

December 19, 2003

Maya Zaitzevsky, Project Coordinator
LA City Planning Dept.
200 N. Spring Street, Room 763
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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CITY OF LOS ANGELES
DEC 22 2003
ENVIRONMENTAL
UNIT

Re. Canyon Hills Draft EIR

Dear Ms. Zaitzevsky,

We want to begin by stating that we believe a property owner has the right to build on their property-- however, that right assumes that any building would be accomplished in accordance with existing guidelines. **Our concerns over the proposed Canyon Hills Development is that the existing guidelines (Community Plan) are clearly not being adhered to and the proposed development project is well beyond the scale that would be in accordance with the best interests of the neighboring community.**

We believe the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Canyon Hills Project grossly underestimates the impact that a development of this nature will have on the neighboring communities and our chosen semi-rural lifestyle.

There are several key impacts from the proposed Canyon Hills project which have been understated in the DEIR including:

- Traffic and Overcrowding**
- Visual Impacts**
- Rural Quality of Life and Equestrian Issues**
- Public Safety & Services**
- Noise**

As a citizen expert, resident, and user of the area to be impacted, I believe I am qualified to address these issues.

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Traffic and Overcrowding

Traffic: We have lived in Tujunga, for 11 years and have been visiting friends and relatives in the immediate area since 1968. The changes that have occurred in the area over that period have been dramatic, yielding increased population, increased crowding and traffic, and overall, reducing the quality of life that our foothills area once enjoyed. The proposed Canyon Hills project would only contribute further to that decline.

For several of those years I traveled up and down La Tuna Cyn Rd. twice daily in my drive to and from work. **The traffic increased noticeably, over that period, on the stretch of road that will be directly impacted by the Canyon Hills project: La Tuna Cyn Rd. from Sunland Blvd., and specifically at the point where the La Tuna Cyn off-ramp of the 210 Fwy meets La Tuna Cyn Blvd. Now, I travel daily on Lowell and the stretch of Tujunga Cyn. Blvd. from the Verdugo Hills Golf up to Foothill Blvd. Traffic is congested morning and evening, regardless of the time I depart and return. The widening of sections has really not impacted the traffic load, which is already significant; I cannot believe that the potential added traffic derived from the proposed 280+ homes (stated as approximate-- which really translates that there may be more than that number) will not have further significant impact on an already crowded**

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traffic situation. I believe this fact is either clearly and deliberately understated in the DEIR or has been vastly under-estimated out of failure to significantly observe traffic patterns in the impacted areas. Either way, it bears reevaluation and is grounds for redoing the DEIR.

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My husband currently chooses to utilize the Sunland Blvd. on and off-ramps of the 210 Fwy, driving up congested Foothill Blvd. on his daily route to and from work in the Valley. Despite the pleasure he derives from viewing the panorama of open hillsides and the sense of being in the country, on the stretch of 210 Fwy between the Sunland Blvd. off-ramp and the Lowell off-ramp, he chooses to drive busy Foothill Blvd. to avoid the delay and danger associated with the La Tuna Cyn. off-ramp --which is already dangerous due to the speeds and volume of traffic flowing on La Tuna Cyn Rd, and the excessive waits to make the needed left turn to proceed East on La Tuna Cyn Blvd., and then the 2-lane stretch of Tujunga Cyn. Blvd. that must be traveled to get back up to Foothill Blvd.

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People living near the Convalescent Center and the golf course cannot now easily get out of their driveways. One cannot imagine how they will ever ingress/egress once the additional projected traffic from Canyon Hills materializes. And of course the DEIR has minimized the traffic congestion and delays on major thoroughfares that will be the result of construction traffic (heavy equipment, dump trucks, etc.) on the proposed project-- over the course of the several years that this development will take to be built!

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We cannot even imagine the nightmare the traffic situation would become on La Tuna Cyn. Rd. with the addition of the Canyon Hills project and the projected number of people who will inhabit those homes on both sides of the freeway! And the number of additional ingress and egress trips generated by outside service providers who will be needed for maintaining those homes-- the maids, gardeners, pool cleaning services, trash collectors, etc. that accompany the maintenance of residences of the significant proportions proposed.

