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MEMO

To: Stephanie Savage

From: Daniel S. Cooper

Date: April 19, 2018

Re: 3314 Lugano Pl.

I have been asked to review the appeal (ENV-2017-2449-CE, Case No. DIR-2017-1001-DRB-SSP) for a proposed single-family home developed located at 3314 Lugano Place in the Beachwood Canyon neighborhood of Los Angeles. This property is being proposed for development under a “Class 32 Exemption” under CEQA [specifically CEQA Guideline Section 15300.2(c)], intended for “infill” development with non-significant impacts to the environment with no “unusual circumstances”.

A neighbor (Wren Chaise) subsequently filed an appeal on the grounds that it would have a significant effect on the environment due to “unusual circumstances”, those being that it is **“located in a unique ecological area where wildlife is frequently sighted on property (bobcat, deer, coyote, etc.) and wildlife corridors exist.”** The appeal further states: **“The construction of the Project will likely significantly impact wildlife and wildlife access. In addition, the construction of new houses on undeveloped lots will have a cumulative impact on the erosion of wildlife corridors.”**

I was present at the site between 2:20 PM and 3:20 PM on April 5, 2018, for purposes of investigating the flora and (potential) fauna using the site.

Summary of Findings

Based on my site visit, the property appears to be part of a partially-disturbed habitat fragment covering approximately 0.4 acres, of which the subject property is 0.15 acres. It is located within an area of homes c. 300’ from intact habitat of Griffith Park. As essentially every residential property/lot in the neighborhood is surrounded by retaining walls or high fences, vacant lots in this area function more as “habitat patches” than “corridors” that would allow free movement of mule deer and other mammals through the landscape. While mule deer, bobcat and coyote undoubtedly visit the property for foraging, it is cut off from any other contiguous block of habitat, and so should not be said to function as a “corridor”. The neighborhood has many vacant lots (most on very steep slopes that defy easy

development), and while some of these connect larger expanses of habitat, 3314 Lugano Place, and the adjacent small vacant parcels around Lugano Place, are “landlocked” from Griffith Park by at least 100 meters (**Figure 1**).

Considering the owners are proposing to not fence 3314 Lugano Place, access to the 0.4 acres should be impeded only by the footprint of the structure (1,638.8 s.f.) and not by any physical barrier. While the existing habitat patch would be reduced by c. 10% (of its current 17,000 s.f. extent), this should not affect the physical movement of wildlife up onto the site, which include species that regularly wander into unfenced backyards (even in fairly urbanized areas). Given the presence of surrounding fences, and the small size of the fragment where it is located (0.4 acres), it cannot be said to function as its own wildlife movement corridor. And, I observed no evidence of permanent occupancy or regular use by mule deer (scat, wildlife trails) during my site visit.

Another concern of the filed appeal is the presence of “endangered, rare, or threatened species”. These species have been analyzed in prior work in the area [e.g., Cooper and Mathewson 2009, Cooper 2011, Cooper 2017 (2015)] and their habitats and occurrence locations are reasonably well-known. During the April 5 site visit, I noted a single dried stalk of mariposa lily (*Calochortus*, likely *C. plummerae*, CNPS Rank 4) on the adjoining property to the north. No similar stalks were observed on the subject property (3314 Lugano Pl.), though several patches of the widespread blue dicks (*Dichelostemma pulchellum*) were present. *Calochortus plummerae* is fairly common throughout the western half of Griffith Park, including on ridges leading down into the Beachwood Canyon area. Thus, the presence of a single plant in a patch off the main blocks of open space is notable, but not particularly “unique”.

Otherwise, a small number of California Species of Special Concern could be found at the site, such as coastal whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris stejnegeri*), which is also very widespread in Griffith Park. However, this lizard tends to be rare in small, isolated patches of habitat throughout the Los Angeles area like this one, and we did not observe it during the site visit (no lizards of any kind were seen, though western fence lizard *Sceloporus occidentalis* certainly occurs here). Otherwise, we observed California ground-squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) and several chaparral/scrubland birds were heard calling from the surrounding neighborhood, including Wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata*), Bewick’s Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), and Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*). A nesting Red-shouldered Hawk was observed high in a pine near the base of Lugano Place. All of these species make use of hilly residential areas with fragments of native vegetation (like this one), and should not be permanently affected by the proposed project.

A small number of native plants (other than blue dicks) were present on the subject property: laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), deerweed (*Acmispon glaber*), coast morning-glory (*Calystegia macrostegia*), wild cucumber (*Marah macrocarpa*), and chaparral yucca (*Hesperoyucca whipplei*); square-leaf goldenbush (*Hazardia squarrosa*) was observed just off the northern boundary of the property, and a single coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) was observed in the yard of the neighbor to the south. None of the species on the subject property is rare or protected in any way.



Daniel S. Cooper
President, Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.

Sources

Cooper, D.S. and P. Mathewson. 2009. Griffith Park wildlife management plan (Final). Report submitted to the Los Angeles Dept. of Recreation and Parks by Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc., Contract No. 2930. Jan. 22, 2009. 94 Pp, incl. appendices.

Cooper, D.S. 2011. Rare plants of Griffith Park, Los Angeles, California. *Fremontia* 38(4)/39(1):18-24.

Cooper, D.S. 2017 (2015). A flora of Griffith Park, Los Angeles, California. *Crossosoma* 41(1&2):1-86.



Figure 1. The subject property, 3314 Lugano Place (0.15 acres/6832 s.f.) outlined in white, with the remaining portion of the 0.4-acre habitat fragment outlined in yellow. Red line indicates the c. 300' distance to nearest block of intact habitat, Griffith Park. Fencing and residential development along W. Mulholland Hwy., Durand Dr., Heather Dr., and Ledgewood Dr. have blocked connectivity between the subject property and more extensive habitat (in Griffith Park).