

Report to: Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council

Re: Canyon Hills

February 9, 2005

1. On February 24, 2005, the next phase of public hearings will be conducted regarding the project known as "Canyon Hills" on La Tuna Canyon Drive. The hearing will be at the Marvin Braude Building, First Floor Conf Rm, 6262 Van Nuys Blvd after 8:30 a.m.
2. Planning deputy Dale Thrush has been conducting a series of Community Advisory meetings comprised of some of the more active community members. In general, the hope seems to be that an accord can be reached before the tough choices must be made by the City Planning Commission and City Council.
3. Councilmember Wendy Greuel's position on the project has been conveyed most recently by Dale Thrush, Planning Deputy as follows:

Wendy's principal goal is to permanently preserve as much open space as possible.

* She does not support the project, as proposed, because it doesn't have enough open space and because many of its lots are too visible from scenic corridors.

* She does not support any project that would subdivide the entire property into ranchettes because that approach preserves no open space, leads to further subdivision of the property in the future and creates infrastructure throughout the property, making possible the development of adjoining properties.

* She is working with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, private conservation groups and the developer to find ways to increase open space, preserve the site's most important environmental features and reduce the project's visibility.

4. On December 9, 2004, a public hearing was held at the Sunland-Tujunga municipal building. There was a large turnout of persons both in favor and opposed to the project as proposed. It was a joint hearing by the Deputy Advisory Agency ("DAA") for the "subdivision" vesting tentative tract map, and a Hearing Officer for the "general plan amendment" and "zone change" recommendation. (Note: A general plan amendment would be required to be approved by the City Council in order to change the existing designations for most of the subject property to enable

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zones with density greater than that for RE-40). The Canyon Hills project involves decisions on essentially two "parallel tracks". One is a subdivision, and the other is a request for a general plan amendment and zone change. Most of the project property is currently subject to the "Slope Density Ordinance", however, the proposed new land use designations would remove the applicability of the "Slope Density Ordinance" to the project. The Slope Density Ordinance has been described as the most limiting factor for density. Other related actions include "Project Permit Compliance" (review for compliance with the "Specific Plan" aka "Scenic Plan"), and "Site Plan Review".

5. The project applicant has said that in exchange for clustering, the amendment is sought for increased density [over that which would have been permitted under the existing zones and slope density ordinance]. The application therefore did not originally include a slope density calculation, although one such calculation, of 87 homes was discussed in the Environmental Impact Report ("EIR"). However, the City Planning department apparently required the applicant to submit a slope density calculation after circulation of the EIR and the results were announced at the public hearing on December 9, 2004. The number announced at that time was 175.
6. On January 4, 2005, the DAA published a decision, with an appeal period expiring January 14, 2005, approving a 175 lot subdivision over the entire acreage, with no zone change, which preserves the predominant A-1 zoning of the subject property (5 acre lots). This generally represents the DAA's interpretation of a subdivision under the existing regulations, commonly referred to as "by right", although the existing land use designation would support a zone change from A-1 to RE-40 and the community plan and "Scenic Plan" provides for clustering. The practical effect of a change from A-1 to RE-40 would be roughly from 5-acre to just under 1-acre lots. Although no specific discussion of the application of "clustering" as provided in the Community Plan was found in the DAA's decision, notable points in the DAA decision include item 73 which provides for a "public discussion meeting" to finalize certain design elements, including:
 - a. Approximate location of proposed residential structures and the limits of the building pads for the proposed residential structures.

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- b. Proposed Finish Floor Elevation (FFE) for each residence; and maximum residence height.
- c. Location of Prominent Ridgelines and Prominent Ridgeline Protection Areas (San Gabriel/Verdugo Mountains Scenic Preservation Specific Plan) in relationship to residence height and lot location.
- d. Illustrative landscape plan showing the final tree restoration plan required by Condition No. 69. ...
- e. The final development standards, including streetscape standards, for proposed homes and improvements required by Condition No. 72.
- f. Cut grades not to exceed 1.5:1 to the satisfaction of the Department of Building and Safety, Grading Division....

The purpose of the Public Discussion meeting is to review that landform grading techniques have been employed to the extent feasible to preserve the project site's natural topography and to review the layout, trail system, development standards, landscaping, restoration plan for oak and sycamore trees required by Condition Nos. 69, 70, 71 and 72. **This shall not be a public hearing.** Persons to be noticed are those who signed in at the initial Advisory Agency hearing on the subject tract and Council District 2.

7. The Community Advisory meetings with Dale began on January 10, 2005.
8. Appeals were filed on the initial DAA decision prior to January 14.
A SHORT summary:
 - a. F.A.L.C.O.N – appealing environmental review, slope density analysis, and other
 - b. William Eick – appealing slope density analysis, lack of opportunity for public review, lack of due process, wildlife corridors
 - c. Bart Paul – appealing the 175 subdivision over the entire property and favoring the 280 lot clustered proposal
 - d. Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy – appealing re: Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor, environmental review, scenic resources
9. The City Planning staff report regarding the proposed plan amendment and zone change was received a couple of days prior to the subsequent hearing on January 27, 2005 for the appeals. City Planning recommended approval of the GPA and zone

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changes, adoption of the EIR with findings, and a total of **not more than 230 lots** dwelling units.

10. On the evening of January 26, 2005, in response to prior requests from some community members, Dale Thrush provided the slope density calculation map to Mr. Eick for review.
11. On January 27, 2005, testimony was heard from persons in favor and opposed to the proposed project, also testimony on the appeals, however a decision was deferred until February 24, 2005. Testimony can also be given at the February 24, 2005 hearing, with the caveat that it shouldn't be redundant. The issue of the slope density calculation was specifically held as an open issue, subject to further review and comment.
12. On February 4, 2005, Mr. Eick sent a letter to the DAA and Hearing Officer for the City Planning Department, explaining problems identified with the slope density calculations, indicating notable differences, and asking for additional review.