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April 30, 2024

Los Angeles City Council
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
c/o City Clerk
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Via online submission portal

**Re: Council File #24-0339, 17538, 17544, 17550 Tramonto Drive;
17532, 17540, 17548 Revello Drive; 17523, 17529 Revello;
17537, 17541, 17547 Revello Drive**

To the Honorable Councilmember Harris-Dawson, Councilmember Lee,
Councilmember Yaroslavsky, Councilmember Padilla, and Councilmember Hutt:

This firm writes on behalf of the Castellammare Mesa Home Owners Association (CMHOA) to comment upon the inadequacy of the environmental analysis of the wildfire risks of the proposed housing project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and to demonstrate how the approval of new residential construction in this very high fire severity zone is improper under state law due to the inadequate roadway width on Revello for fire access purposes.

The proposed construction of these residences on a landslide zone in a state-designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) has been analyzed in an inadequate Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND), which entirely fails to disclose the significant impacts posed by the construction in a VHFSZ without adequate emergency access for fire and evacuation.

The proposed single-family homes are located on Tramonto and Revello Drives, and all properties are located in the designated Hillside areas and in Bureau of Engineering Special Grading Areas. While these conditions alone would raise concerns, additional documented roadway deficiencies exist on both Tramonto and Revello. For purposes of this letter, we will focus on Revello and the area that has been described as the “Revello Pinch.”

The Revello Pinch is an artifact of the devastating 1965 Revello Slide, which caused significant damage just east of the area proposed for construction. The below photo from the Los Angeles Public Library collection depicts a home at 17400 Revello after the slide.



The Revello slide significantly damaged Revello Drive just to the east of the proposed developments on Revello. The attached Exhibit 1 is an October 2021 letter (omitting exhibits) from Greg Demos, one of the applicant's representatives, discussing, *inter alia*, the Revello Pinch. Mr. Demos explains that as a result of the City's reconstruction of Revello and the surrounding sloped area and the placement of the bulkhead to stabilize the slope, the resultant roadway is only about 13 to 15 feet wide for a 200-foot section. Moreover, "this section of roadway was never restored to its pre-landslide grade so there is a dip approximately 9 feet deep at the lowest point." The dip may be even greater than Mr. Demos asserted, and could be as deep at 12 feet at the lowest point.

Included as an exhibit to Mr. Demos' letter is a series of present-day photographs of the conditions at the Revello Pinch, which are included as Exhibit 2 hereto. In addition, Mr. Demos provided a survey of the Revello Pinch, showing roadway width of 13.8 feet, which is attached as Exhibit 3. As the photos and survey make clear, it is beyond dispute that this portion of Revello is extremely constrained and presents traffic hazards by virtue of its choke point prohibiting passage of inbound and outgoing vehicles and including what the applicant admits itself is a "blind turn" just west of the Pinch.

In light of the project's location and admitted reliance upon Revello Drive to access the Revello parcels (most of the proposed development; see Traffic Management Plan), the MND's analysis of wildlife and hazards is deficient. The MND's cursory analysis of wildfire acknowledges that "the Project site and surrounding area is within a VHFHSZ." In consideration of the question whether the project would "substantially impair" emergency evacuation plans, the MND contends that "plans would be submitted for review and approval to ensure that all new development has adequate emergency access and escape routes in compliance with City regulations." In the Hazards and Hazardous Materials analysis, the MND elaborates in its findings of "less than significant impact" on emergency access and "expose people or structures...to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires," that the "Transportation Management Plan" would "ensure the Project would not physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan," and that plans would be submitted to DOT and LAFD "for review and approval to ensure that all new development has adequate emergency access and escape routes." Finally, under Transportation, the MND checks "less than significant impact" for the questions whether the project will "substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections)" and "result in inadequate emergency access."

Notably absent from the MND is any discussion of the Revello Pinch or any of the existing conditions on Revello. The MND does not discuss the blind turn on Revello. It does not disclose Revello's well-below-substandard width. It does not discuss the challenging 9-foot dip in the pinch point. If the purpose of CEQA is to ensure that decisionmakers are presented with relevant information about the environmental consequences of their actions, the MND is an abject failure on this topic. No reader would ever be aware that the very road proposed as construction access to all of the three of the proposed Revello homes presents unusual circumstances posing a risk of traffic blocking either inbound emergency response vehicles or outbound evacuating residents, workers, and future residents. Of course, as the MND fails to even mention these conditions, no mitigation is proposed for them. The attached Transportation Management Plan does not discuss them at all and indeed relies extensively on Revello for construction access to the properties.

