

Mulholland Scenic Parkway Design Review Board

July 20, 2010

Re: BASELINE HILLSIDE ORDINANCE

To: Los Angeles City Council
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Room 350
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear PLUM Committee Council Members:

With a Planning Commission recommendation and now your deliberations, we are at last nearing a time when the full Council will consider the passage of a Baseline Hillside Ordinance.

For many years, hillside residents have sought regulations to limit the size, grading, heights and housing stories to give definition and governance to the development of oversize houses on small and steep lots. Up to now, the absence of these guidelines and regulations has meant a steady increase in fire hazards, slope failures, visual blight and a strain on the community infrastructure in the hillsides and mountains of Los Angeles.

The Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association letter of this date, July 20, 2010, addressed to your committee is an excellent summary of the points, issues and modifications to this ordinance that require your earnest consideration to make this a truly meaningful and effective piece of legislation. It seeks what we all seek, the on-going preservation of the integrity of hillside and mountain topography within Los Angeles through the enactment of intelligent planning regulations.

Specifically, we encourage you to:

1. Change the wording so that no grading permit will be issued prior to the issuance, not approval, of a building permit.
2. To re-instate a standard whereby 75% of cut and fill will be counted toward the maximum grading amount allowed.

3. Re-instate the prohibition against grading on extreme slopes (100% or greater).
4. To limit, to 10% maximum, any determination by a Zoning Administrator above the limits referenced in the Hillside Development Standards of the ordinance.
5. To require that landform grading is performed.
6. To spell-out definitions within the ordinance of:
 - a. “Free-Standing Retaining Wall.”
 - b. “Notching.”
 - c. Landform grading.
7. To expand the notification process for neighborhoods, maximizing both information and a broader, more inclusive, area of residents.
8. To regulate “slight modifications” to an approved building permit to a defined maximum of no more than 5% or 1,000 square feet, whichever is less.

Basically, we seek your support in ensuring that the FAR of new construction will be consistent with current zoning and lot sizes so as to greatly reduce the practice of leveling steep slopes for building pads buttressed by extensive caissons and retaining walls.

By standing up for the preservation of our hillsides and mountains, for ourselves and for generations to come, we have it within our capacity to preserve one of Los Angeles’ greatest assets.

Sincerely,

Alan Kishbaugh, Chair
8136 Cornett Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90046

cc: Gail Goldberg, Director of Planning
Erick Lopez, Jennifer Driver, Planning Department
James K. Williams, Ex. Sec., LA Planning
Commission, Bud Ovrom - General Manager - Building and Safety -
Hon. Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Hon. Paul Koretz, Shawn Bayliss, Joan Pelico, Jeffrey Ebenstein
Hon. Tom LaBonge, Renee Weitzer, Doug Mensman
Hon. Paul Krekorian, Dale Thrush
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