swap is trade to an approximately one acre area of MRCA land for the subject 4.53 acres. The public benefits of this swap are significant. The most important is securing the connection to the freeway overpass for animal crossings. The parcel has lots of native trees and is visible from both Mulholland Drive and the freeway.

In order to meet the City requirement for a 20-foot interface with a paved street, the portion of MRCA property that would be exchanged most likely needs to include a 20-foot-wide appendage down to Mulholland Drive. There are many cases of built Hollywood Hills parcels that do not use their 20-wide-street-interfaces for access. In any case the proposed 20-foot-wide appendage would go straight up the side of a steep hill at a prohibitive angle to be an access threat.

The proposed owner desires to access the MRCA parcel from Viso Lane. However if the City does not approve such access via a driveway, even with a 20-foot-wide parcel extension to Mulholland Drive, the only access option is via a long driveway from Mulholland Drive through the proposed parcel that the MRCA would acquire. Such a driveway through future public parkland is sub-optimal. However, the parcel exchange partner needs to retain an easement as insurance. That long driveway is inferior to the exchange partner for multiple reasons including cost and privacy.

The proposed land exchange would include the owner of APN 5549-001-001 retaining an access easement down to Mulholland Drive. That easement would be based on his existing engineered plans for a driveway. The driveway would have minimal light and no fencing so most of the habitat linkage value would remain if this worst case scenario unfolded down the road. If the owner is able to achieve building permits with a driveway from Viso Lane, the easement would be extinguished.

The existing house pad is within the Inner Corridor of the Mulholland Specific Plan and thus would be subject to full review by the Mulholland Design Review Board. The land swap would be a significant gain for the permanent protection of the wildlife corridor to Griffith Park. It would be a net increase in ecological capacity. The value of the real estate received would exceed that which is exchanged. The only cost would be the staff time to achieve the transfer.