

Communication from Public

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Council File No: 21-0777-S1

Comments for Public Posting: Honorable Council Members, Attached please find a letter to you regarding the PLUM Committee Meeting on March 21, 2023 (Agenda Item 14) for Council File No. 21-0777-S1.



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March 20, 2023

VIA EMAIL clerk.plumcommittee@lacity.org

Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Council
200 N. Spring Street, Room 340
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: The Retreat at Benedict Canyon Project
Council File No. 21-0777-S1
PLUM Committee Meeting Date: March 21, 2023 - Agenda Item 14
Support for Motion

Dear Honorable Council Members:

This law office represents Save Our Canyon. We urge your support for this Motion made by Councilmember Yaroslavsky and seconded by Councilmember Raman to rescind the initiation of a General Plan Amendment for The Retreat at Benedict Canyon Project.

The Motion is based upon and supported by applicable legal precedent. In *Las Lomas Land Co., LLC v. City of Los Angeles* (Sept. 17, 2009, B213637) 177 Cal. App. 4th 837, the Court upheld the long standing rule that a discretionary application may be terminated, that CEQA does not apply to projects rejected or disapproved by a public agency, and that a public agency may reject a project before completing or considering the EIR. In *Las Lomas*, the Court of Appeals for the Second Appellate District made clear that a city may reject a discretionary application midstream without awaiting the completion of a final EIR. This holding allows the City to avoid wasting time and money on a dead-on-arrival project.

In May of 2002, Las Lomas Land Co., LLC ("Las Lomas") submitted an Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) for the development of a 555-acre site along the 5 Freeway North of Sylmar, in an area to be annexed into the City's sphere of influence. The City issued a notice of preparation of an EIR for the project, which included the annexation of the site, approval of a specific plan, zoning and development entitlements. Las Lomas submitted a draft specific plan and preliminary draft environmental studies to the City. City Councilmember Greig Smith opposed the project and asked the City to cease its work on it. The City Attorney advised that the City was required to continue processing and completing the EIR. Nonetheless,

Councilmember Smith introduced a motion to suspend the review process until the City Council made “a policy decision” to resume the process. The City Council ultimately approved a modified motion which called for the City to cease work on the proposed project.

Las Lomas filed a combined petition for writ of mandate and complaint, alleging, among other arguments: 1) the City had no rational basis to stop processing the project application; 2) the City had a mandatory duty to complete its environmental review before making a decision on the project; 3) the failure to complete the environmental review denied Las Lomas procedural and substantive due process and equal protection; and 4) allowing the objecting council member to substitute a new motion for his original one without notice denied Los Lomas procedural due process rights. The Court rejected all of Las Lomas’ claims.

It is clearly legal for the City to stop the processing of the General Plan Amendment for The Retreat given the community’s, the Mayor’s and the Council Office’s known opposition to the project. We request that the PLUM Committee recommend that the City Council adopt Councilmember Yaroslavsky’s Motion at the earliest possible date.

Sincerely,

GAINES & STACEY, LLP

Fred Gaines

By

FRED GAINES