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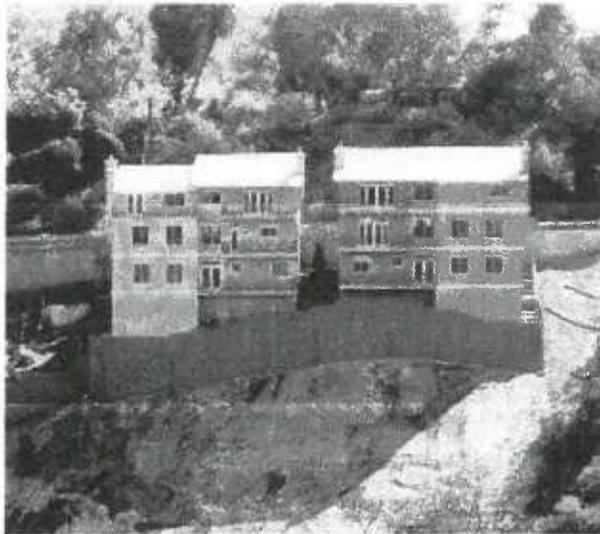
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Street improvement effort raises new safety concerns

By Aaron Blevins, 9/11/2014

Laurel Canyon residents want an EIR completed

According to some residents of Laurel Canyon, the only two homes on Bulwer Drive have been a nuisance and eyesore for more than 20 years, providing a hub for drug use, partying and prostitution.



According to some neighbors, these two homes on Bulwer Drive have been a nuisance for more than 20 years.

(photo by Fred Karger)

Date: 5.6.15
Submitted in PWGR Committee
Council File No: 14.1297
Item No.: 5
Deputy: public

Now, after purchasing the properties, a developer is looking to improve Bulwer Drive, a project that some residents believe will enable the developer to build additional homes without creating an environmental impact report (EIR). The developer owns 12 parcels on the street.

Bulwer Drive LLC is seeking a permit for the improvements, which include paving, drainage system improvements and building a cut-off trench, among other things. A hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m. on Monday at the Los Angeles Board of Public Works, neighbor Fred Karger said.

“That’s why the city likes it — it’s a free road,” he said. “But at what cost?”

According to the city’s Department of Public Works, building permits were issued for three homes on Bulwer Drive in 1986, but construction was halted due to funding problems shortly after the approvals. In 1990, one of the unfinished homes burned to the ground.

In 2002, Bulwer Drive LLC purchased the properties, and the city determined that the permits were still valid for the two remaining, unfinished homes. However, the developer had to make various improvements, such as building a paved roadway and constructing sewer main lines and storm drains that connected to Laurel Canyon Boulevard.

Construction was completed in 2009. That year, Bulwer Drive LLC sought permitting for a hillside street with a 20-foot roadway from 8037 Bulwer Drive to Woodstock Road. The owner, though, opted not to proceed with the improvements.

According to the department, the road began to experience problems, as heavy rains have led to erosion and a water main break created mud deposits in the roadway. For the most part, repairs were made at city expense.

Because of the issues with the street, the owner notified the city's Bureau of Engineering to request a permit for improvements, stating that the conditions of the road were preventing the owner from maintaining tenants or selling the homes.

On Sept. 12, the company sought new permits for street improvements. This time, the developer is not looking to widen the road; rather, the company wants to pave the existing dirt road.

Karger said he believes the company is looking to get around creating an EIR. Though the project cannot be appealed to the Los Angeles City Council, Councilman Tom LaBonge, 4th District, is lobbying for the company to complete the report.

"We support the neighbors and not getting the road improved at this time, unless an EIR is done," said Renee Weitzer, LaBonge's chief of land use planning, south.

She said the developer of the original homes was supposed to honor certain requirements as part of the issuing of the certificate of occupancy, and some elements of the approval, such as connecting to sewer lines, were never done.

Furthermore, the homes have been a nuisance, Weitzer said. She said one was rented to a tenant who turned it into a party house, which led the tenant in the neighboring home to leave.

"It was a mess. Since then, they've been trying to sell the homes," Weitzer said.

