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September 13, 2004

Mr. Mark Seigel  
Chairman, Residential Land Use Committee  
Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council  
7747 Foothill Blvd.  
Tujunga, CA 91042

**Re: Issues Related to the Proposed Canyon Hills Project in the Verdugo Mountains**

Dear Mr. Seigel:

As you know, the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the proposed Canyon Hills project was released about one week ago, marking the end of the formal EIR preparation and public comment process. The next part of the process involves a series of public hearings where decisions will be made about the sufficiency of the project's environmental review and the appropriateness of the proposed land use policy changes contained in the pending application. As we go forward, I want to update you on the proposed development in the Verdugo Mountains and seek your input as we reach the final phases of this project.

Scenic Preservation and Open Space in the Verdugo Mountains

The Verdugo Mountains have a special place in my heart and I want to preserve as much of the area as possible as permanent open space. In December 2003, it was my great pleasure to present the San Gabriel/Verdugo Mountains Scenic Preservation Specific Plan to City Council for its approval. The essence of the Scenic Preservation Plan was the protection of Prominent Ridge Lines throughout the plan area. The plan recognizes the great beauty of the area and takes bold steps to protect its most visible features. I am proud to have been the driving force in completing a plan that was started more than two decades ago.

In addition to completing the Scenic Preservation Plan, I am arranging for the city to buy 145 acres of land south of La Tuna Canyon for incorporation into Verdugo Mountain Park. I am also in discussion with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and other agencies to explore the possibility of public acquisition of the Canyon Hills properties as well as other threatened lands in the area.

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS  
CHAIR: AUDITS AND GOVERNMENTAL EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE  
VICE CHAIR: RULES AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE  
MEMBER: PERSONNEL COMMITTEE



## Canyon Hills EIR Process and Alternatives

Canyon Hills' applications for a zone change, General Plan Amendment, Major Project Review and Vesting Tentative Tract Map approval were filed on July 9. Now that the FEIR has been released, the next step will be the scheduling of hearings before the Deputy Advisory Agency (subdivision) and a Planning Department Hearing Officer (all other applications). I expect that those hearings will be held concurrently in late October or early November and that a hearing on all issues before the City Planning Commission will take place in January. This schedule will afford the community time to prepare for the upcoming public hearings.

The environmental review process will assess the adequacy of the FEIR for the proposed project and its five alternatives. Briefly, they are described as follows:

- Proposed Project: 280 single-family lots, located on 187 acres, leaving 700 acres of the 887 acre property as dedicated open space. The lots would be located on both sides of the Foothill Freeway, with 69 lots to the south of the freeway and 211 lots to the north.
- Alternative A: No project alternative.
- Alternative B: All 280 lots located north of the freeway.
- Alternative C: Same as the Proposed Project except that the access to the northern part of the development would be through the 55 acre Duke property located to the east of the Canyon Hills property.
- Alternative D: 87 lots developed as large ranchettes with no dedicated open space.
- Alternative E: 210 lots constructed in the same development area as the Proposed Project.

There is no doubt about whether the Verdugo Mountains should be protected. The only question is: "What is the best way to accomplish that goal?" One proposal is to limit the project to the number of lots allowed by the current zoning and community plan, while another suggested approach is to cluster the development and retain a majority portion of the Canyon Hills property as permanent open space.

During my 28 months as your City Councilmember, I have heard from home and property owners, neighborhood councils, community group leaders, conservationists, developers and City planning officials. Out of this process, a few dominant thoughts have emerged for me:

- First and foremost, the Canyon Hills property – and adjacent properties such as the 550 acre Majors property, the 55 acre Duke property and about 350 acres held by multiple owners north of Canyon Hills – have exceptional natural beauty. I want to preserve as much of that special land as possible as permanent open space.
- Second, the Canyon Hills property and adjacent areas are privately owned. That ownership includes certain minimum development rights over which the city has limited control.
- Third, pressure to develop privately owned open space will intensify as the city's population grows. I believe that, unless the great majority of Canyon Hills and adjacent properties are dedicated to open space, they will be fully developed over the next few decades, and their great scenic beauty and this important natural resource will be lost.

