

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Gerry Hans  
**Date Submitted:** 04/22/2025 02:04 PM  
**Council File No:** 25-0006-S35  
**Comments for Public Posting:** Please see attached letter.



**Friends of Griffith Park**

P.O. Box 27573

Los Angeles, CA 90027-0573

friendsofgriffithpark.org

April 22, 2025

Councilmember Nithya Raman  
City of Los Angeles, Council District 4

Re: CF-25-0006-S35

Dear Councilmember Raman and fellow Councilmembers,

Friends of Griffith Park (FoGP) fully supports the above-referenced Council Motion which calls City Departments to improve protocols and policies to preemptively reduce fires and fire severity within Los Angeles' high risk areas.

Catastrophic urban fires, where homes burn, are often the result of a wind-driven weather event, as was the case in the Palisades and Eaton fires, where floating embers ignited fires up to six miles from origins. By their nature, homes are incredibly dry and prone to fire; when a residential community ignites, the main fuel becomes the homes themselves.

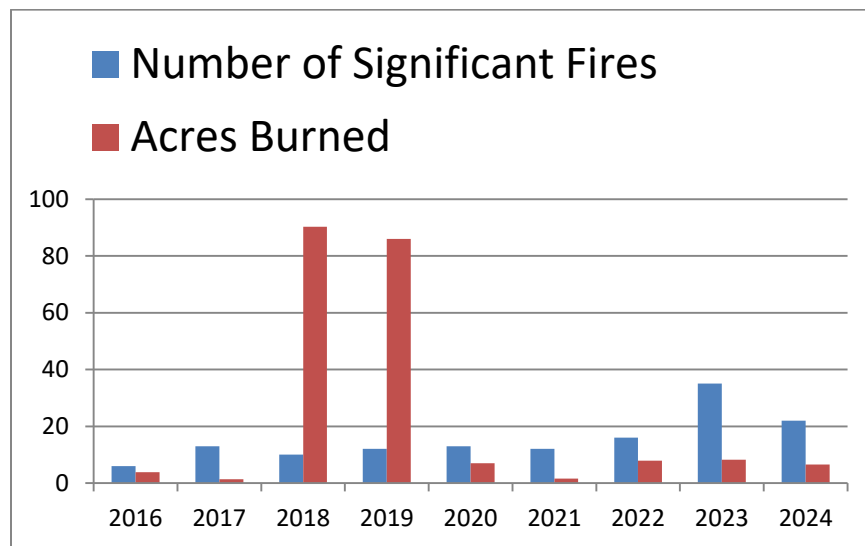
Trees and flora, on the other hand, hold varying degrees of moisture. They are not quick to catch fire. They can be our allies in upcoming fire events.

Hillside residential areas are experiencing a well-intentioned, but damaging, panic reaction including wholesale tree removal and severe trimming. Fire ecologists, who study urban fires, tell us that trees can provide benefits during wind-driven fires by both sheltering homes from wind and by literally catching/snuffing out embers. Public messaging regarding over-reacting should be considered to avert adverse impacts to the great biodiversity the City enjoys within its residential zones. Few press articles have covered the science of fires, which in some regards is not instinctive to the public's thinking.

**However, this comment letter largely focuses attention on fire ignition topics relevant to Griffith Park specifically. Alleviating ignitions within the Park, especially during wind events, can reduce risk to nearby residential communities.**

### **Griffith Park Fire Data**

City Park Rangers have kept data on park fires since mid-2016. FoGP has extracted the data for Griffith Park and learned that from 2016 to 2024, there were 128 "significant fires" in the park, an average of over 14.2 fires per year.\* A total of 212 acres burned, which is an average of 23.6 acres yearly. The average acreage is skewed, though, by three sizable fires, 80, 63, and 20 acres.\*\* Most fires are small and Park Rangers are usually the first responders to keep them small.



\* “Significant Fire” criteria was minimum 0.25 acres for years 2016-2021;  
 And minimum 0.125 acres for years 2022-2024  
 \*\* 2018: 63 acres and 20 acres; 2019: 80 acres

### Park Closures:

At a minimum, a Particularly Dangerous Situation (PDS) should automatically trigger the closure of Griffith Park, and trigger a closure in advance when predicted by the National Weather Service. If a Griffith Park closure metric can be identified and justified somewhere between Red Flag Alert (LAFD) and PDS, FoGP would likely support it as an even more proactive Park closure protocol.

While City code allows emergency City Park closures by RAP General Manager, Assistant General Managers, and Park Rangers, the public became extremely alarmed on January 6, 2025, long after the morning ignition of the Palisades Fire, when Griffith Park remained open the rest of that day. With the addition of a specific benchmark for closures, the public will know what to expect. No longer will there be a need for closure determination to be discussed; it will be mandatory protocol.

### Community Outreach Announcing Park Closures:

Getting the word out is critical for closing Griffith Park. On January 7, 2025, many park visitors simply did not know the park was officially closed, due to its size and porosity.