She said the proposal started small and has blossomed into a much larger project. Weitzer said the developers have painted the project as a "temporary improvement."

"Actually, it's more than a temporary improvement," she said, adding that there are concerns that heavy equipment could push debris down the hillside. If something were to fall, Laurel Canyon Boulevard would be closed, Weitzer said. "So, it's in a very precarious site."

She said it is common for an EIR to be required on such a road. Weitzer listed two former planning department employees who have called for an environmental report to be done on site.

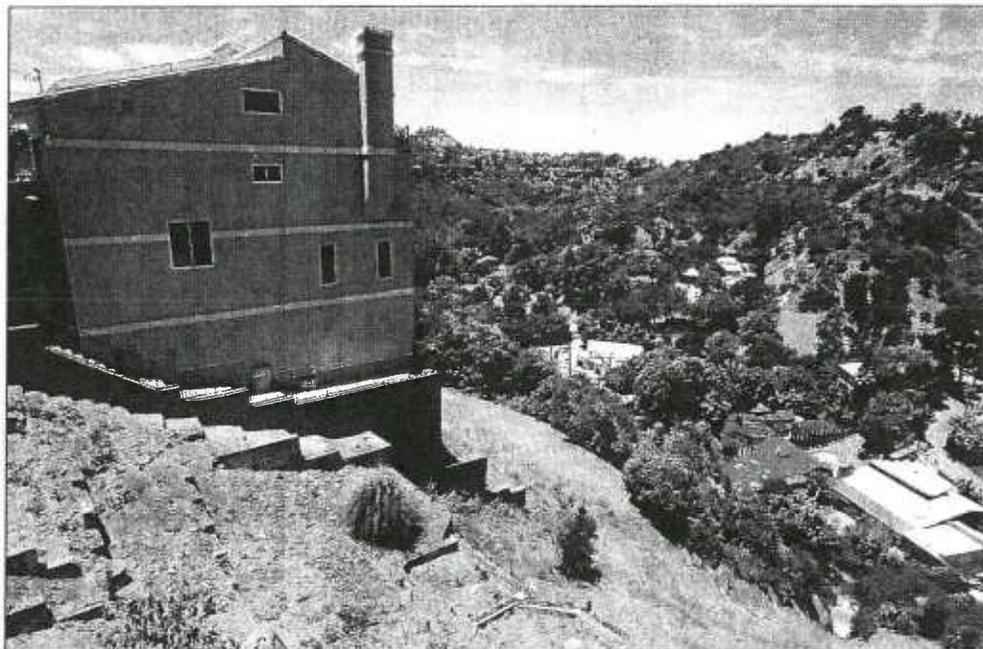
An attorney representing the developer, Benjamin Reznik, declined to comment, stating that he was not authorized to speak on the matter.

CALIFORNIA

VALLEY EDITION

Friday, September 15, 2006

latimes.com/california



GARY FRIEDMAN *Los Angeles Times*

CLIFF CLINGERS: *This house and its neighbor perch over Laurel Canyon on a narrow fire road. The city wants the road widened, with a cantilevered firetruck turnaround added.*

Ledge Homes Put Foes on Edge

After 19 years, two Laurel Canyon houses finally have been finished. Now, to the dismay of neighbors, the developer wants to build more.

By **BOB POOL**
Times Staff Writer

For nearly 20 years they stood as the beacon of bad for commuters winding their way through the mountains between Studio City and Hollywood.

Two hulking, partially built houses clung precariously to the nearly vertical hillside off a fire road at the top of Laurel Canyon. They were the first things that motorists saw as they left the San Fernando Valley and crossed Mulholland Drive.

Graffiti was sometimes scrawled on the abandoned structures, whose boxy backsides towered five stories over the canyon. During

occasional periods of construction, debris would tumble down the hill. Rainstorms sent mudflows oozing toward Laurel Canyon Boulevard below.

Young people used the empty houses for drug parties. Prostitutes frequented the places until neighbors got authorities to chase them away. Homeless squatters came and went, using charcoal barbecues to cook on since the two dwellings lacked water and electricity.

But after years of being ignored and neglected, the homes and the narrow road they sit on are suddenly getting a lot of attention.

