



CITIZENS FOR  
LOS ANGELES  
WILDLIFE

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July 26, 2021

Mayor Eric Garcetti  
Office of the Mayor  
City of Los Angeles  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 303  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

City Council  
City of Los Angeles  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 340  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Opposition to Director of Planning Bertoni's March 30, 2021, Implementation Guidance Memorandum

Honorable Mayor Garcetti and City Councilmembers:

Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife (CLAW) joins The Sierra Club Angeles Chapter, Center for Biological Diversity, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, The Hillside Federation, Friends of Griffith Park, LA City's own Community Forest Advisory Committee, and numerous residents and stakeholders who have taken positions opposing Director of Planning Vince Bertoni's March 30 Implementation Guidance Memorandum (Memo), which has eviscerated a 30 year procedure of public review and guidance by the Mulholland Design Review Board (MDRB). In opposing the unilateral action of Director Bertoni, **CLAW asks you to instruct Director Bertoni to rescind his Memo, which negatively impacts the Mulholland Scenic Parkway Specific Plan (MSPSP) process.**

This drastic change to the MDRB process by Director Bertoni (downplayed as an "interpretation" in his Memo) impacts five council districts and eliminates public participation and review for an area twice the size of Griffith Park - over 9,000 acres of mountain habitat. The 1992 City Council-adopted MSPSP protects one of LA's crown jewels - a parkway that is not only home to people but endemic plants and unique animals, including a mountain lion population currently receiving state protection under the California Endangered Species Act. With such unique ecological importance, the MSPSP needs more expert public oversight, not less. This process has been working effectively for three decades without any interpretation needed or asked for. After 30 years of functioning, the time for a planning director to provide "interpretation" is suspect.

The MDRB is a forum that welcomes participation by agencies such as Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, and with their participation, cooperative gains in the form of conservation easements have protected acres of wildlife habitat and corridors in the City's Santa Monica Mountains, including critical habitat of which more than 50% is now exempt from review under this Memo's policy change. As Chairperson of CLAW, I am keenly aware of the conservation importance of the MDRB, because senior city planners have proudly boasted about its successes to me in meetings, producing multiple maps of these easements with an exuberant appreciation for this special Specific Plan. The Planning Department is fully aware of the environmental and public benefits of this review process, and it is troubling that Planning has taken unprovoked steps to weaken it.

On June 25, 2021, the Hillside Federation filed a lawsuit against LA City and Director Bertoni for exceeding their authority. CLAW supports the lawsuit and notes that the Director, his staff, and all counsel tasked with advisement to the Memo should better understand their City Charter, their own code, and the gravity of playing it loose with the public's participation process.

Since March 30, 2021, when the ill-advised Bertoni Memo was drafted, CLAW has discussed this unilateral action with many city representatives and stakeholders. We now clearly understand the following, and hope everyone else in receipt of this letter takes heed:

- The Draft Wildlife and Ridgeline Protection Ordinances have not been adopted, are not environmental resources, and should not be used as reasons to justify the immediate evisceration of over 50% of MDRB oversight. A recent presentation by planners for the Draft Wildlife Ordinance reiterated that future regulations are meant to be complementary to, and not a replacement for, other planning tools such as MDRB public oversight.
- The Director's action abruptly eliminated review, and moved oversight from appointed experts to environmentally unfriendly, developer-biased Planning Staff, who are incapable and without expertise to extract functioning conservation easements for habitat connectivity and natural resource protection.
- The MDRB process should not be considered an issue of funding or capacity. Costs for all hillside projects (including staffing) have been addressed, as City Council has directed full cost recovery for all projects in hillsides. Furthermore, it is nonsensical for MDRB Planning Staff to claim they have too many projects to oversee, when there is a no-cost, volunteer review board of experts ready to be tasked with that work.
- For over 30 years, MDRB oversight has provided much needed baseline review for both the inner and outer corridors of the MSPSP. This public process is so important to the constituents of the City - important enough for them to sue over it.

These items provide a great rationale for Mayor Garcetti to give clear direction to Director Bertoni to rescind his Memo. Unfortunately, while we have heard much rhetoric from the Mayor's Office concerning the protection of natural resources, we have seen little meaningful action in this matter. Likewise, Councilmembers, we ask that you instruct Director Bertoni to rescind his Memo as well. We need the Mayor and the City Council to restore the voice of the public. Time is of the essence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Tucci', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tony Tucci, Chair

*CLAW is a public benefit non-profit 501(c)(3) environmental organization that works to protect and restore the environments of wildlife of Los Angeles and California from dwindling open spaces. Our mission is to promote, educate and protect the fundamental importance of wildlife, wildlife habitats and wildlife corridors everywhere.*