This absence is in spite of Mr. Demos' own pleas to the City in October 2021 that "the City's inability to access and timely respond to a brush fire that starts on one or more of these properties [accessed by Revello] could have a catastrophic impact on this area." Mr. Demos requested that the City restore this 200 foot section of Revello "to its intended public use (i.e., the roadway condition prior to the 1965 Revello Landslide.)." Mr. Demos requested that the City "immediately perform the necessary inspections and analysis, as required, in order to determine and provide its opinion regarding whether or not the roadway traversing in front of 17464-17480 Revello Drive is 'in safe and passable condition'." Mr. Demos' letter concluded with an unambiguous request that the City "immediately" perform necessary work to improve the right of way.

Moreover, not only does the MND fail to disclose *any* facts regarding the Revello Pinch and the hazardous conditions it presents in wildfire conditions, the MND fails to disclose the roadway's inconsistency with applicable state regulations concerning fire safe development in *all* VHFHSZ areas, statewide. As of July 2021, Public Resources Code section 4290 requires that the state regulations on "minimum fire safety standards" in the VHFHSZ shall apply "to the perimeters and access to all residential . . . building construction . . . within lands classified and designated as very high fire hazard severity zones." The regulations do not apply to pre-1991 building permit applications, but otherwise apply to all approvals (including as of July 2021) approvals by local government in the VHFHSZ. The regulations must include, by command of the Legislature "road standards for fire equipment access."

Attached as Exhibit 4 are the regulations set forth at Title 14, sections 1270.00-1276.04, which were approved by the Office of Administrative Law in April 2023, and which are known as the State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations. These regulations make clear that the state has determined that in the VHFHSZ, ensuring adequate ingress and egress is a major concern when considering new developments in the VHFHSZ. "Roads . . . whether public or private . . . shall provide for safe access for emergency wildfire equipment and civilian evacuation concurrently, and shall provide unobstructed traffic circulation during a wildfire emergency consistent with [the requirements of the regulations]." (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 1273.00.) "All roads shall be constructed to provide a minimum of two ten (10) foot traffic lanes, not including shoulder and striping. These traffic lanes shall provide for two-way traffic flow to support emergency vehicle and civilian egress, unless other standards are provided in this article or additional requirements are mandated by local jurisdictions." (Id., § 1273.01(a).) Traffic lane is defined as "[t]he portion of a road or driveway that provides a single line of vehicle travel." (Id., § 1270.01(ff).) Moreover, road surfaces "shall be designed and maintained to support the imposed load of fire apparatus weighing at least 75,000 pounds." (Id., § 1273.02(a).)

It is beyond dispute that Revello does not satisfy the State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations ingress and egress requirements. The 200-foot section of roadway scarcely has one traffic lane, let alone two 10-foot lanes. As Mr. Demos' photos (exhibit 2) make clear, there is scarcely room for one construction vehicle to traverse the Pinch. The use of this 200-foot stretch as a sole evacuation point, both for existing residences on Revello and for the construction workers and the future residents on Revello, is flatly inconsistent with these state law requirements.

Taken together, Mr. Demos' admissions and pleas to the City to evaluate and restore the full roadway width on Revello, and the unambiguous evidence that access to the project is not consistent with the applicable State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations, is more than a "fair argument" that the Project may have unmitigated impacts on Wildfire, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, and Traffic. The MND does not satisfy CEQA's obligations in this critical life and safety area.

Finally, the project simply cannot be approved absent compliance with state law requirements for safe egress and emergency access in the VHFHSZ. Without a plan to address the Revello Pinch, further development in this area is unsafe and cannot be permitted.

Accordingly, the City must accept the CMHOA's appeal and find the MND inadequate, sending the project back for the more comprehensive environmental analysis in an EIR that is required for a project in this sensitive location and with the attendant risks of development in a VHFHSZ and on a landslide.

Yours very truly,

STRUMWASSER & WOOCHELL LLP

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beverly Grossman Palmer".

Beverly Grossman Palmer

Exhibit 1



14809 Pacific Coast Highway
Santa Monica, CA 90402

October 29, 2021

Department of Public Works, Bureau of Engineering
West Los Angeles District Office
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Mr. Gutierrez,

I am proposing to develop four single-family homes located at 17538-17550 Tramonto Drive ("SHP House 1"), 17532-17548 Revello Drive ("SHP House 2"), 17523-17529 Revello Drive ("JDR House 1"), 17533-17547 Revello Drive ("JDR House 2"), collectively referred to as the "proposed development". The attached site plan (see Exhibit 1) conceptually illustrates the proposed development, which is currently going through the entitlement and permitting processes. All of the referenced exhibits herein can be accessed and downloaded via the link at the bottom this letter.