The over-arching concerns set forth above have focused my attention on a few issues which I hope will form the basis of our discussions during the final stages of the environmental review and entitlement processes. We are coming to a point in the process where hard choices must be made. I would greatly appreciate your continued input in evaluating the project and its alternatives.

The issues which I outline below represent the wide array of feedback I have received from the community at large. Although I may not agree with the assumptions of all of these items, I want to make certain you take into consideration the various perspectives that have been shared with me. In my view, these issues are critical as we come to a conclusion on the Canyon Hills project. Your thoughts with respect to these concerns will help me to formulate my approach to preserving and protecting as much of the Verdugo Mountains as possible.

### Proposed Project & Alternative C

The Project proposes to develop 280 lots clustered on 187 acres. The average lot size for the clustered development is approximately 17,000 square feet. Under this scenario, the remaining 700 acres would be dedicated as permanent open space. Concerns about the Proposed Project include density, traffic generation, damage to viewshed and setting a precedent for future development. Some have expressed the view that the large percentage of open space resulting from the Proposed Project outweighs the negatives associated with the development, since the slope density formula which yields 87 lots may actually permit as many as 240 lots. Moreover, some have offered that the placement of new development adjacent to existing development minimizes many of the project impacts.

### Alternative D

This alternative proposes to develop 87 lots as large (minimum 5 acres) ranchettes without any dedicated open space. It is widely believed that, by requiring the developer to abide by existing zoning and Community Plan controls, the project will become financially unfeasible and will be abandoned. Others believe that, by building luxurious, large estate homes on the ranchettes, the project will be financially viable.

A significant concern about the ranchette approach is the potential for eventual re-subdivision of the large lots. The Valley has a historic pattern of subdividing large-lot properties into smaller lots. For example, the Hidden Hills area has experienced subdivisions of some of its large estate lots, and the once-pervasive RA zones in the Valley are being subdivided into smaller lots.

A related issue is the proliferation of infrastructure across the entire site. The creation of the infrastructure needed to develop all of the Canyon Hills land will extend roads and utility lines to the edges of the property and will create access to the Duke property, the Majors property and several hundred other nearby acres. The developer has received inquiries from his neighbors about connecting to the Canyon Hills infrastructure.

### Alternatives B & E

Essentially, these Alternatives involve modifications to the Project which could result in no development on the south side of the Foothill Freeway. Alternative B offers all 280 lots clustered on the north side of the freeway whereas Alternative E suggests 210 lots on the site of the Proposed Project. Since the Proposed Project has 211 units on the north side of the freeway, it has been suggested that the 210 lots of Alternative E could similarly be located on the north side. These options would preserve additional open space and would eliminate the most visible part of the Proposed Project. In addition, it has been suggested that these Alternatives are consistent with existing development patterns in the area in that they preserve the pristine character south of the freeway. Further, this would provide no infrastructure to support the development of other property south of the freeway.

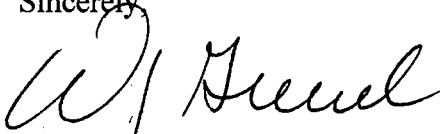
To date, some individuals and organizations have discussed with the developer various concepts for modifying the Proposed Project. Among those concepts are the preservation of all open space south of the Foothill Freeway and the inclusion of recreational amenities including a public equestrian facility in upper La Tuna Canyon and recreational trails throughout the property.

Conclusion

I look forward to hearing your thoughts about the above issues. Your input will be invaluable to me and my staff as we move through the final phases of this process.

Together, we have been engaged in this process for more than two years, and I want you to know how much I appreciate your help in evaluating our various options for the Canyon Hills project. I look forward to working with you to find a solution that best serves all of our community stakeholders, and that, ultimately, contributes to the preservation of open space and natural resources in the Verdugo Mountains.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy Greuel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "G".

Wendy Greuel  
Councilmember, 2nd District  
Los Angeles City Council