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Even installing a traffic signal at the La Tuna Cyn Rd. off-ramp location would be ineffective as the rest of La Tuna Cyn Blvd. is sorely inadequate to handle the additional traffic that would be generated by the project. In some places the road is already dangerous due to the nature of the curves, and the additional volume of traffic generated by the proposed project would certainly result in overcrowding at best, and potentially, could turn La Tuna Cyn. Rd. into a parking lot at peak traffic times.

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And of course the increased traffic would have a significant impact on the homes in that community, due to the noise and pollution created by such volume. Homeowners on La Tuna Cyn. will effectively be living on a major highway--with 4 lanes of bumper to bumper traffic, noise, and pollution, from pre-dawn till after dusk! And I'm not even addressing the details of deterioration of quality of life for the horse owners and their animals who currently populate the La Tuna Cyn and Shadow Hills areas. But it's certain that the equestrians and horses who currently utilize the trails at the western end of La Tuna Cyn. Rd. (who we enjoy watching) will be kept from doing so by the traffic volume and noise levels. It would be suicide to try to ride your horse under those conditions!

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Overcrowding: The residents of this area are painfully aware that there are not currently enough business establishments to serve the existing community. With the latest Seven Hills development it became obvious that there are not enough markets and other retail and business establishments in the immediate area to service the existing population.

It's a 20-minute trip on surface streets through mostly residential neighborhoods just to get to the market! **The parking lots of the few grocery stores are full at peak after-work hours and on weekends. The number of restaurants in the area is seriously limited. There are no movie theatres or other entertainment outlets in the immediate neighborhood. And there is very little available property on which to expand these types of needed establishments.** Residents must and will continue to go to drive to Glendale, Burbank, or Pasadena to enjoy a night on the town!

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And by simply adding more population— the residents of the proposed 280+ homes, the City of Los Angeles will get some additional property tax and other service dollars, but realize no gain from the expenditures of that population base— who will all be spending their money elsewhere! Not a bright move for the City of Angels...

Visual Impacts / Noise

The La Tuna Cyn, Sunland / Tujunga area is a bedroom community nestled in the foothills. Homes have traditionally been on the smaller side, in nice tree-shaded communities. The proposed Canyon Hills project goes totally against that semi-rural nature supported by the Community Plan for the impacted area, as evidenced by the variances it is requesting.

The developer is seeking a General Plan Amendment and numerous zone changes in order to increase the density of the project from what is currently permitted. That in itself clearly indicates they know how seriously the development will visually impact the area! Only 87 homes would be supported by the existing community plan, but the proposal is for developing 280+ homes (approx...) on the same acreage— some of which exceed 4,000 sq. feet, and many of which would be perched near the ridgelines, with some just a mere 10' apart, and many others on tiny 9,000 sq. ft lots! That density will have a major visual impact on the neighboring community— yet it is given inadequate attention in the DEIR.

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This proposed development clearly changes the visual impact of the community and shows disdain for the desires of the local population who have chosen to live in these narrow valleys ringed with mountains. The undeveloped hillsides surrounding us are one of the major attractions of the area! Their loss to development, characterized by graded hillsides and slopes and homes of enormous proportions, will have significant adverse impacts on the quality of life in the surrounding area.

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The DEIR for Canyon Hills Project does not adequately address the loss of visual resources that provide the very atmosphere this area is noted for. The depiction of how and where the proposed homes will be located is purposely vague. No mention is made of how significantly the proposed development will impact the urban wilderness that provides the visual backdrop and recreational areas for the neighboring communities. And the statements

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concerning the mitigation for the hundreds of oak trees that will be removed is ridiculous: **Planting acorns will not replace the stately trees for generations!** As the DEIR acquiesces: "over the short term (i.e. 10 to 20 years) it is anticipated that impacts to coast live oaks *would remain significant with implementation of mitigation measures.*"

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And the questions of wildlife that populates the hills, as addressed by the DEIR is woefully inadequate. **Wildlife encounters are currently frequent in the foothill communities. Coyotes, skunks, deer, and even mountain lions, as well as hawks and other birds and rodents, etc. inhabit the proposed development area in numbers far greater than those mentioned in the EIR.** On any given evening the coyotes are heard and often seen, in packs numbering greater than 5, and sometimes the nighttime din is truly awesome! Encounters with skunks are also well known to the community. With the construction of the proposed development the wildlife will have no alternative but to migrate into the adjacent currently populated neighborhoods, further increasing the risk of human / animal encounters and seriously impacting the fate of domesticated animal pets kept by area residents. We have firsthand knowledge that coyotes are currently a major problem in the Crystal View area and that problem will only be compounded by the construction of the Canyon Hills project.

