CITY OF CALABASAS

Mullholland Highway Master Plan

Addendum to the Calabasas General Plan EIR

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Project Synopsis

The Mulholland Highway Master Plan is a long-range planning document that recommends beautification, circulation and traffic improvements for Mulholland Highway and the immediately adjacent properties. The boundaries of the plan reach from the intersection of Old Topanga Canyon Road and Mulholland Highway on the west, to Mulholland Drive near the private Louisville High School in the City of Los Angeles to the east. Since the planning area covers almost three miles, for the purposes of this study the road has been divided into four distinct zones (refer to Appendix 1 for detailed information about these planning zones). The improvement areas include:

Zone 1: The intersection of Mulholland Highway and Old Topanga Canyon Road to Declaration Avenue.

Zone 2: Declaration Avenue to Daguerre Avenue.

Zone 3: Daguerre Avenue to Paul Revere Drive.

Zone 4: Paul Revere Drive to Mulholland Drive.

Preparation of this plan involved long-standing interaction with the community, with efforts ongoing since the Spring of 1994. Numerous interviews, a public questionnaire, multiple public workshops and hearings have been held to ensure that the public and residents along the highway have had multiple opportunities to voice their likes, dislikes, and visions for this important area. It is through this public involvement that the recommendations set forth in this plan have been shaped.

The guiding premise of this plan is to set forth detailed improvements by zone for the entire plan area. A key factor in the plan is to identify potential funding sources, timing of improvements, and opinions of probable cost outlining the necessary steps to implement the plan and improve the

Highway.

Each of the four zones contain numerous beautification and traffic/circulation recommendations involving the following topics:

- *Landscaping*
- *Medians*
- *Signage*
- *Bike Lanes*
- *Intersection Configurations*
- *Neighborhood Identification*
- *Street Trees*
- *Paving Materials*
- *Street Furniture*
- *Road Widening and Striping*
- *Consolidation of Access Points*

While this plan has been designed as a useful long-range planning tool, it is acknowledged that many years may pass before certain segments of the plan are implemented. Through providing a comprehensive plan that addresses all the components above, the City can implement segments of the plan as funding is secured, thereby allowing this plan to evolve in a consistent way over time. The document has been formatted in a manner that provides both proposed planning and design data as well as environmental analysis of the potential effects of the project. The anticipated impacts of the undertaking are predicted to be beneficial both on streetscape aesthetics and traffic circulation. The document includes the following sections:

Background: Contains an overview of the City's need for the plan and sets forth the plan's major goals.

Executive Summary: Provides an overview of the plan and discuss the report's organization.

Key Planning Issues: Provides a summary of the key planning issues encountered during preparation of the plan.

Public Participation Process: Describes the steps involved to receive input and feedback from the community, the results, plus direction given by the public to the consultants.

Consistency with the City's Adopted Plans and Programs: Summarizes the consistency of the plan with the General Plan, Circulation Element, Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone, the Draft Development Code, Urban Forestry Program, City-wide Bikeway Master Plan, and proposed Local Transportation Program.

Based on the data contained in the consistency analysis, the proposed Plan was determined to be consistent with the relevant portions of the City's General Plan and supporting planning programs.

Land Use Issues with Potential Environmental Consequences

The Master Plan outlines several land use concerns that need to be considered in deciding when buildout of the streetscape program should occur and in determining how this buildout should be timed in relation to development and funding availability. These land use issues and concerns include:

(1) The mix of uses between Mulholland Drive and Freedom Drive needs to be closely coordinated between both the City of Calabasas and the City of Los Angeles since the variety of commercial, office and residential uses create conflicts with regard to traffic movement, pedestrian flow, design continuity, and identifiable entries into both cities. Resolution of these incompatibilities can be achieved through preparation of a comprehensive plan and coordination between agencies. **A mitigation measure has been conceived to implement this recommendation.**

