

Communication from Public

Name: Jack Humphreville
Date Submitted: 08/01/2023 05:35 PM
Council File No: 21-0777-S1
Comments for Public Posting: Union Demands Trump the Santa Monica Mountains

Union Demands Trump the Santa Monica Mountains

JACK HUMPHREVILLE

JULY 31 2023



LA WATCHDOG - *"Beauty is our greatest asset in this district and our heritage of the hills must not be wasted."* Sylvia Morrison from *"Zev's Los Angeles"*

The Santa Monica Mountains are one of the most precious assets of our City and County, providing open space and nature to over fifteen million Californians who live within a fifty-mile radius of its hills and valleys. Many people and organizations, including the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area, have gone to great lengths over the decades to protect this rich environmental resource from irresponsible development.

Unfortunately, the Los Angeles City Council has twice failed to pass a **motion** by Councilwoman Katy Yaroslavsky requesting the City's Director of Planning to consider rescinding the 2018 zoning change that would allow a 59-room luxury hotel with large banquet halls and eight monster mansions to be built on 33 acres in Benedict Canyon, a neighborhood located in the Santa Monica Mountains.

This failure to protect the environment and to prevent the commercialization of the Santa Monica Mountains is surprising for two reasons.

In the past, each member of the City Council determined the zoning in his or her district. But in this case, the seven Councilmembers who voted not to approve this motion in Yaroslavsky's district went against the established protocol. The question is why.

Second, this failure to approve the motion is a vote against the environment. This development in a Very High Fire Severity Zone will involve the cutting down of protected trees, the destruction of natural habitat for wildlife and vegetation, and the excavation of almost 120,000 cubic yards of soil, destroying the topography of the site. So why would Councilmembers Krekorian, de Leon, Hutt, Lee, Park, Price, and Rodriguez vote against this motion when they claim to support the environment and the New Green Deal?

Underlying the no votes is the political pressure from the unions for the building trades and hotel workers whose members were out in force during public comment. You can only imagine the pressure exerted behind closed doors that caused the seven to vote against the environment and violate protocol.

There are also other outstanding issues, including the reputation, expertise, and financial resources of the developer; the conflict of interest where a lobbyist for the developer was married to local Councilman Koretz' planning deputy; the Environmental Impact Report; the need for adequate insurance for the hotel if fire caused by hotel guests destroys the surrounding neighborhoods; and potential litigation involving both the residents and the developer.

The City Council will soon be scheduling another hearing on this development, **The Retreat in Benedict Canyon**. Given the opposition of the community and many environmental organizations, the aroma of corruption and undue influence of special interests, and the damage to the environment, our reputationally damaged City Council would be well advised to pass the Yaroslavsky motion.

Note: Chapter 18, God Isn't Making Mountains Anymore, in the book, Zev's Los Angeles, provides an excellent overview of the efforts to protect the Santa Monica Mountains. The book is also an interesting read for those who follow the politics of City Hall, ranging from Zev's time on the City Council (1975-1994) and the County Board of Supervisors (1994-2014).

Previous City Watch articles:

Is Benedict Canyon the New China Town?

Bulgari Resort Los Angeles: Big Hat, No Cattle

<https://www.citywatchla.com/la-watchdog/27366-union-demands-trump-the-santa-monica-mountains>