

Los Angeles Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Hearing
October 3, 2005
re: "Canyon Hills"

In Room 350 of City Hall, with standing room only, the latest decision in the Canyon Hills development proposal was reached. The final decision will be before the Full City Council soon (date and time to be confirmed).

The Decision:

Appeals to the February 2005 Planning Commission decision were partially denied, and partially granted when the PLUM Committee unanimously approved a modified project granting the General Plan Amendment and Zone Changes. Approved and sent to the full City Council was a project consisting of 221 dwelling units all North of the 210 Freeway on what is known as "Site A". The land South of the 210 Freeway, known as "Site B" is offered to the SMMC as a donation. Still pending is a final disposition regarding the "open space" on the Northern "Site A". Some MAY be donated to the SMMC and some may be required to have what is known as a "conservation easement" placed on the land. Deferment of this aspect of the decision was recommended by PLUM member Weiss.

The Process:

Appellants argued several reasons why the methods used in applying the Slope Density ordinance by the city and the developer were improper, perhaps even constituting a fraudulent manipulation of the ordinance in an effort to justify the project decisions. Although speaking time was extremely limited, numerous community members took the opportunity to reiterate concerns over a variety of issues including the internal workings of the Department of City Planning, potential city-wide impact on other hillside communities regarding similar decisions involving slope density, as well as local concerns over safety, sound walls, loss of equestrian lifestyle and rural character of the foothill communities, and an apparent loophole in the proposed "development agreement" between the City and the developer which would seem to enable lots to be sold off individually or in small groups without being subject to the conditions of the agreement. Others rose to speak in support of the project, citing the need for housing and their satisfaction with open space preservation as it stands.

Councilmember Greuel offered her recommendation to the PLUM members as follows: Ms. Greuel reiterated her belief that if this project were denied, the entire 887 acre site would be developed and then

Los Angeles Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Hearing
October 3, 2005
re: "Canyon Hills"

further sub-divided. She recalled her statement to the City Planning Commission in February, in which she stated that the original proposal of the 280 houses didn't go far enough to preserve open space, and that "we could do better". Ms. Greuel indicated "we can still do better", proposing the following conditions that, if agreed upon by the developer, would secure her support for the project; but also noted that her support was contingent upon acceptance of all elements of her proposal:

1. That the developer willingly donate/dedicate the entire Site B property to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC).
2. That the developer willingly donate/dedicate open space areas on the North to the SMMC; and other open space not dedicated would be required to have a "conservation easement" placed on the land for the benefit of the public (a map was presented to the PLUM members to illustrate the areas)
3. Eliminating or relocating 9 dwelling units which had the most visual impact (south side of Site A visible from the Fwy and/or La Tuna Cyn Road).

Ms. Greuel indicated that this would all result in 85% of the project being held as open space in perpetuity. In her remarks, Ms. Greuel also indicated that the arguments and challenges to the interpretation of the Slope Density ordinance have also captured her attention, as have the related concerns about the impact of this project decision on future decisions in hillside developments. Citing the considerable variation in results from different calculation methods and interpretations, Ms. Greuel called the Slope Density Ordinance "flawed" and vowed to correct it by way of a motion she intends to introduce soon to City Council, while noting that any such possible amendment or revision will not affect the Canyon Hills project.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy representative, Joe Edmiston, spoke on behalf of the agency, indicating that a true "public benefit" of granting the additional dwelling units [over and above the slope density calculations] would only be realized if there was also a requirement for the developer to adequately fund the maintenance of the equestrian park and the public trails, and to require all the open space be donated in perpetuity, instead of a conservation easement.

The Developer agreed to dedicate the remaining land in Site B to the SMMC, and to remove the 9 units with the most visual impact, however, did not directly address the dedication of the open space on Site A North of the 210 Freeway at this time.