



Villa Marina Council

Bob Herrera, President
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January 17, 2018

Mr. Richard Brody
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
c/o ESA (jas)
550 Kearny Street, Suite 800
San Francisco, CA 94108

Dear Mr. Brody:

On behalf of the Villa Marina neighborhood, we would like to submit the following comments on the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project Draft EIS/EIR.

Villa Marina is a community of 685 townhomes within 18 HOAs directly adjacent to Area C North. We have seen many changes to the Marina del Rey area since our neighborhood was built in 1966, and are grateful that the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve has endured literally in our back yard during this time. But we have also seen the gradual ongoing deterioration of Area C North over the years. We support a plan that restores degraded areas and provides a habitat where native plant, bird and animal species can survive and thrive, as well as affords an opportunity for the public to enjoy the wetlands in an unobtrusive way. While we all agree that Area C North is long overdue for some much-needed rehabilitation, we feel that certain aspects of the Draft EIS/EIR could have a potentially negative impact on our neighborhood. We have identified three main areas of concern that directly affect Villa Marina:

F8-1

Excavation of soil from Area A and relocation to Area C North

The Draft EIS/EIR states that under Alternatives 1 and 2, anywhere from 13 to 30 feet of soil above existing grade would be added to Area C North. This is excessive in our view, and would literally tower over our community of two story townhomes. **We strongly oppose any alternative that calls for the dumping of large quantities of soil in Area C North.** Our concerns include:

F8-2

- **Aesthetics.** Our current view of Area C North from our neighborhood is that of an open field with views of Playa Vista, the Playa Bluffs and the Marina. The amount of soil described in the excavation plan of Alternatives 1 and 2 would transform that to a view of the side of a dirt mountain – even from the second story of our homes. In addition, we are concerned that the excavation and grading process will produce an inordinate amount of dust that, given the prevailing winds, would blow directly into our neighborhood.
- **Destruction of the current ecosystem.** We are concerned that the amount of soil placed on top of the current habitat would destroy the important existing ecological network within Area C North. This will take years to regenerate and does not fit our definition of “restoration.” There does not appear to be a logical reason for the relocation of this soil other than the need for a place to dump the excess fill excavated from Area A.
- **Displacement of wildlife.** We are concerned that once their habitat disappears, animals from Area C North will be driven into our neighborhood. This will have a negative impact not only on the animals forced to abandon

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F8-6

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the area, but on our residents, many with small children and pets, having to confront frightened wildlife near our homes or deal with the destruction of gardens and landscaping on our property caused by these animals.

- Stormwater drainage. We are unable to determine from the current plan how stormwater will drain or where it will be collected after rainstorms. Many of our residents already experience problems with groundwater seepage in their garages requiring sump pumps and French drains to keep their property dry. We are concerned that the plan will exacerbate these issues. We also worry that in the event of a significant rainstorm, the excavated soil could produce mudflows that would damage our property. **We would like to see a more thorough examination of the impact to our property of the proposed additional fill and assurances that this will not negatively affect us.**
- Existing retaining wall between Villa Marina and Area C North. Our properties currently share a low cinderblock retaining wall. It is unclear whether any of the alternatives call for plans to remove, replace or disturb this wall – or whether any other kind of fencing is planned. We would like more information on this issue.
- Project delays. While the initial excavation and relocation of the soil will occur early in the project, the grading and actual restoration is scheduled for much later. We are concerned about long delays that could lead to large amounts of dust generated from the dirt pile or changes in priorities or funding that would leave Area C North unfinished.

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Public Access Plan

The Draft EIS/EIR shows several public access entrances around the perimeter of Area C North, including one at the current dead end at La Villa Marina. **We strongly oppose any public access entrance located within the Villa Marina neighborhood.** Our concerns include:

F8-10

- Traffic/Parking/Noise/Trash. We are concerned that the public access entrance proposed for the end of La Villa Marina will bring additional traffic to our neighborhood, which is already inundated with traffic, noise and trash from customers and employees of the nearby shopping center, court house and hospital. We have often found these individuals to show a general lack of respect for our neighborhood, and the additional traffic associated with this entrance would make this situation even worse. There are currently four other proposed public access entrances to this small area in the plan. Given this, we feel the La Villa Marina entrance is unnecessary.
- Security. The current proposed hours of the Reserve are from dawn to dusk. It is unclear whether the entrances will have secured gates that will be opened and closed daily, or whether these entrances will be lighted. We are in favor of secured entrances but are opposed to bright lights that would shine into our neighborhood. We would like more information on this issue.
- Homeless encampments. Historically, these encampments have been pervasive in Area C North and bring with them crime, drug use and trash. Authorities are often slow to remove them and they quickly reestablish. The plan states that should these encampments appear, CDFW will address these activities “as they have in the past” (pg. 2-158). This is inadequate in our view. **We would like to see a more proactive and robust plan for preventing transients from locating in Area C North and more timely removal of encampments.**
- Dogs. The plan does not state whether dogs will be allowed on the pedestrian trails within Area C North. If dogs are allowed, how will clean-up be enforced? Will pet waste stations be provided? We would like more information on this issue.

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Soil Transport/Construction Route

The Draft EIS/EIR refers to a number of different potential methods for transporting soil from Area A to Area C North, including the use of existing roadways. The specific routes are not clearly defined, however Fiji Way is mentioned. Our concerns include:

F8-15

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- Use of existing roadways within Villa Marina. A number of possible routes are mentioned within the Draft EIS/EIR including "Fiji Way and crossing Lincoln Boulevard from Area A to North Area C" (Table 2-11, pg. 2-122). Villa Marina is a pedestrian and bike friendly neighborhood. Our community includes families with small children and pets, as well as a large population of elderly residents. Any use of the streets within our neighborhood for soil transport or construction would create a tremendous disruption to our residents in terms of traffic, safety, noise and physical damage to our streets. **We strongly oppose any route for soil transport or construction/grading that involves use of the streets within the Villa Marina neighborhood (Fiji Way and/or La Villa Marina).**
- Disruption of the Fiji Barrier. Prior to the construction of the Fiji Barrier (located on Fiji Way just east of Lincoln Blvd), the streets within Villa Marina served as a non-stop thoroughfare for speeding motorist between Lincoln Blvd., Mindanao Way and the 90 freeway. After years of discussion with the City of Los Angeles, and as a Condition of Occupancy for the Aqua Marina del Rey apartments, the barrier was constructed, greatly increasing the safety of our neighborhood. Any disruption or removal of the Fiji Barrier would be detrimental to the safety of our neighborhood and would be unacceptable. **We strongly oppose any method or route for soil transport or construction/grading that involves disruption of the Fiji Barrier.**

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As affected stakeholders in this process, we hope you will give serious consideration to our concerns. For the reasons mentioned above, we are opposed to Alternatives 1 and 2. Based on our current understanding of the Draft EIS/EIR, Alternative 3 best reflects our desire for a balance between restoration and access, notwithstanding our comments above regarding public access. However, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Lead Agencies to address any potential misconceptions or discuss any possible modifications to the various alternatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important project.

Sincerely,

Bob Herrera
President

310-985-5427

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