



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: August 8, 2018

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XII: Consideration of resolution authorizing (a) entering into an agreement with Snowball West Investments LP to acquire all or portions of APNs 2572-025-006, 2572-021-020 and 2572-021-016; (b) authorizing the acceptance of an open space dedication from Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 69976 on the former Verdugo Hills Golf Course property; and (c) authorizing entering into a Project Agreement for said acquisition with the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing (a) entering into an agreement with Snowball West Investments LP to acquire all or portions of APNs 2572-025-006, 2572-021-020 and 2572-021-016; (b) authorizing the acceptance of an open space dedication from Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 69976 on the former Verdugo Hills Golf Course property; and (c) authorizing entering into a Project Agreement for said acquisition with the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District.

Background: A conflict over the development of the Verdugo Hills golf course has brewed for approximately a decade. A Final Environmental Impact Report and Tract Map approval for approximately 230 homes will soon begin hearings in the City of Los Angeles. The opportunity to secure an agreement with the current ownership prior to a sale to a merchant builder is fast closing. Such an agreement could forestall litigation by opponents and secure great public open space benefits.

A portion of the property was actually an internment camp during World War II – the Tuna Canyon Detention Station operated by the Department of Justice. In the interim, the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Coalition was able to achieve City of Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument (HCM) (#1039) status for an approximately 1.5-acre portion of the property. Attached figures show the current HCM boundary. The Coalition working with the local group VOICE attempted to acquire the whole property teamed with the Trust for Public Land (TPL), but the price tag exceeds available funding. Throughout the process, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy has pushed to reduce the project footprint and to provide public

access to the open space. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) owns ten abutting acres. If a tract map was ever approved on the now shuttered golf course, most parties assumed that the MRCA would accept the back slope open space dedication. Finally the 5th District Supervisorial office has upheld a longstanding commitment to the golf course preservation supporters to sequester \$1.7 million of Proposition A Excess Funds to acquire all or part of the property.

Since earlier this year, staff has worked with VOICE, TPL, and a third party representative for the landowner on a plan to allow the conservation buy down of some of the proposed tract map lots both for general open space purposes and to enhance the HCM. Just as of last week, an agreement for a multi-phase buy down process was achieved with the property ownership. Staff deferred to the other preservation parties on which lands were most important to protect in each subsequent phase depending on available funding. The preservation parties involved primarily want to expand the size and accessibility of the HCM. Some of the options include a whole trailhead with parking off Tujunga Canyon Boulevard with a bridge over the Verdugo Wash. The Coalition also desires a museum site for an exhibit that currently has no permanent home.

Staff was clear to all parties that the MRCA would not be interested in owning and managing parkland with elements or a design that required substantial ongoing annual funding. In addition the third party representative made it clear that the acquired land would be accompanied by a minimum \$200,000 payment for maintenance and coordination to the MRCA. The landowner or future development buyer would provide such funding along with funding for the Coalition primarily to begin the process of establishing a museum site. The landowner most likely would also supply utilities to the museum site. Under the current plan, the MRCA would have fee simple ownership of the HCM, all acquired lots, any museum site, and all of the dedicated open space from the tract map as shown on an attached figure. At some point the MRCA and the Coalition would have to enter into an MOU to address management and responsibilities. No museum related expenses would be borne by the MRCA.

The proposed plan is for the MRCA to enter into an agreement with the landowner that secures the option to acquire lots under four different options. Diagrams of those four different options are attached. The option figures were prepared by the property owner and represent potential park/open space areas that could be achieved in concert with the development's drainage, grading, circulation, and utility requirements. The boards of both VOICE and TCDS Coalition voted to move forward with this plan. It may be that TPL would also hold all of the initial option agreements. Because time is of the essence, staff seeks authority to enter into necessary agreements with the owner to achieve the acquisition objectives. VOICE and the Coalition will seek the maximum amount of funding to maximize the retirement tract lots. The cost of the lots will depend on appraised value after the City tract map and EIR approval are beyond the period of judicial challenge. There are many procedural issues left to hammer out.

The third part of this proposed action is for the Governing Board to authorize a grant application and entering into a Project Agreement with the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District to make use the sequestered \$1.7 million for a first phase acquisition or a portion of the property to be determined.