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October 20, 2010

Councilmember Tom La Bonge
City Hall
200 N. Spring Street, Room 480
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Councilmember LaBonge:

For nearly a century the Los Feliz Improvement Association has represented hundreds of households throughout the Los Feliz district of Los Angeles. Now on their behalf we strongly advocate that a well-designed Griffith Park Master Plan be speedily adopted in order to insure clarity and predictability in the stewardship of the great civic treasure Griffith Park represents.

Two projects impacting the Park have recently come to light which evidence the potentially serious problems which arise when the oversight provided by a Master Plan and an advisory committee charged with assuring that it is faithfully implemented are lacking.

The first project involves the rental by the Recreation and Parks Department of a large portion of the east side of the Park and Old Zoo to a private, for-profit concessionaire for a Halloween festival—a fifteen night “carnival” stretching over a three week period. In return, the concessionaire will contribute \$80,000 of the proceeds to the LA Parks Foundation for use for the benefit of the Park. We are concerned that the event was contracted without conducting any public meetings to inform those most impacted thereby obviating the possibility of any meaningful public input.

The second project involves a plan by the LA Parks Foundation to rehabilitate the Commonwealth Nursery using grant monies obtained under a Proposition 84 (Safe Drinking Water Bond Act) grant application. The grant applications speaks of expanded use of nursery spaces (as yet poorly defined), including “learning centers,” “public propagation areas,” increased parking areas, publicly available student and resident classrooms and fundraising and office facilities for the LA Parks Foundation. Although we enthusiastically support the return of the Nursery as a viable working facility, we are again concerned about the lack of a predictable and transparent public process in the planning stages and our inability to obtain clear information regarding the scope of the project and the intended use of the Nursery following investment of the grant funds.

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October 20, 2010
Tom LaBonge
Page 2

We believe that before implementing any material project, commercial or otherwise, involving the Park, the Recreation and Parks Department and other governmental and quasi-governmental agencies must:

- Evaluate the project in terms of its potential to promote the “passive recreation” specified in Colonel Griffith’s gift as the intended purpose of the Park—housing a private organization such as the LA Parks Foundation in a public park as is contemplated by the Nursery project seems an inappropriate use of public space.
- Recognize that the funding difficulties facing the City should not justify the proliferation of commercial activities at the expense of the Park’s traditional users and its fragile wildlife and natural environment and ecosystems. To the extent the project involves permanent expansion of facilities in the Park, as does the Nursery project, realistically assess the availability of funds to maintain them on an ongoing basis without adding “fundraising” to the activities for which they are used.
- Solicit public input with particular emphasis on seeking input from local residents and organizations whose knowledge of the neighborhood, the Park and the impact on traffic, noise and overall disruption affecting the quality of life in the area should be a fundamental part of the planning process.
- Assess the cumulative burden of events scheduled within the Park, including Greek Theatre, Observatory and Golf Course events, and the potential fire and other health and safety issues given the impact on fire and other emergency vehicle response times.

Many mistakes have been made in the development of both the festival and the Nursery projects that local neighborhood leaders familiar with the particulars of Griffith Park would have known to avoid and/or plan for in advance. The City’s lack of public process and coordination with impacted stakeholders in moving forward on the festival and Nursery projects illustrates the historic challenge of managing America’s largest urban park without a Master Plan and an advisory committee to implement it.

We commend Council District 4 for reconvening the Master Plan Working Group and are optimistic that the City is once again on the path to the preservation of our great civic treasure.

Sincerely yours,



Donald A. Seligman
President

cc. Jon Kirk Mukri, General Manager Department of Recreation and Parks