

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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August 7, 2019

City Council
Public Works and Gang Reduction Committee
City of Los Angeles
200 North Spring Street, Room 395
Los Angeles, California 90012

Request to Grant Appeal
CEQA Appeal of Environmental Determination for Tree Removal Permit
10034 Westwanda Drive – Benedict Canyon
Council File Number CF18-0916

Hon. Councilmembers:

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) mapped the subject property with precise GIS parcel lines as part of a distinct habitat block in its adopted the *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map* that was formally submitted to the Planning Director and Planning staff multiple times since 2017.

The extensive removal of protected trees in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone does not qualify for a Categorical Exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The suspicious grading quantity of just under the 1,000 cubic yard threshold in combination with the removal of oak and walnut woodland when far less damaging alternative development footprints further disqualifies the subject project as proposed for a Categorical Exemption. A project that relies on extensive, time-extended mitigation measures further bars this level of environmental review.

The entirety of the subject property is located within the Santa Monica Mountains Zone (established in Section 33105, California Public Resources Code), an environmental resource of critical concern. CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(a), which lists Exceptions to Categorical Exemptions makes it clear that that the subject project is ineligible for a Categorical Exemption due to its location:

“(a) Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located -- a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical

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concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.”

The Conservancy further urges your Committee to recommend full granting of the CEQA appeal to the City Council based on the poor public policy of approving most ecologically damaging projects on substandard streets when the City has full rights to ask for less damaging projects to the Public Commons.

Please direct any questions to my attention at 310-589-3200, ext. 128, or by e-mail at edelman@smmc.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Edelman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

PAUL EDELMAN
Deputy Director
Natural Resources and Planning