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**Los Angeles City Planning Dept.
Maya E. Zaitzevsky
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012**

**ENVIRONMENTAL
UNIT**

**RE: ENV-2002-2481-EIR; SCH#2002091018
Canyon Hills Project-DEIR Comments**

Dear Ms. Zaitzevsky:

I have been a resident of the Tujunga Valley for over 13 years now, first in Lake View Terrace and for the past 3 years in the Verdugo Mountains of Tujunga. I work as an independent television producer with a special interest in documentaries. Many years ago, after falling in love with this community, I began to study and research the history and development of the Sunland and Tujunga areas for an eventual documentary which I continue to work on to this day. What I discovered was a community with a very special uniqueness since the beginnings of its conception. I feel that the research that I have done as well as many years of residency put me in a position to speak with authority to the numerous inaccuracies and omissions in the Canyon Hills DEIR. It is my expert opinion that Whitebird must reissue the DEIR in light of its gross inadequacy in correctly predicting the cumulative environmental impacts of the Canyon Hills Project.

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1) LAND USE AND COMMUNITY UNIQUENESS

First and foremost, the most glaring omission, in my opinion, is the complete and utter disregard of the fact that the people of this area have fought for decades to maintain the unique and special lifestyle I previously spoke of. This is a community of misfits of sorts; it's a place that draws the kind of people who, while intensely loving their city of the angels, just can't breathe in a Westwood, Long Beach, or Encino. They need their open spaces and their horses and their wildlife to survive! For over a hundred years now these Mountains have been a beacon for such souls to come and settle and raise their families. From the first moments that development threatened this way of life the fight was on. Many decades later we find ourselves with a Scenic Preservation Specific Plan and a Community Land Use Plan that it *seems* would send a very clear message to all those that would ponder excessive development here. Just when you may begin to think that the misfits have won their fight they're confronted with Whitebird's Canyon Hills Project. It is clear to me that the current project plan flies in the face of everything this community has ever stood for and is! I believe it is a flagrant insult to all those who have toiled for so many years in effort to protect this communities way of life. Every rule, every zoning restriction, every requirement now in place should be enforced to its full extent and NO LESS! This, in my expert opinion, is the only way to respect this community and its spirit. I myself moved to Los Angeles in 1983 from a rural equestrian town in Southern Michigan. After many years of living in and around Hollywood I began to contemplate moving back home, then I found Sunland/Tujunga. As I stated earlier I fell madly in love with this community and its people. I rented a house in the area and I felt at home.

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In my further pursuit of happiness I immediately began to save for a down payment and I searched for years among the hills of the Verdugos for a home that I could call my own. I was well aware (and found it somewhat miraculous) that some very insightful people had come before me and had had the foresight to protect these mountains from overdevelopment. With the knowledge and comfort that the adjacent hills were protected by the words "SHALL BE VERY LOW DENSITY" in the Specific Land Use Plan, I put down my life's savings and purchased my current home. I have heard grumbling surrounding the subject of Whitebirds land owner rights and expectations. Well as far as I know those rights go both ways and the adjacent land owners have an extremely valid expectation that the City of Los Angeles will hold Whitebird to the limited number of homes allowed per the existing Slope Density Formulas, Hillside Ordinances, building codes and all other current Plan zoning. Whitebird has requested zone changes and while they have the right to develop their land responsibly this DEIR does not specify why any zoning regulations, carefully and thoughtfully put in place to protect this unique and special place in our city from environmentally harmful development, should be varied for any particular group or individual, and for this project specifically. The "Objectives" of this project do not substitute as reasons why this project should be developed beyond the regulations which apply to the surrounding community.