On September 20, 2021, Planning held a public hearing for this proposed development with a public comment period to ensue over the following four weeks. I have been in close contact with the Castellammare Homeowners (CMHO) Board over the past few months regarding the scope of my proposed development as well as the scope of their requests contained in their October 14, 2021 letter to Planning, the BOE, the Councilmember's Office ("CD 11"), which I've reattached for your reference (see Exhibit 2). I write in response to and largely in support of this letter.

Below is a brief historical summary of the Castellammare Mesa area as it pertains to the Ordinance referenced below. The CMHO Board and I would like to meet with the BOE and CD 11 to discuss their intentions regarding the specific requests made in both of our letters. Please let me/us know a time that works best for the City so that all the relevant parties can participate in order to have a productive meeting. I can be reached by email at gregdemos@demosdevelopment.com or by phone at (646) 265-5158.

The Castellammare Mesa Area

As you may know, back in the early 1920s a series of roads were cut into the hillside traversing the area now known as the Castellammare Mesa Area. Shortly thereafter, this area was subdivided into a series of small lots that are zoned almost exclusively for single-family homes. Most of these lots are less than 5,000 square feet so this area allows for a greater density of single-family homes than what is currently allowed today (i.e. minimum lot sizes are required to be at least 5,000 square feet). Moreover, this subdivision was approved by the County/City based on certain roadway infrastructure that would allow vehicles and pedestrians direct and safe access to all of

these subdivided properties. Since then, real estate taxes have been assessed by the County and paid by respective property owners in this area based on their understanding that these roadways would be maintained and, if required, a portion of the tax proceeds collected by the County would be used to repair and/or restore such roadways, which obviously has not been the case.

The Tramonto Landslide

In 1936, 3.2 acres failed as a moderately deep slump landslide, extending onto former Roosevelt Highway (current PCH) from upslope at Tramonto Drive. The Tramonto Landslide is reported to have periodically reactivated and enlarged to the west and east, ultimately truncating and closing a portion of Castellammare Drive, Posetano Road, Revello Drive, and Tramonto Drive by 1959. No development or street reconstruction has occurred within the limits of the failure, except for the bulkhead shoring wall at the failure headscarp restoring Tramonto Drive in 1969 (further reinforced in 1981) and the installation of an aboveground storm drain pipe at the eastern terminus of Revello Drive that traverses this hillside along the eastern slide margin down to the PCH. Outside of the failure area to the north, west, and east, sporadic new development occurred and filled in throughout the community over the decades.

The Tramonto Drive Bulkhead

I've attached an as-built plan and elevation view of this bulkhead that was prepared by the City in 2006 (see Exhibit 4) along with a table, which was created by the City on 11/08/2005, that quantifies the displacement of material at certain pile locations from 1981 to 2006 (see Exhibit 5). For example, there was 12.0 feet of material displaced in front of Pile 50, which also coincides with the illustrations shown in the 2006 as-built plans. These plans and table also suggest this bulkhead was faced with a shotcrete wall. However, I want to clarify that this is not a conventional shotcrete wall that is 12" thick and reinforced with steel but rather a very thin veneer, which appears to have no real purpose other than to keep the soil from pushing between the lagging. I've attached a series of pictures of this bulkhead and the "shotcrete" wall that were produced by the City through my request for information in 2019 (see Exhibit 6).

Furthermore, this seaward facing bulkhead was constructed of steel (concrete encased) piles and timber lagging. It is only about 800 feet away from the ocean and has been exposed to the elements and salt-air for approximately 52 years. Since 1981, it appears this bulkhead has performed well. However, given the foregoing concerns, I think the CMHO Board's scope of requests are very reasonable. I also want to point out that the wood railing at the top of this bulkhead is very unsafe and many pieces of wood are rotted (see Exhibit 7). I often see people try to climb over the railing or step on the lower horizontal rail. Some of these pieces have already given way. If this were to happen when someone tries to maneuver over or step on this railing then they could easily lose their balance and fall approximately 30 feet over this bulkhead. This railing should be replaced immediately as its current condition presents a serious safety concern.

Finally, I want to make my position clear regarding this matter. Based on my geo. consultants and structural engineers' assessments (by extension of their submitted/published reports, plans and calculations), the integrity of this Tramonto bulkhead will not be undermined by my proposed development. My team of consultants have performed extensive analysis and research over the past five years on the Tramonto landslide, including analysis that considered the precise sequence for which the proposed work will need to be performed to ensure the stability of this bulkhead.