The owners finally completed the homes earlier this year. And to the dismay of residents, more homes might be coming to the ledge.

The city calls the one-lane dirt road where the two homes are perched Bulwer Drive. It is demanding that it be widened to a regulation 20 feet, paved and lined with curbs, and equip-

[See Houses, Page B10]

over

Canyon Faces New Cliffhanger

[Houses, from Page B1]

ped with a 60-foot-wide firetruck turnaround space that will be partially suspended over Laurel Canyon Boulevard.

To pay the millions of dollars it will cost to build retaining walls held up by about 90 caissons and the massive concrete cantilevered turnaround, the Nebraska company that took over and finished the 19-year construction project says it has to build more houses on Bulwer Drive.

Canyon residents grumble that Midwest First Financial of Omaha has remained closed-mouthed about the extent of its eventual development. They contend that the two finished houses are enough of a blight on the scenic parkway, a city-designated view-shed corridor that runs through the mountains between the Cahuenga Pass and Topanga Canyon.

Homeowners are demanding that the Nebraska firm fully disclose its development plans and pay for a full-fledged environmental assessment of its long-term impact on Laurel Canyon.

Canyon residents say the roots of the dispute go back eight decades, to a time when the vast Santa Monica Mountains area was first being subdivided. Some of the newly designated "lots" were so steep and geologically unstable that they were deemed undevelopable. Some parcels were even given away as prizes or publicity stunts.

City construction rules in the mountain area remained relatively loose until the 1970s, when tract-builders began running out of flat land and began looking toward the hills.

In 1976 city officials took their first step toward limiting construction of homes on hillsides with a test ordinance that used a formula to base development density on the steepness of the terrain for portions of Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, Bel-Air and Woodland Hills. The rules were extended to other mountainous portions of the city in 1987.

By then, though, a speculator had secured city approval to build three houses on Bulwer Drive. Permits issued in October 1986 allowed them to be perched side-by-side next to the fire road, about 100 feet above Laurel Canyon Boulevard.

Construction began on the three houses in 1987. But when the original speculator ran out of



GARY FRIEDMAN Los Angeles Times

CHECKERED PAST: Between bouts of construction, the homes were used for drug parties and by prostitutes and squatters.



Los Angeles Times

cash and work was about to stop, a fire later labeled as arson burned the third one to the ground.

Firefighters were forced to use a helicopter to extinguish that 1990 blaze. After the fire, the bank holding the construction loan foreclosed on the original developer.

The two unfinished houses changed hands about a half-dozen more times before eventually being donated to Pepperdine University as a tax write-off. The university was unable to secure proper title to the property, however, and so turned it over to the realty agent who had helped arrange the gift. In early 2001 the agent pledged to neighbors that the two homes would finally be completed.

Canyon homeowners say the realty agent went into partner-

ship with Midwest Financial on the project. As the construction project languished, canyon homeowners petitioned to have the vacant structures razed. In 2003 the city attorney's office warned that the city was poised through its Narcotics Abatement Unit task force to tear them down unless there was "timely completion of the construction at your properties."

After a dispute with its partner, the Omaha group subsequently took over the project and finished the two houses. It put them on the market as it filed for city permission to begin construction of another one.

It has been at preliminary city hearings on that permit request that controversy has again flared over the first two houses, which one wag has nicknamed "Fred" and "Ethel" with a nod to the aging, cranky "I Love Lucy" TV show characters who never could win any respect.

Neighbors contend that the now-completed homes still look ugly from below. They argue that construction of more homes will make things worse.

The biggest threat to the rustic feel of the neighborhood may be the proposed widening of narrow Bulwer Drive and construction of the firetruck turnaround, they said.

John Pogue, a film writer who has lived in Laurel Canyon for 10 years and is local area chairman for the Hollywood Hills West Neighborhood Council, likened the proposed cantilevered roadway "hanging over Laurel Can-

yon" to a freeway bridge.

"Twenty feet of open space under a concrete structure on the most prominent ridge in Laurel Canyon is more appropriate for the new elephant compound at the L.A. Zoo," Pogue said.

