



Friends of Griffith Park

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friendsofgriffithpark.org

July 22, 2021

Mayor Eric Garcetti
Office of the Mayor
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, Ca 90012

Los Angeles City Council

Re: Opposition to Planning Director’s March 30, 2021 Memorandum Exempting “Non-Visible” projects in the Mulholland Scenic Parkway from Design Review Board Procedures

Honorable Mayor and City Council:

Friends of Griffith Park is greatly concerned about the impact that the Planning Director’s Memorandum regarding the change of purview the Mulholland Design Review Board (MDRB) will have on habitat and wildlife in the Santa Monica Mountains, including Griffith Park. The Director’s unilateral policy change to the MDRB after three decades of successful operation is baffling and will have a radical negative impact.

The MDRB is a group of professional architects and landscape architects who volunteer their time to review all projects in both the Inner Corridor and the Outer Corridor of the Mulholland Scenic Parkway. These two corridors were deliberately and specifically established by City Council in 1992 to preserve and protect the habitat and viewshed along scenic Mulholland Drive. Such a Specific Plan, created by City Council, cannot be arbitrarily diminished by the Director of Planning. The Director’s recent Memorandum completely upends the purpose of the original document.

The MDRB has worked creatively with builders to create better projects that have preserved wildlife connectivity across the Santa Monica Mountains. Thanks to their efforts now-world famous mountain lion P-22 was able to make his way – unseen – from west of the 405 freeway, across the Hollywood Freeway and into Griffith Park. This was an amazing feat. He could not have made such a journey without the wildlife corridors and easements negotiated by the MDRB.

The MDRB also addresses other issues related to the success of wildlife corridors such as light pollution. They assist applicants in designing low level lighting that still provides for public safety. Low level lighting directed downward is a step in the right direction toward the Dark Skies initiative.

These wildlife corridors benefit not only exotic animals like mountain lions but all of the creatures whose native habit we humans have invaded: mule deer, raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, and the wrongly maligned coyote. They are all part of Mother Nature's system of balance. From an ecological perspective, connectivity is absolutely essential for genetic health of local populations of terrestrial species.

The hearing before the MDRB also gives the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) the opportunity to meet with builders to discuss with them ways to make their project more conservation-friendly. The MRCA is frequently able to work with the property owner to get a wildlife easement; this benefits the animals, the City, and the property owner. It is a true win-win. If projects were not required to go through the MDRB process, these easements would never be created. It would be a loss for all.

The Santa Monica Mountains are a unique resource for the City of Los Angeles. How many cities can boast that they have a mountain range running through the middle of their city? It is a tremendous asset. Mulholland Drive is celebrated in song and art. Renown artist David Hockney painted it. Tourists flock to it. Residents pay prime prices for living in the beauty of the Santa Monicas. If it were not for the diligence of the MDRB, the Mulholland Scenic Parkway would be just another concrete jungle.

Friends of Griffith Park strongly urges you to rescind the Planning Director's Memorandum and re-establish the integrity of the Mulholland Design Review Board. Los Angeles can continue to be a great city if it recognizes and respects the unique qualities and attributes of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Sincerely,

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

President

Cc: Vince Bertoni, Andrea Conant, Stefanie Smith, GPAB, Helene Rotolo, Sarah Tanberg, MRCA, Andy Shrader

About Friends of Griffith Park:

Friends of Griffith Park (FoGP) is a California non-profit 501(c) (3) dedicated to preserving and protecting Griffith Park's natural habitat, biodiversity, and historic features, for current and future generations. 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.