(2) One large-acreage vacant parcel exists along the Highway that is not within the jurisdiction of the City of Calabasas (the parcel is within Los Angeles County's jurisdiction). Problems related to implementation of land use controls, density of development, and handling of traffic and aesthetic issues needs to be addressed by establishing a comprehensive design plan that is compatible with both City and County goals. **A mitigation measure to implement this recommendation has been proposed.**

(3) The City of Calabasas High School generates significant traffic volumes and has increased enrollment over recent years. Peak hour trips related to school drop-off are problematic, as are the issues of redesign of the parking lot and turning movements into and out of the high school onto the heavily traveled Highway. Ongoing coordination with the Las Virgenes Unified School District and the City needs to occur to ensure that beautification efforts and traffic improvements are consistent with the individual goals of these two agencies. **A mitigation measure designed to resolve conflicts related to residential pass-through traffic and the use and occupancy of the school has been required.**

Traffic and Circulation Issues

The proposed Mullholland Corridor plan has been design to address the following traffic and circulation concerns:

- Entrances and exits into neighborhood residential areas at five distinct intersections along the Highway need more visible marking and/or signage in order to **increase traffic flow efficiency and safety**. Clearly defined entries and the use of intersection treatments should be employed.

- The **lack of a continuous pedestrian circulation network** is a serious concern throughout the Highway. Existing sidewalks are fragmented and safe pedestrian crossings are all but absent from the Highway. This is particularly true of the areas in

front of Calabasas High School and connecting the Gelson's shopping center to the residential neighborhoods west of Freedom Drive.

- **Regional through-traffic** often creates local traffic conflicts. Regional and local traffic volumes overload the road and cause either dangerous high speeds or a constant steady stream of cars during more congested conditions. Inconsistent lane striping and the number of travel lanes needs to be resolved so that traffic flow is more efficient.

- **Bike lanes are currently absent from the Highway** and a comprehensive bikeway system needs to be identified for the entire planning area.

- **Transit stops and bicycle racks** need to be located at strategic points throughout the Highway to increase ridership and encourage transit use.

- **Existing light standards** (high canopy, cobrastyle) **should be replaced** with lower foot-candle power lamps with cut-off type components to reduce glare and spill into adjacent residential neighborhoods

The proposed plan includes specific design measures to mitigate these problems and provide enhancements that will overcome existing deficiencies.

Streetscape Aesthetics and Enhancements

The proposed Mullholland Highway Plan was conceived to implement the following Beneficial Effects (as defined in CEQA):

- Beautify the existing Highway consistent with the community's image for a rural, landscaped "parkway" framed by the Santa Monica Mountains. Transitions between the more commercialized "anchor zones" at both ends of the project need to be carefully integrated with the residential zones in the center of the highway.

- Integrate the City's Urban Forestry Strategic Program within the Highway Master Plan and use landscape materials that are indigenous and representative of the area whenever possible.

- Reinforce the City-wide rural, old town country charm through the use of similar and compatible materials that have been planned for other key areas of the City (i.e. Old Town, Las Virgenes Road).

- Locate a City entry monument to define the boundaries between the City of Calabasas and the City of Los Angeles.

- Beautify neighborhood entries to subtly draw attention to key intersections and reinforce the City-wide unifying image through consistent decorative lighting, landscaping, and signage.

- Connect the two commercial "anchors" at both the east and west ends of the highway with the central residential segment, by linking pedestrian and bicycle circulation and encouraging a safe pedestrian-friendly environment. Decorative paving using materials consistent with the City-wide image at carefully designated

pedestrian crossings should be employed.

- Preserve and frame views to the Santa Monica Mountains, open spaces, and surrounding hillsides.

- To reduce visual clutter and attain conformance with Highway goals, establish short-term landscaping along the single family residential areas where steep slopes intersect with the Highway, revegetating steep slopes and removing or screening incompatible fencing types.

Implementation of these goals, policies and programs will reduce existing environmental and aesthetic problems. The effects of the project related to these portions of the proposed undertaking will be beneficial rather than adverse.