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And despite the fact that Pages 3-6 of the Community Plan set precedent for the horse keeping nature of the community, **the developers of Canyon Hills promise equestrian amenities but the plan doesn't even provide enough space for two horse trailers to turn around in their 3 acre proposed "equestrian park."** The developers also would have us believe that the purchasers of the 4,000 sq.ft. multi-million dollar monuments (so vaguely depicted in the graphics on their web site) will be horse people. Not likely! The "horse people" who can afford those types of homes already live in La Canada Flintridge, and it is not likely that they would choose to relocate to another hilltop community just a stones throw away. **The homes in this pricey gated community will not be owned by horse people, nor by the locals... thereby irreparably changing the nature of the adjacent hillside communities.**

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And finally, what will the visual impact be of the hundreds of dump trucks and graders and other heavy equipment that will be crawling over and through our beloved hillsides and canyons during the years of construction that are required for a development of this size and nature? The DEIR states "*there would not be a significant noise impact (no visual impact is mentioned) from the slight construction-related truck volume increase on La Tuna Canyon Road.*" Excuse me... but where are those trucks and other heavy equipment going to be driving if not on La Tuna Cyn Rd? **You cannot build 280+ homes without a convoy of heavy equipment creating noise and visual impact during the hours of 7AM to 9pm!** Ensuring mufflers and engine covers on vehicles weighing several tons, is certainly not an effective method of mitigating the noise on neighboring residences!

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Public Safety and Services

The issue of public safety and services is also not adequately addressed in the DEIR.

Schools are said to be able to accept the proposed number of children. Yet teachers at several local schools have differing opinions. (And this is probably irrelevant anyway as people who can afford the price of the proposed homes can afford the price of private schools elsewhere). However, wherever the schools are located, the impact on local traffic by increased congestion will be felt by the surrounding communities.

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Police, fire, and paramedic services are already in short supply as residents will attest. Response time is already currently inadequate and significantly above the norm for the City of Los Angeles. Adding another significant development, separated by a freeway and accessible via only 2 or 3 ingress/egress points, is not going to reduce that emergency response time! And despite the fact that we are talking hillside canyon homes, The DEIR calls for no extraordinary mitigations, only those required under the standard laws. Yes, fire station #74 may be within the requisite distance, but the response time is the crucial factor, not distance... and with the overcrowded traffic conditions that will be generated by the proposed project, we are seriously concerned by the lack of attention paid to this critical issue. With the recent firestorms still fresh in our minds, this issue is one left distressingly unanswered by the DEIR. When fires are raging, the major thoroughfares already become a parking lot for emergency equipment... and adding a new, massive development in the hills will only increase the need for more equipment and add to the problem of appropriate response time.

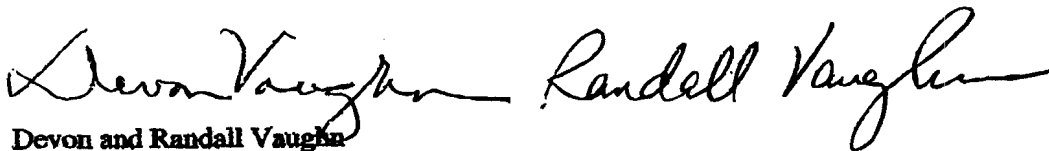
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In summary, we believe the current EIR is inadequate because it seriously underestimates the impact that the proposed Canyon Hills development and its alternatives B,C, D, and E, will have on the neighboring communities, and urge the Planning Dept. to have the consultant redo the EIR and have the City of Los Angeles re-release the EIR when the deficiencies are addressed. To advance the current DEIR would be a travesty.

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Further, we are of the opinion that only Alternative A, whereby the project would not be constructed and the property would remain in its current condition, is in the best interest of the neighboring communities.

Sincerely,



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