Film director Jesse Dylan, who lives above the fire road, said he feared for the safety of children in the area. TV writer William Kunstler, who lives beneath it, said he was "terrified" by landslides that had occurred on the project site.

To bolster their arguments, Pogue, Dylan, Kunstler and neighbor Fred Karger, a retired public relations executive who has lived three decades in the canyon, hired geologists to study the canyon site. Their experts have condemned the developer's slope-stability studies as inadequate, saying that the area has suffered "numerous slope failures" and mudflows in the past.

A company representative, consultant Don Duckworth, acknowledged that Midwest First Financial inherited a project that had "a history with the neighbors." So far, he said, the company has spent millions finishing the two houses.

Other consultants working with Midwest First Financial have asserted that little can be done to beautify — or even camouflage — the two houses.

Landscape designer Kathleen Ferguson said the slope beneath the Bulwer Drive houses was so steep that nothing larger than 1-gallon-size trees could be planted without construction of special retaining walls.

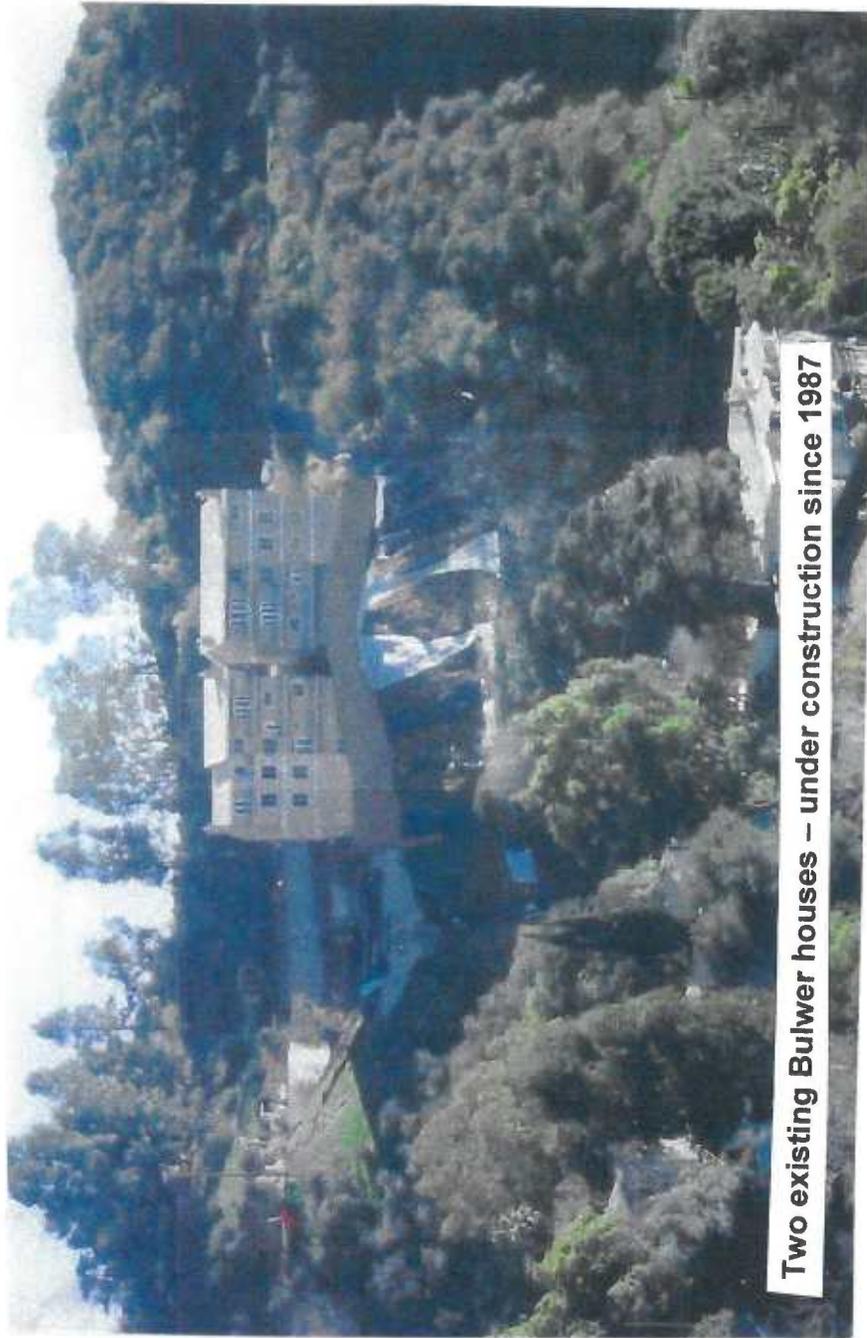
Project coordinator Chris Parker said such walls would cost \$250,000. "It's not feasible," he said.

