Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead

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Director of Planning

July 5, 2006

TO: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe

FROM: James E. Hartl, AICP
Acting Director of Planning

SUBJECT: BOARD MOTION REGARDING PROTECTION OF EXISTING TRAIL EASEMENTS

On May 9, 2006, your Board directed the Departments of Regional Planning, Parks and Recreation and Public Works to review the current process for locating trail easements and identify recommendations for measures to ensure that said easements are protected during review of ministerial and discretionary development projects.

Current County Review Process

During the ministerial review of projects, the Departments of Regional Planning and Public Works review the Assessor's Maps and House Numbering Maps to ascertain the location of existing trail easements. Where said easements are depicted on the maps, the development plans submitted for review are required to accurately depict the easements to ensure their protection prior to project approval. The Department of Parks and Recreation is also consulted, as necessary, to clarify or verify the maps and trails depicted on the development plans. Site visits are also conducted by Parks and Recreation to verify the accuracy of the trail easements to further ensure their protection.

For discretionary subdivision projects, the Department of Regional Planning in consultation with the Department of Parks and Recreation, also references any adopted planning documents, including the Los Angeles Countywide General Plan, area and community plans, for future location of planned trails. These are evaluated and incorporated into the project design as necessary, for the future dedication of these trail easements as part of the project approval.

For discretionary zoning permit projects, the Department of Regional Planning depends mainly on delineation of existing trail dedications depicted on House Numbering Maps,

the General Plan and Area Plans, and agency consultation. As part of the review process, the Department of Regional Planning consults with the Department of Parks and Recreation to confirm the location of existing trails and establish potential dedications for new trails. In addition, other agencies such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and State Park Service are also consulted as part of the environmental review process.

Recommendations

Presently, the Department of Parks and Recreation does not review all development projects submitted to the Department of Public Works and Regional Planning to ensure protection of existing trail easements due to the high volume of projects. While the Department of Parks and Recreation considers this to be its responsibility, currently there are insufficient staff and resources available to provide a timely review without placing an undue burden on applicants. However, if additional staff and funding are allocated by the Board of Supervisors to address this issue, the Department of Parks and Recreation welcomes the opportunity to review all development projects to ensure that existing trail dedications are protected and future proposed trails are dedicated.

The Department of Parks and Recreation is also currently working on updating its trail maps and creating a GIS, parcel-based trail map overlay covering the entire County to ensure accurate depiction of existing trail easements. An update was recently completed for portions of the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys and proposed as amendments to those plans' Master Plan of Trails. Part of this effort included working with local trails groups and mapping the physical location of trails through GPS technology. The Department of Parks and Recreation will be initiating the process to include mapping efforts for the remainder of the County.

Once the entire County trail update has been completed, the Department of Regional Planning GIS Section will use the information provided by the Department of Parks and Recreation to create a trail overlay on GIS-NET. The Department of Regional Planning will then utilize GIS-NET to verify the location of trail dedications during the ministerial and discretionary review process. This project will ensure that consistent, accurate and updated maps and information are used by all Departments to further protect existing trail easements.

It should be noted that this report only addresses protection of existing trail easements, and does not address trails on private property that may be currently used but not dedicated. The Department of Parks and Recreation has established the following definitions for different types of trails.

- Dedicated trail – A trail easement that has been dedicated by a developer or private property owner and may or may not be constructed. If the easement is only a small section of a longer trail and is not accessible then is will not generally be constructed until such time as connectivity is achieved.

- Proposed/Future trail – Trails depicted on the Master Plan of trials that are not constructed.
- Existing/Built trails – Constructed trails on dedicated easements.
- Offer to dedicate – is generally a condition of the Coastal Commission requiring a developer or private property owner to offer for dedication a trail easement. This offer to dedicate may be picked up by any number of governmental agencies (County, State, Conservancy, National Park Service).

It should be noted that the Departments have no legal mechanism to protect trails that have not been publicly dedicated or recorded onto private property. Although the Department of Parks and Recreation requires the dedication of trails as part of discretionary projects, including subdivision development review process, the Departments of Regional Planning and Public Works do not have the legal authority to require trail dedications for ministerial projects.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Sorin Alexanian of my staff at (213) 974-6470. Our office hours are Monday through Thursday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. We are closed on Fridays.

JEH:JC,FM:AL,SMT

C: Chief Administrative Officer
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