



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: December 6, 2017

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VI(j): Consideration of resolution authorizing: (a) the acquisition of APNs 2381-006-012 and 013 (approximately 3.3 acres) along the San Fernando Valley side of Laurel Canyon Boulevard and (b) acceptance of private funds for option payments and to complete said acquisition, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing: (a) the acquisition of APNs 2381-006-012 and 013 (approximately 3.3 acres) along the San Fernando Valley side of Laurel Canyon Boulevard and (b) acceptance of private funds for option payments and to complete said acquisition, City of Los Angeles.

Background: The subject 3.3-acre property on the Berry Canyon (San Fernando Valley) side of Laurel Canyon Boulevard probably contains the most standalone significant perennial water source on the northern face of the Santa Monica Mountains between the Cahuenga Pass and the 405 freeway. It is one of thirteen year-round water sources in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains for which the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) recently received a Proposition 1 grant from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to develop land protection blueprints to maintain wildlife access and water source integrity. The property is part of Habitat Block number 25 in the Conservancy's adopted Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map. It is a greatly isolated habitat block located east of Wilacre Park and northeast of Fryman Canyon Park with a perennial stream and significant oak-sycamore woodland. Its value to birds, amphibians, small and medium-sized mammals, and perhaps larger mammals cannot be underestimated because of the long-length of perennial water and forest over-story.

The MRCA has an extendable option on the property that requires putting private money at risk on December 13, 2017. The option can be extended for four 30-day periods. The Seller prefers to see the property conserved and has worked with staff

for a year to wait for a completed appraisal and offer. There are many physical reasons why the property has not been developed to date but it is comprised of two parcels that abut Laurel Canyon Boulevard that have exceptional scenic charm. Priced at over \$1 million it is not a property likely to be funded by the MRCA Community Facilities Districts (CFD) or by State grant funds. However it is a property that the MRCA can maintain and facilitate the acquisition thereof with CFD funding.

Staff has sent out letters over wide radius around the property and to select community residents to test if there is interest in a totally private funded acquisition. Staff has inspected the property and found that there is periodic camping and trash deposition by homeless people. The MRCA's financial resources in the case of this property should be reserved to manage encampments and trash pick up. The local residents would benefit from ranger presence and a guarantee of no future development.

A block wall separates the property from a standard sidewalk along Laurel Canyon Boulevard. Nonetheless the property is accessible from the intersection of Laurel Canyon Boulevard and Dona Pegita Drive via this sidewalk. There is even an MTA bus stop and signaled cross-walk at the intersection. The main purpose of the proposed acquisition is to protect habitat, watershed, and viewshed in this portion of the upper Los Angeles River watershed and eastern Santa Monica Mountains.

Staff hopes that the community recognizes the natural resource in its midst and finds a way to fund the acquisition with tax deductible contributions to the MRCA. This proposed public-private partnership is perhaps the only way to permanently protect a widely-viewed scenic and ecological oasis with the Studio City area.

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