The Revello Landslide & Revello Drive Bulkhead

In 1965, another landslide event (the "Revello Landslide") occurred approximately 500 feet to the east of the Tramonto Landslide from Revello Drive to Castellammare Drive with the headscarp being located along the public right-of-way ("ROW") fronting 17464-17470 Revello Drive and part of

17476 Revello Drive. This section of roadway, which was significantly damaged by this landslide event, was inadequately restored shortly thereafter. In particular, the City improperly located a timber bulkhead shoring wall, which varies in height from 1 to 4.5 feet, on the south side of the street that is approximately 7 to 11 feet away from the southern ROW boundary. In doing so, it created a much narrower street than was necessary. The grade conditions between this bulkhead and the southern ROW boundary descend away from the bulkhead no more than 4 feet. Thus, had the City properly located this bulkhead along the southern ROW boundary it would have resulted in a bulkhead height that is no more than approximately 8 feet (at its highest point) and a paved roadway width of 20 feet. The current paved roadway width is approximately 13 to 15 feet for a section that is 200 feet long.

In addition, this section of roadway was never restored to its pre-landslide grade so there is a dip approximately 9 feet deep at the lowest point. To allow upstream water run-off to traverse/bypass this dip, a 36" diameter steel pipe, which spans approximately 150 feet, was installed aboveground on the north side of the street. The City also located/installed this storm drain pipe without any diversion which created a blind corner in front of 17476 Revello (see referenced pictures and the solid blue line in the attached survey). For your reference, I've attached: (a) an aerial photograph taken in 2017 showing the limits of this substandard roadway section (see Exhibit 8); (b) an aerial photograph taken in approximately 1930 showing the original condition of same section of roadway (see Exhibit 9); (c) several pictures taken by the City over the past few decades of the existing conditions you now see today, which were recently produced by the City in response to my request for information (see Exhibit 10); and (d) a copy of the survey performed by the owner of 17464/17470 Revello, which also includes my annotations (see Exhibit 11).

This section of roadway is currently used to access two existing single-family homes located at 17476-17482 Revello Drive and 17520 Revello Drive as well as approximately 22 vacant lots on this street that are covered with heavy brush. As you may also know, these vacant lots, especially those located within the Tramonto Landslide, have notoriously been a place for transient people to loiter, illegally trespass on property and engage in nefarious activities. This area is a very high severity fire zone and many of the current residents in this community are older so emergency and life-safety response vehicles/units must have the ability to quickly access and traverse all parts of this neighborhood.

Given the current condition and width of this section of roadway, it has been recently brought to my attention that certain community members, who are opposing my proposed development, are speculating that firetrucks and other life-safety response vehicles cannot access any property along and to the west of this Revello bulkhead, including those properties referenced above. I do not believe this to be the case. However, needless to say, the City's inability to access and timely respond to a brush fire that starts on one or more of these properties could have a catastrophic impact on this area so I'm passing their comments on to the City as an abundance of caution. I ask that the City look into this matter and advise if this is, in fact, the case.

In 1963, the City issued Ordinance No. 125282 (see Exhibit 3) in order to withdraw certain streets, or portions thereof, and other public places from public use, including Tramonto Drive, Revello Drive, Posetano Road and Castellammare Drive. I've attached a copy of the Ordinance for your reference. Please let me know if this Ordinance is still in effect. If not, please provide documentation to substantiate any and all changes thereto as well as any new ordinances that came into effect as a result. According to this Ordinance, "[t]he Board of Public Works is hereby authorized and directed to return the above mentioned streets or any portion thereof to public use when, in its opinion, the said streets or any portion thereof are in a safe and passable condition." [emphasis added]

In 2020, the Revello Landslide was almost entirely remediated by the One Coast project (17331-17333 Tramonto Drive) and the Sea View Villas project (17325 Castellammare Drive). The only unremediated portion remaining is at the headscarp situated across 17464-17470 Revello Drive and part of 17476 Revello Drive. As such, I believe the portion of roadway fronting these specific properties are now "in a safe and passable condition" and therefore the City should restore and return this section of roadway to its intended public use (i.e. the roadway condition prior to the 1965 Revello Landslide).

As such, the CMHO Board, the list of undersigning community members, which I'm told is now close to 100 people and counting, and I ask that the City immediately perform the necessary inspections and analysis, as required, in order to determine and provide its opinion regarding whether or not the roadway traversing in front of 17464-17480 Revello Drive is "in safe and passable condition" such that it can be returned to its intended public use. Please provide us with a copy of the City's findings and analyses once completed so we can retain these documents for our records. In the event the City determines this portion of roadway is "in safe and passable condition" then we ask the City to immediately take the necessary steps to procure permits and perform the work and improvements within the right-of-way as required and as needed without stoppage or delay until this section of roadway is returned to its intended public use.

Sincerely,
Greg Demos

Download Link for Exhibits
<https://app.box.com/s/jhnngn5pabrcci89q6ru09n9p45ogskxz>

with a copy to:
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