Members of the Mulholland Scenic Parkway Design Review Board, which helps oversee mountaintop development in the area, argue that more needs to be done to help hide Fred and Ethel.

"How can anyone say they want to leave these houses this way? It's really atrocious," board Chairwoman Lynette Robe said.

Board member Alan Kishbaugh, who lives across the canyon from the Bulwer Drive site, said canyon residents realize that vacant land will be built upon.

"In 1987 I watched this happen," he said. "But in 2006 why are we repeating the same kind of nonsense? Have we learned nothing?"



Two existing Bulwer houses – under construction since 1987



Landslide that closed Laurel Canyon for 2 days directly under existing houses



Landslide 30' east of existing houses from 2005 storms



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December 21, 2005

Mr. Fred Karger
2745 Woodstock Road
Los Angeles, California 90046

Project No: 71612-00
Report No: 05-5700

Subject: **Second Party Geotechnical Review**
Proposed Bulwer Drive Widening and Realignment
Los Angeles, California

Regarding: 1. Coastline Geotechnical Consultants, Inc., 2005, "Geotechnical Engineering Investigation Report, Phase II – Proposed Street Improvements, Bulwer Drive, West of Woodstock Road, Los Angeles, CA", dated September 23, Project No. 930C-065.

2. Mountain Geology, Inc., 2005, "Report of Engineering Geologic Study, Proposed Street Improvements, Bulwer Drive West of Woodstock Road, City of Los Angeles, California", dated August 24, MGI Project No. JH4887.

3. City of Los Angeles, Department of General Services, Standards Division, 2004, "Bulwer Drive, West of Woodstock Road, Lab No. 140-5308, W.O. No. BD-001642", Geotechnical Services File: 01-136, dated February.

Dear Mr. Karger,

This correspondence presents the results of Geofirm's second party geotechnical review of the proposed Bulwer Drive widening and realignment adjacent to your property in the Mt. Olympus area of the City of Los Angeles, California. The geologic and engineering services provided for this review are focused upon the referenced geotechnical reports prepared in support of the project.

Site Description and Proposed Development

Bulwer Drive west of Woodstock Road consists of a partially improved one and one-half lane access road that traverses 850± feet in the upper-central portion of the hillside slope above Laurel Canyon Boulevard in the City of Los Angeles. The road follows a relatively consistent elevation of 1,100± feet as it curves along contour and topography. Minor steel pile retaining walls accommodate the grade change along portions of the upslope right of way, and a moderate height, temporary pile and I-beam wall system shores a portion of the drive on the downslope side. The current alignment of Bulwer Drive approximately follows a Public Roadway Right-of-

December 21, 2005

Project No: 71612-00

Report No: 05-5700

Page No: 2

Way indicated on the undated plans by Merit Civil Engineering, Inc. Known utilities within the road consist of a buried two-inch gas line, and overhead electric power and telephone cables.

The following description of the proposed widening and realignment is based on our review of the City of Los Angeles, Department of Public Works plan. However, discrepancies between the design depicted on the base map for the geological report and the design indicated on the City of Los Angeles plan are noted to exist. The sections of the Bulwer Drive that are currently proposed for widening can be characterized as the western 130± feet for a fire truck turn-around, and the eastern 500± feet of realignment and widening. The western turn-around will extend out of the Public Right-of-Way as much as 20± feet into adjacent property, and will require retaining walls of up to 30± feet in total height. The eastern realignment and widening is proposed to establish the road into the Public Right-of-Way, and will require the construction of ascending and descending retaining walls to a maximum height of 20+ feet.

