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Sierra Club, San Diego Chapter

January 5, 2005

RE: Sierra Club opposition to proposed two-lane
road through Fox Canyon Neighborhood Park and appeal of
Planning Commission decision on Permit: 70422/112.0520 Environmental
Determination

Dear Honorable Mayor Sanders and City Council Members:

The San Diego Chapter of the Sierra Club of has taken formal action to support the appeal of the "Friends of Fox Canyon Park" against the development proposals of the former City Manager at Fox Canyon in City Heights. The location of the proposed park development and road project is an open space canyon generally south of University Avenue and east of Euclid Ave. with access points off of Auburn Dr. at Ontario Ave. (a paper street), and Winona Ave. in the north.

The Sierra Club's support of this appeal is based on how a fine neighborhood park project has been converted into to a road project. The intent of the grants and environmental documents for this project was a park not a road!

We believe a one-lane multi-purpose trail or an 8 foot wide utility road would serve the needs of the community for emergency vehicle access, maintenance, and law enforcement access, but also provide for joggers, bicyclists, and pedestrians that want to visit the new park or walk through Fox Canyon to adjoining neighborhoods.

If only authorized vehicles are allowed to use the new road/trail, the little-remaining open space in Fox Canyon would retain an open space feel and serve open space uses for the vast majority of the time. Sharply in contrast to preserving a pedestrian-friendly open space feel for this park, the proposed two-lane road would result in 2500 vehicle trips per day (ADT) through this relatively small area.

This canyon, and the restoration of Auburn Creek through the canyon, could one day become a nature-classroom for the adjacent Marshall Elementary School -providing a scarce opportunity to connect urban youth with nature in City Heights.

In his new book, “**Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder**”, (2005) author **Richard Louv** pulls together a host of studies and information that show significant developmental advantages for children with access to nature and for those with opportunities to learn in a natural, outdoor setting. One national study of environment-based education that Louv points to was conducted by the *State Education and Environmental Roundtable*. Louv wrote: “*The Roundtable worked with 150 schools in 16 states for ten years, identifying model environment-based programs and examining how the students fared on standardized tests. The findings indicate that environment-based education produces student gains in social studies, science, language arts and math; improves standardized test scores and grade point averages; and develops skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision making.*” (Report entitled “*Closing the Achievement Gap*”, (2002).

There is so much for urban youth to learn from the canyons themselves including: human and natural history, biology and the study of our many endangered and threatened species, archeology/paleontology, geology and the emerging science of watershed management.

A two-way road with constant traffic would cut the small remaining space in two and ruin the canyon and the open space values. We consider Fox Canyon and Auburn Creek, (a tributary to Chollas Creek), to be valuable parts of the Chollas Creek watershed and eco-system. Opportunities for restoration of riparian areas would be greatly limited by a two lane road precluding maximum storm-water filtration benefits. Please recall the city’s obligation and commitment to clean up the pollution in Chollas Creek, -a water body classified by the EPA as “impaired”.

There are inconsistencies between the Environmental Checklist and the Project including statements on the Checklist indicating that the project requires a Community Plan Amendment however there is no Community Plan Amendment being processed. The addition of the road through the park is growth inducing and this is not disclosed or analyzed properly. There are also major inconsistencies between the State Parks grant and the project. For example, the grant does not show a road through the park but the project permits a road.

There was evidence presented at the Planning Commission hearing that the project is being illegally segmented for the CEQA review and perhaps other purposes unknown at this time. The project proposes to acquire a portion of an existing lot with development going in for a lot split afterward. There is some reason to believe that the road will be a benefit to this other project and that it should be processed together - at least for CEQA review purposes.

I have visited the site of the proposed park on several occasions. I have hiked its relatively short length several times. I have visited the site with Jose Lopez and discussed the issues surrounding a proposed two-lane road through the proposed park.

The constant two-way traffic of the proposed road would greatly damage the aesthetics of the remaining open space and the experience of being in the park.

Please do not turn Fox Canyon into a tidbit of additional urban infrastructure dedicated mainly to the automobile. The need for opportunity for quality open space uses in City Heights far out-ways any possible benefit another segment of road would provide.

Please retain the open space feeling and other values in Fox Canyon for the people -and request staff to create an alternative design for the road that reduces the footprint and impact and allows for authorized vehicle access only.

Thank you for your past support and commitment.

Sincerely,

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CC: Katt Eaton, City Heights Canyons Group
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