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Public Safety and the Hollywood Sign

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PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

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Community Impact Statement

The Hollywood Sign--A Foreseeable Disaster Waiting To Happen
Terrorist Target...Very High Fire Danger.....Lack Of Infrastructure Puts Pedestrians At High Risk

Conditions At And Near The Hollywood Sign

- * For over the past fifteen years the world has been in an unprecedented state of alert due to the threat of terrorism. Landmarks, symbols of western culture, tourists magnets and large crowds are targets. Protections have been stepped up or added.
- * One of the most important and famous landmark, tourist magnet, and symbol of western culture in Los Angeles, and throughout the world, is the Hollywood Sign. In addition to the Sign itself, the top of Mt Lee houses the communication tower for emergency communications for first responders throughout the Southland, a heliport, 8,000 gallons of stored fuel--all in a very high fire hazard zone surrounded by hundreds of homes with extremely limited infrastructure.with substandard, winding,narrow streets. The added element of fire makes this a particularly vulnerable location. Any one of these elements is an alluring target, but the combination is alarming.This is a target that if hit could have devastating consequences.
- * Many of the most recent attacks around the world have been committed by lone wolves or small cells that generate little "chatter" making them more difficult to prevent.
- * **The current management of the Hollywood Sign is contrary to security and safety policies instigated throughout the world. This is an embarrassment to the City, a foreseeable disaster waiting to happen. Laws and regulations are not just being ignored, but are constantly being broken by the City as well as visitors.**
- * Recently, without any public process or studies, and contrary to the previous safety policies started in the 1940's, The City began a brand new tourist activity--- encouraging 40 million tourists to "Hike to the Sign" in this sensitive, passive area previously off limits to the public.
- * The lack of security at the top of Mt Lee is shocking. There are no detectors or inspections that are common at other venues and buildings. Anything may be carried up. Even huge backpacks and suitcases are frequently brought into this area. The extensive camera system and PA system which is often broken are severely lacking. A shocking example was this past New Years Eve. Nearby residents were assured over and over that measures on top of Mt Lee were sufficient. On an evening when security is heightened all over the world, an intruder was able to trespass to the Sign, climb on to it and spend three hours changing the letters and leave. Even after this scandalous and potentially catastrophic breach of security, no comprehensive study was done to examine the wisdom of continuing the current "open door " policies and enforcement.
- * The safety issues atop of Mt Lee are compounded by the area surrounding the Sign that visitors access to hike to the Sign or to get a closer view from nearby residential streets.
- * Millions of visitors are entering Hollywoodland,an extremely limited R1 historic,hillside community developed in the 1920's, in order to view or hike to the Sign. All streets are substandard in width, have two way vehicular traffic, with blind curves, most have parking intended for residential use,(but not one added parking spot designated for tourists) hardly any

sidewalks and can be as narrow as 20 feet! To access the tourist magnets it means that hundreds of thousands of visitors are walking IN these narrow streets. Drivers currently have to demonstrate an inordinate amount of care NOT to hit them. This is contrary to all of the policies of safety and counter terrorism to separate high volumes of pedestrians from moving vehicles. In addition the traffic congestion with the high volume of outside cars coming into this limited area is a safety issue. Streets are blocked with overwhelming numbers of vehicles as they travel to magnets most of which are at narrow dead end street with no turnarounds.

* These conditions are extreme and dangerous on their own, but if added to the occurrence of a terrorist attack would be catastrophic. Casualties would be multiplied by huge numbers because of the inability of visitors and residents to evacuate the area, and the difficulty of emergency vehicles to gain proper access. (In the 1960's when Hollywoodland needed to be evacuated because of a fire it took 200 officers to control traffic. This was before the present gridlocked streets filled with tourists and cars that are in Hollywoodland, and Hollywood, the area where people would need to be evacuated to)

* None of the tourist magnets are legal, but all are dangerous. They were all bootlegged in without a proper process or review--which of course explains why they are so dangerous, but not why the City continues to promote them.

1 The end of Beachwood Drive: Visitors were hiking to the Sign from this bootlegged trail that was using the Sunset Ranch easement Road and that was the subject of a recent court decision. (After the judge ruled that his access point must be closed down, the City and stables agreed in a joint stipulation that this never was an official entrance to the park and that hikers should access these very same trails from the official park entrance at Canyon Drive that has parking, sidewalks, necessary infrastructure and is safe.) The end of Beachwood is a dead end with no turnaround, and pedestrians have to walk in streets with no sidewalks to get there. The City has been dragging its feet in following this court order and is looking into reopening access at this dangerous location.

2 The end of Deronda Drive: This is where Mt Lee Road begins that hikers use to go up to the Sign even though numerous City "no trespassing" signs are posted. This has never been designated a public entrance into the park. This is also at a dead end on a very narrow street. It only takes three cars to gridlock the street, and hundreds can go up there daily. This area can be filled with pedestrians in the street.

3 Dirt Mulholland and divided Mulholland between Ledgewood and Durand: This is an area directly underneath the Sign at the end of an extremely narrow dead end that has no turnaround without the possible use of private property. Trespassing and climbing up to the Sign usually originates from this point. It is overrun with cars and pedestrians in the street.

4 The view site: Illegally put in by Tom Labonge's office staff and not RAP employees with no process. This area is currently drawing the most visitors, and looks like a public event is going on. This site has now expanded to about a half a dozen pads running along narrow Mulholland with several blind curves. As pedestrians take over the street and cars stop, it is impossible for vehicles to proceed without passing cars and pedestrians at blind curves.

* This whole area that juts into Griffith Park and is surrounded by park land on three sides is highly susceptible to fire destruction. The daily amount of cigarette smoking by tourists is a time bomb.

What Should Happen Next

* Immediate drills for evacuating this hillside area must be performed involving residents, tourists, and first responders.

* "Walking to the Sign", this new park activity/attraction should be shut down until there are studies, hearings, and a proper process to determine if this is in the best interest of public safety (besides environmental considerations that are currently being trashed).

* If it is determined that the City wants this to continue this activity it must be done with safety as the primary consideration. Backpacks etc should not be allowed at the top. Personnel are needed on top to screen visitors. Better surveillance with more employees are needed.

* All bootlegged access points and view sites must be immediately shut down to prevent pedestrians in the street because there is no infrastructure. Actual physical gates and fencing should be used to prevent trespassing.

* Hikers should be sent to official developed entrances with infrastructure that are safe.

* The dangerous view site area should be restored with planting and fencing to make it an inhospitable location for viewing. (A specific proposal with these elements has already been put together.)

* All recent and future new trails and actions in the previously western passive part of Griffith Park in conjunction with the Sign must go through all proper public studies, and reviews. Safety must be the most important consideration.

* If each magnet is not shut down at its source, an alternative solution is to shelter the entire residential area (such has been done by the Getty Center) creating a special protected Hollywood Sign Zone for impacted areas.

* In the long term, access to and further promotion of the Sign should come from the north side of the park where there are no residential areas. The success of any of this new development would be dependent on shutting down the current magnets on the south.

The bottom line is that the City is currently playing Russian Roulette with visitors and residents. The lack of over-site in process and execution is a public disgrace. A tragedy will happen. It is a question of when, not if. If this were a privately operated concern it never would have happened, and if it did, it would be shut down by authorities in minutes because of the shocking safety conditions.

Sarajane Schwartz
Homeowners on Beachwood Drive United