A 220± feet section in the western-central portion of the alignment (Phase I) has been constructed to accommodate residential development. This sections design matches both the geologic base map and the City plan.

Summary of Subsurface Conditions

At relatively shallow depths, the alignment is underlain by siltstone bedrock of the Martinez Formation in the east, sandstone and conglomerate of the Chico (Chatsworth) Formation in the central portion, and granite bedrock in the west. These deposits are locally buried by fill, colluvium, and landslide/mudflow soil material. The area is mapped with numerous slope failures and mudflow scars, apparently related to prior and recent winter rains. Relatively shallow groundwater appears to be present within the hillside, typically confined within the bedrock deposits.

CONCLUSIONS

The following items need to be addressed by the project geotechnical consultants to adequately evaluate site conditions and the proposed construction. These items include:

1. Plates A, B and C of the Coastline Geotechnical Consultants, Inc. report are missing.
2. The geologic map and cross-sections do not depict the proposed design shown on the civil engineering plans (Merit Civil Engineering). The current civil design must be shown and analyzed in order to assess the design impact and recommendations.

3. The geologic structure shown on the consultant's map and cross-sections, with respect to the characterization of contacts between geologic units as faulted, is not consistent with published regional maps or City of Los Angeles DGS mapping. This discrepancy should be investigated and explained or revised.
4. Geologic structure was not considered in the slope stability analyses. The geologic report identifies foliations and shears in the granite, and bedding in Chico sandstone and Martinez siltstone. Additionally, possible siltstone or claystone interbeds in the Chico Formation below the explored depth should be evaluated. Wedge or block failure analyses should be performed utilizing shear strength parameters reflective of bedding, shear, and foliation structure, as appropriate.
5. It is noted that City of Los Angeles DGS shear strength data is also available, but was not utilized. The shear strength determined by DGS is significantly lower than that utilized by Coastline. All the available data should be evaluated and the final values utilized for each condition should be justified.
6. Stability analysis of upslope (uncertified?) fill is not provided. This is critical to the design of upslope retaining walls and the long term performance of the road.

The referenced reports are considered inadequate at this time to establish the stability of the slopes and the impact of the proposed construction on the hillside. Further geotechnical investigation, including subsurface exploration, sampling and laboratory testing, and stability analysis will be required to properly assess site conditions.

LIMITATIONS

This review has been conducted in accordance with generally accepted practice in the engineering geologic and soils engineering field. No warranty is offered or implied. Changes in proposed land use or development may require supplemental review or recommendations. Also, independent use of this report in any form cannot be approved unless specific written verification of the applicability is obtained from this firm.

December 21, 2005

Project No: 71612-00

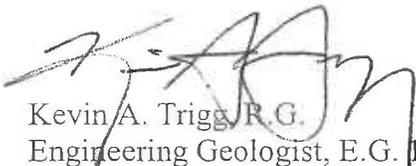
Report No: 05-5700

Page No: 4

Thank you for this opportunity to be of service. If you have any questions, please contact this office.

Respectfully submitted,

GEOFIRM



Kevin A. Trigg, R.G.
Engineering Geologist, E.G. 1619
Registration Expires 12-31-06



Hannes H. Richter, P.E.
Geotechnical Engineer, G.E. 717
Registration Expires 3-31-06
Date Signed: 12/22/05

KAT/HHR:fp

Distribution: (5) to Addressee

REFERENCES

1. Dibble Geological Foundation, 1991, "Geologic Map of the Hollywood and Van Nuys (South ½) Quadrangles, Los Angeles County, California", Map DF=31, first printing May.
2. Dibble Geological Foundation, 1991, "Geologic Map of the Beverly Hills and Burbank (South ½) Quadrangles, Los Angeles County, California", Map DF=30, first printing May.
3. Hoots, H. W., 1930, "Geology of the Eastern Part of the Santa Monica Mountains, Los Angeles County, California", United States Geological Survey, Professional Paper 165-C.
4. Association of Engineering Geologists, 1982, "Geologic Maps, Santa Monica Mountains, Los Angeles, California", compiled by the City of Los Angeles.