A checklist of community non-profits, neighborhood councils, and resident associations should be established in order to get messaging out to park patrons via email and social media. Pre-planning and rehearsal for the use of electronic billboards should be considered for park access points. Some are ideally located, already; others may need to be moved.

FoGP has established a relationship with hiking app, AllTrails, and now Park Rangers can issue hiker alerts directly using AllTrails’ Public Lands Program portal. AllTrails is widely used by hikers.

Emergency staffing should be considered. Contingency planning should include pulling employees temporarily from their regular duties for deployment at the many porous points into the Park.

### No Smoking Policy

After careful reflection, FoGP recommends a complete ban on smoking in the entirety of Griffith Park. No exceptions. Even where there is currently compliance, the variable policies cause confusion. Some “designated smoking areas” are not effectively enforced. And some park users question why the policy applies to them and not others.

Park Film Office policy allows film crews to smoke within “areas that are designated by the Fire Safety Officer or Park Film Monitor” when either is present. In practice, there is a well-evidenced compliance concern, even at high-risk interior areas, such as Mt. Hollywood Drive.

Golfers can be seen exiting the Wilson-Harding Clubhouse area and returning to the parking lots – surrounded by native habitat – with cigarettes in hand. The Greek Theatre, on the other hand, makes a relatively effective end-of-concert announcement prior to patrons leaving for the parking lots. The Greek venue allows smoking at an outdoor space within its confines. Even so, some concert-goers experience clouds of smoke, unwillingly.

The LA Zoo’s policy allows smoking **only** within its parking lot, and not inside the Zoo gates. Smokers are advised to receive hand stamps to smoke in the parking lot and re-enter without paying!

We fully support a simple **one-rule policy** for Griffith Park: no smoking anywhere in Griffith Park. Period.

### BBQ Grills

A Red Flag Alerts (LAFD) should trigger a halt in the use of all BBQ grills. While many park-style grills are available with a cover and locking feature, few are installed in Griffith Park. A transition to locking grills or a means to disable use of grills, along with effectively deploying “no grilling” signage on every grill, should be studied.

### Invasives and Fuel Modification

Management of the spread of invasive species in Griffith Park should become a priority issue and receive considerable funding, not only as it pertains to fire risk, but also as its threat to native flora displacement and ecological disturbance.

Eucalyptus trees elevate fire hazard and are detrimental to native flora. FoGP agrees with the post-2007 fire, *Griffith Park Wildlife Management Plan*, that eucalyptus trees not providing shading benefits for the public should be considered for removal. One such area where they have become naturalized in a remote location is Condor Canyon, where they added to the intensity of a 63-acre fire in 2018.

Annual brush clearance at 200 ft from structures is mandated by LAFD. There seems to be good adherence to this policy by RAP, and there is no evidence that would suggest a greater distance or a more complete clearance of trees/shrubs enhances the level of protection.

Clearance along trails and fire roads encourages invasive grasses and mustard, both more volatile than natives. The higher risk areas are where cars travel, not along hiking and equestrian trails. When do you ever see a hiker smoking?

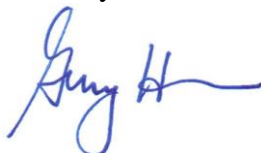
A nuanced approach to selective brush clearance along trails and fire roads should be considered, such as leaving high-value shrubs and trees untouched. This would include hollyleaf cherry, toyon, golden currant, fuchsia-flowered gooseberry, walnut, native bunch grasses, and others. Native annuals should also be spared where obvious, instead of encouraging non-native grasses.

### Involve Experts

It is our hope that City Departments report their recommendations in concert with knowledge gained by fire ecologists whose work validate facts based upon data and studies specific to Southern California fires. The Thomas and Woolsey fires, as well as the recent Eaton and Palisades fires, provide evidence that traditional thinking about tree and vegetation removal – and the idea that more brush clearance is better - should be overhauled. An expert in the field, Dr. Jon Keeley of the U.S. Geological Survey should be consulted, along with California Native Plant Society scientists and others.

In closing, our overall goal is to keep the communities surrounding Griffith Park safe, as well as assure the ecological sustainability of Griffith Park for all to enjoy. We hope our above thoughts and recommendations will help City Departments meet the goals of the Ordinance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gerry H.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gerry Hans, President

Cc: CD 4: Mehmet Berker, Jennifer Hull, Mashael Majid; RAP: Jimmy Kim, Matthew Rudnick, Brenda Aguirre, Stefanie Smith, Tracy James, GPAB

#### About Friends of Griffith Park:

*Friends of Griffith Park is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable group that promotes the enlightened stewardship of Griffith Park so it can survive and thrive well beyond the 21st century. FoGP is committed to ensuring that Griffith Park, a public park and Los Angeles' largest Historic-Cultural Monument, remain open, natural, and free to all citizens of Los Angeles.*