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MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Citizens Reject Paving Griffith Park as Officials Pave Way for New Development

By Chuck Soter, LFIA Parks Committee Chair

For those who may have just joined us, let me begin with a recap of a situation that is of vital importance to our community. Nine months ago, the City quietly released a new vision for Griffith Park that was greeted with some dismay. Instead of preserving the Park's natural and authentic features, the draft of the new Master Plan for Griffith Park called for the Park to "reach its full potential" by re-inventing it into a giant rec center/entertainment complex filled with new developments and commercial schemes. After crushingly negative feedback, the City convened a citizen's advisory panel, the Draft Master Plan Working Group, to remake the

document. The public process now in place is being helped along by a coalition called "Save Griffith Park," which is circulating the Griffith Park Urban Wilderness Petition conceived and launched by the LFIA. The petition directs the City to recognize and protect the Park's "remaining open, undeveloped and natural spaces" and preserve "its unique historic identity." Since July, more than 7500 residents from more than 90 zip codes in the City proper, (not to mention far flung areas throughout



Fern Dell photo Kathryn Louyse

the County), have signed on with gusto.

Heeding the Public Will

At the October 11, 2005 Working Group Meeting, the panel unveiled a new *Vision for Griffith Park* that replaces the draft's present vision chapter with principles that reflect the community's desires.

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Here is an excerpt:

**Vision for Griffith Park:
An Urban Wilderness Identity**

Griffith Park is a natural refuge surrounded by an intense urban environment. It is characterized by extensive open space that evokes the natural heritage of California, as well as the physical and cultural history of Los Angeles. While a diversity of uses will be accommodated within the Park, the primary management principle for this Park will be to preserve and restore natural resources and ecosystems and enhance the Park's natural qualities.

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This governing management principle will establish a unique Urban Wilderness identity for Griffith Park, one which fosters a visitor experience that is apart from urban infringements.

The Park will remain an oasis in our urban environment. The majority of the Park will continue to be comprised of naturally hilly terrain with the native southern California chaparral landscape that serves as a habitat for native wildlife

communities. Trails for hikers and equestrians will continue to wind through the hills and flats, taking care to minimize impacts on the protected natural systems. The natural watershed, including the Los Angeles River, will be a key element of the Park's sustainable infrastructure system. Environmentally sensitive and responsible practices incorporated throughout the Park will demonstrate to Park visitors

the many ways we can operate in harmony with the natural world.

The text goes on to direct the City to view the Park's programs, facilities and other usages through the prism of its Urban Wilderness identity. It requires the Recreation & Parks Department (RAP) to preserve the Park's historic features and continue to provide for informal recreation. It instructs them to reclaim the Head-works area and Toyon Canyon Landfill as natural spaces and, although current usages are not affected, rules out additional facilities and new activities that will encroach on the natural Park. Most importantly, the new vision provides a foundation for the remaking of the draft document into a plan that will preserve, not end, Griffith Park as we know it. To read the entire Vision Chapter, go to www.lfia.org

Official Maneuvering Continues

Last June, at the LFIA's General Meeting dedicated to the Griffith Park Master Plan, the panel emphasized that the draft was based on many false assumptions and fictional needs. Among them were the needs for revenue enhancement and making the Park more accessible. Citing revenue enhancement, the draft recommends destination restaurants, a hotel and a variety of public-private partnerships. The LFIA panel challenged RAP to prove that Griffith Park needed to make money. No answer was forthcoming; and even now, whenever questioned by the LFIA or the Working Group about its finances, particularly as they pertain to Griffith Park, RAP's responses are vague and evasive.

Citing user accessibility, the draft recommends six multi-level parking structures so that more visitors and cars can be accommodated; in the very same document, the draft acknowledges that Park visitors (over 10 million annually) are already wearing out the infrastructure and natural environment. When questioned whether money wouldn't better be spent creating more parks for the inner city where,

according to the Trust for Public Land, "nearly 67 percent of the kids in Los Angeles do not live within walking distance of a park, ball-field, or playground," we received no rational answers – only an accusation of NIMBYism. When we asked RAP for the real statistics on cars that are actually turned away from Griffith Park, we finally got a real answer. An employee intimately familiar with parking said that Griffith Park averages ten automobile closures per year, with the average length of time being one to two hours – meaning that cars are turned away about fifteen hours a year. Yet the draft calls for six multi-level parking structures to alleviate this non-problem.

So we ask ourselves again and again, why this need for parking structures? The answer may lie in City Controller Laura Chick's November audit of the Recreation & Parks Department. The Department proudly points to the \$2 million it generates each year at its multi-level parking structure under Pershing Square in downtown L.A. (millions that were pooling for a purpose unknown until their discovery by the City Controller's audit). Every proposed Griffith Park parking structure would obliterate an existing surface lot where visitors now park for free. So in effect, by charging for parking, the City would begin levying a fee to use Griffith Park. What's more, we the people, will finance the multi-million dollar parking structures and then pay to staff, police, power and maintain them. This may sound far-fetched, but consider that in October, RAP replaced Griffith Park's senior management with a new superintendent among whose marquee accomplishments was devising the plan that turned the Pershing Square parking structure into a cash cow for RAP. Simultaneously, in a textbook case of gerrymandering, Griffith Park – the City's wildest Park – was suddenly lumped with distant Pershing Square – the City's all concrete Park – into a new "Griffith Region," a region that leap-frogs much closer continued on next page

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Griffith Park, the city's wildest park, was suddenly lumped with Pershing Square, the city's all-concrete park...

and more logical administrative fits like semi-wild Elysian Park.

So whose needs will be served by RAP's new administrative camel? Who will benefit from the current Griffith

Park Master Plan draft's push to "pave paradise and put up a parking lot(s)?" Certainly not the citizens of Los Angeles. Officials may continue to argue that what L.A.'s last great natural and open space needs is parking structures, and plenty of them. But you do the math. Connect the dots. Then make your opinions known.

Note:

Saving Griffith Park will continue to require the sustained and concerted effort of LFIA members. I urge readers to attend the monthly Working Group meetings at the

Ranger Station in Griffith Park, speak out during public comment and express support for the LFIA's representative, boardmember, Valerie Vanaman. Also, visit the web site www.savegriffithpark.org for a listing of elected officials to whom you can write about the current draft. Meeting dates and links to the plan can be found there, as well as the *Griffith Park Urban Wilderness Petition* which, thanks to the skilled leadership of LFIA Boardmember, Marian Dodge, is meeting with success.