



October 30, 2018

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Mission Canyon Park Project – CEQA Comments  
Attention: Ms. Eimon Smith, CEQA Project Manager  
2202 South Figueroa Street, #621  
Los Angeles, California 90007  
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Dear Supervisor Kuehl and Executive Director Edmiston,

I am the President of Brentwood Hills Homeowners Association (Brentwood Hills), and am writing to comment upon the Mission Canyon Park project and the current Mitigated Negative Declaration.

By way of background, Brentwood Hills is a community of about 450 single-family homes along the western ridge of Mandeville Canyon. In the very midst of our community lie two of the most popular trailheads in Los Angeles County: the entrance to the 4-mile-long Westridge-Canyonback Fire Road at the top and end of Westridge Road, stretching up to San Vicente Mountain Park on the dirt portion of Mulholland Drive; and the Sullivan Canyon Trailhead at the end of Queensferry Road, which also reaches Dirt Mulholland via the Sullivan Ridge Fire Road.

Brentwood Hills strongly supports the Mission Canyon Park, which will be a wonderful and much-needed addition to the trail systems and wildlife habitat surrounding Mandeville Canyon. But it is critical that there be public access to all areas of the park (including the upper areas and fields in the park), connector trails to the Canyonback/Mountaingate ridge and trail system, and a variety of public uses in the park, including hiking, biking, and equestrian uses.

Mission Canyon Park lies at a critical juncture with the Westridge Fire Road, Dirt Mulholland, and the Canyonback/Mountaingate Ridge, where these trails can be connected by a short trail to the 18,000-acre Big Wild. It is important that the project include this trail connector, and we are willing to work with the County and MRCA to locate this trail connector in a logical and low-impact area.

In addition, we support an analysis of the entrance to the park on Sepulveda, to make sure the entrance is safe and easy to access from both the north and south-bound lanes of Sepulveda. We also support access to the Park from Mulholland, as long as there is dedicated off-street parking for actual park users and the parking area is patrolled to prevent parking by the institutional users of the many schools, places of worship and institutions along the Mulholland Corridor.

Brentwood Hills believes that public lands and parks are for the public to use, and we have welcomed the public to the Westridge-Canyonback trailhead on Westridge ever since we fought to protect that land in conjunction with the County, the MRCA, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the State Parks and the City of Los Angeles.

Every week, hundreds of people come from every part of the City into our community to go hiking, running, mountain-biking and picnicking, and to take in the panoramic views within these two parks. I myself am a long-time hiker and mountain-biker, and have regularly used these trails since we moved to the area in 1997. Residents of Brentwood Hills and members of the public from all over the City and County regularly come to Westridge-Canyonback Wilderness Park, and use our trailhead to access all areas of the parkland surrounding Mandeville Canyon, including San Vicente Mountain Park, Topanga State Park, the Canyonback trail on the Mountaingate ridge, and all of the interconnected trails and viewpoints.

How the Westridge Canyonback Wilderness Park came into existence is noteworthy and bears telling. In the 1980s and 90s, car-dealer magnate Bert Boeckmann (Galpin Ford) teamed up with a developer to build 17 mansions at the top of Westridge Road and beyond. There would be a guard-gate at the end of Westridge Road to keep out the public. Back then, Brentwood Hills mobilized to oppose this development (Brentwood County Estates, across the canyon, had just been launched a couple years earlier), and we joined with other HOA's and concerned organizations, including the Sierra Club and Save Our Mountains Inc. (SOMI) to fight the Boeckmann project.

After years of struggle, publicity and endless hearings at City Hall, it appeared a deal might finally be possible to purchase the land from Boeckmann for fair value, using a combination of State, County and City money. I vividly remember attending the final City Council hearing, where we hoped to obtain approval of the deal.

At that hearing, then-Councilwoman Laura Chick said, "This is not your private park. This is for all the public." She commented that it was very important that there be a parking area at the gateway to the park and that no-parking restrictions be lifted along the top of Westridge Road so the public would have easy access to this new public parkland, which was being acquired with public funds. Brentwood Hills and MRCA supported and agreed to the City's condition, and the deal was approved.

Brentwood Hills, SOMI and the Canyonback Alliance (and many others) have also fought the proposed Eastport Development on the rest of the Westridge Fire Road, the Castle & Cooke project on Canyonback ridge, and we are now working to protect MRCA open space and public easements from encroachment by the proposed Berggruen Institute. The efforts of the community have led to the protection of the many acres of open space surrounding the Westridge, Mandeville Canyon and Mountaingate communities.

There have from time to time been voices in our community who have spoken up to complain about the parking, traffic and other impacts created by public access to these parks, especially in the age of social media and meet-up hikes. While we are sensitive to those concerns – we are impacted by them too – our Board perceives a higher calling: public lands acquired with public money deserve public access. We in Brentwood Hills see ourselves as stewards of an important resource and treasure, for posterity. Our neighborhood is the beneficiary of easy access to this great public resource, and we welcome the public to enjoy it. In turn, the people that come to this trailhead are, by in large, courteous and helpful, and the constant use of the trails (coupled with SMMC Ranger patrols) helps dissuade miscreants and minimize the fire hazard that might otherwise be presented by people that would otherwise hop the fence and misuse the resource.

We have worked closely with the HOA's adjacent to the Mission Canyon Park on many other issues concerning the preservation and enhancement of our beautiful Big Wild open space and parkland, and we appreciate their help and support on those efforts. Everyone is in agreement that we do not want to see Mission Canyon developed into tract homes and condos. But there is a price to be paid for that. Based upon our experience with the Westridge-Canyonback and Sullivan Canyon trailheads, we believe the price for acquisition of public parkland is public access. And as an HOA, we believe we are the stewards for public access to this unique public resource.

Sincerely,



Michael R. Leslie  
President,  
Brentwood Hills Homeowners Association

Cc (via email):

Maria Chong-Castillo  
Paul Edelman  
Eric Edmunds  
Wendy Rosen  
Teri Redman Kahn