



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: March 7, 2018

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VII: Consideration of resolution authorizing (a) entering into an option and purchase agreement for approximately 101 acres (APNs 4455-005-020, 4455-008-002 and 4455-008-003), (b) an option payment and deposit, and (c) the acquisition of said parcels, Calabasas Peak area, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing entering into an option and purchase agreement for approximately 101 acres (APNs 4455-005-020, 4455-008-002 and 4455-008-003), an option payment and deposit, and the acquisition of said parcels along the Calabasas Peak Motorway.

Background: The three subject parcels are located along the Calabasas Peak Motorway between Old Topanga Canyon Road and Stunt Road. They all abut land owned by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) or the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Interestingly they flow into three different watersheds-Los Angeles River, Malibu Creek, and Topanga Creek. The properties (acquired by the same families over 50 years ago) have remained undeveloped to date because of topographic constraints. According to the ownership (as shown on an attached map) there is legal access via sixty-foot-wide easements from Old Topanga Canyon Road and Elsie Drive.

The three parcels are being offered for sale in a sealed-bid, private auction. Staff has met with the owner, owner's counsel, and the auction representative. They have encouraged the MRCA to bid. The MRCA currently has no funding source but with the owners consent, the MRCA can submit a bid to be determined by appraised value that would allow the auction to remain open long enough to see if Proposition 68 passes in June which provides substantial funding to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. The MRCA has begun its appraisal process. To receive this special dispensation to extend the bidding process the ownership is requiring a non-refundable \$15,000 option payment/deposit. Because the MRCA has no

dedicated funding source for such a payment, staff is reaching out to surrounding homeowner and property groups to donate the \$15,000. If the MRCA's bid is accepted, the option payment will apply towards the agreed upon sale price.

The properties are highly desirable elements within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Their development or even grading for vineyards would be highly detrimental to a large core habitat hub located between Topanga and Malibu Creek State Parks. The access roads to the properties would have significant visual and biological impacts. Staff recommends entering into a contingent agreement to acquire the properties and their valuable access easement which can serve as public trails. The ultimate appraisal price may or may not be acceptable to the Seller. Likewise, the MRCA may or may not be able to successfully secure adequate grant funds from the Conservancy and/or Los Angeles County this coming summer. Nonetheless the opportunity and level of Seller cooperation is ripe and should be pursued.

The properties would require zero brushing and are in an area already patrolled by MRCA rangers.