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2) FLORA & FAUNA

Living in this community for so many years has giving me the opportunity to observe a great variety of flora and fauna, it is one of the extremely unique and wonderful aspects of life in the Verdugo Mountains. It's a living classroom or museum of sorts, a priceless commodity, an undeniable resource for the residents of the entire City of Los Angeles to commune with nature, right on their own back porch. With the Canyon Hills Project being proposed in what I would call the heart of these Verdugos, it is my educated assumption that much of the extraordinary wildlife will ostensibly be eradicated from this area given the current irresponsible plans for development. The DEIR fails to identify this eventuality for several reasons. The primary reason the environmental impacts to the areas wildlife is severely underestimated in the DEIR is because their expert's evaluation methods were fundamentally flawed. The environment here goes through dramatic changes with both the seasons and the variations in rainfall and weather in general. It is clear from the DEIR that very little time was spent in the field, not nearly enough for viable estimations of both wildlife present and wildlife movements in what I am certain is an active wildlife migration corridor. With many examples and stories of Deer and Mountain Lion sightings in the project area and with my own personal sighting of a Cougar making her way under the Foothill overpass of Little Tujunga Wash into the Verdugos Hills, it is clear to me that this wildlife corridor is alive and well and should be preserved at all costs. My many years of observation of local wildlife during periods of both draught and high precipitation as well as regular exposure to both Nocturnal and Diurnal animal activities have led me to believe that the DEIR grossly underestimates not only the numbers of expected species in the project area, but more importantly the existence of many other species of both plants and animals claimed not to exist in the project area, some endangered. This defect to the DEIR is reason enough to require further study of this very delicate but vibrant zoo, aviary, and botanical garden.

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The DEIR also does not address:

-The inevitable introduction of non-native invasive plants and their overtaking natural habitat

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-Increased predation by household pets and the devastating impact to the wildlife food chain, especially the Owl and Hawk populations.

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-Incompatibility of a gated community and its likely residents with the likes of Bobcats, Cougars, and Coyotes.

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-Finally the DEIR states that Whitebird will follow regulations when removing Oak trees by replacing them as required but it seems that the reintroduced trees will be placed in areas which will only enhance the intended developed areas of the project site and not where they need to be in the remaining open undeveloped areas as to replace the destroyed nesting sites of innumerable birds and small animals. This is not in line with the true intentions of the Oak Tree removal regulations.

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TRAFFIC

Traffic is probably the number one problem facing all residents of Los Angeles these days. I think that just being a resident here is enough to claim expert status on the negative effects of extensive traffic on the quality of our lives. Again Sunland/Tujunga stands out as an exception to the general rule. Although I have seen a great increase in traffic along our main thoroughfare of Foothill Blvd. over the past 13 years, it's still one of the few major streets in the entire city that you can drive down at rush hour and never wait more than one cycle to get through any traffic light. Looking at the current status of traffic in Los Angeles it's sometimes hard to believe that planning is actually taking place at all. The DEIR is completely fails to examine any of the potential traffic hazards that the Canyon Hills Project presents to our community.

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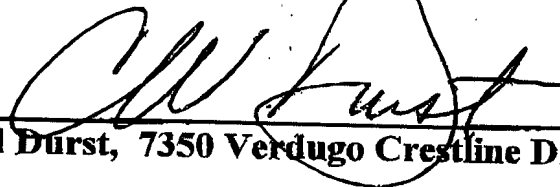
The increased traffic as a result of the currently planned development is in my opinion far beyond anything the existing roadways can handle safely. Specifically the potentially deadly increase of traffic on Tujunga Canyon Blvd.

The recently built commercial development at the South-East corner of Foothill and Tujunga Cyn. included a driveway onto Tujunga Cyn. Blvd. just south of the main intersection. It is currently nearly impossible to use this exit safely because of a blind curve directly adjacent to the exit driveway. This is the exact location that I believe will be most problematic with the overly increased traffic generated by the currently proposed Canyon Hills Plan. It is my educated contention that the surrounding roadways will be significantly and adversely affected throughout the entire communities of Sunland/Tujunga and La Crescenta. The DEIR falls very short of any sort of comprehensive study into the real effects to quality of life for the residents of these communities as well as the inherent dangers therein. These traffic issues are exasperated by the intention to build 288 units which has been estimated to be over 330% of the currently allowed unit density for this project area. Again, I believe it is imperative that Whitebird have their consultant redo this EIR simply because it is inadequate and seriously understates the impact of this development on the community. I have pointed out only deficiencies that I have personal knowledge of and these alone warrant reexamination. Combined with the overall response from the community it would seem overwhelmingly obvious that further study must be conducted.

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Thank you very much for your thoughtfulness and consideration,



Craig Ward Durst, 7350 Verdugo Crestline Dr., Tujunga, CA 91042