Utilities

The proposed project involves major changes to the existing utility plan along the Highway. Utility features can have a significantly degrading impact on quality of life, aesthetics, and view corridors. The proposed Plan is designed to address these concerns. The plan has been conceived to accomplish the following objectives:

- Reduce the visual clutter from overhead utility poles and wires located adjacent to the Highway through consolidation and relocation of overhead wires in locations that are least impacting.

- Consider undergrounding all wiring and high voltage lines along the Highway.

- Research the possibility of utilizing reclaimed water for irrigation of newly landscaped areas.

- Investigate appropriate road widening and slope cuts to accommodate revised traffic flow patterns at both the east and west ends of the Highway. Necessary retaining walls should be designed to reduce their mass and size, and should be constructed of materials that blend with the natural environment to reduce visual impact.

- Future drainage engineering should consider facility designs that include traps for grease and heavy metals to reduce discharge and road pollutants consistent with NPDES standards, particularly at the east and west ends of the Highway.

With implementation of the project as proposed, the existing concerns related to the design, appearance, and degrading quality of overhead utilities will be remedied. The environmental effects of the project relative to utility planning will be beneficial rather than adverse.

Construction Related Impacts: Slope Stabilization, Utility Modifications, and Drainage Improvements

The natural setting of the Mulholland Highway has considerable visual appeal. One of the major assets of the project area derives from the dramatic views of the Santa Monica Mountains both from public view corridors and private homes. The design and construction of utilities, grading and drainage infrastructure can diminish the quality of the visual environment relative to the existing natural setting and substantially degrade aesthetic and property value. **Improvement of the Mullholland Highway in several segments will require road widening that will require the construction of significant retaining walls and/or site recontouring in two locations**. The following discussion addresses six engineering and environmental issues that need to be carefully considered prior to implementation of any construction program associated with the Plan.

At the present time, in a number of locations throughout the Master Plan area, hillsides intersect at the edge of the roadway. In some cases, hillside preservation has been successful while in others, engineered cuts and high slumpstone retaining walls have significantly degraded visual quality for residents, motorists, and passersbys. Four distinct areas will require sensitive planning and hillside preservation or revegetation in order to enhance existing (and future) visual quality. These areas include:

(1) Immediately across from the Calabasas High School play field, a steep ravine and a substantially recontoured slope bank exist that constrain further widening beyond two travel lanes and a left turn pocket. Because of the dense tree cover, the actual topography could not be set using aerial mapping methods. Site visits, however, revealed that the slope drops off just past the proposed asphalt berm or curb and there is not enough room for widening to incorporate a sidewalk or landscape strip. Either the ravine would have to be relocated or retaining walls constructed in order to continue the proposed walkway and landscape corridor across this frontage. Both alternatives are expensive and could have substantial negative environmental impacts. The public expressed the desire to have walkways on both sides of the Highway. **To avoid environmental effects and reduce construction costs, the Plan now envisions a sidewalk only on the north side of the Highway.** If a sidewalk on the south side of the Highway is deemed essential, detailed design and engineering should be deferred until consideration is given to the development of the property fronting this portion of the Highway.

(2) The City of Calabasas commissioned contractors to recontour and engineer the substantial slide immediately across from the Calabasas High School site. For safety reasons, in this roadway segment, a black chain-link fence was constructed adjacent to the paved roadway. While the plan calls for maintaining two-lanes in this segment

(no widening for increased lanes) to this section to alleviate grading impacts, it is equally important that revegetation plans consistent with the landscaping plan provided in the Plan are strictly adhered to, to ensure that both the steep ravine and the slope bank are protected. **A mitigation measure has been drafted to ensure this revegetation is done properly.**

(3) Further east of the High School past Daguerre Avenue, the Highway currently narrows to avoid an existing slope bank. Power poles also constrain road widening in this area. However, these power poles can be relocated. To accomplish this relocation, land recontouring or construction of a retaining wall will be necessary in order to achieve desired road widening for the project. Potential retaining wall heights could range from 3' to 24', assuming that the back of the sidewalk will be placed at the back of the right-of-way.

Due to the significant size of these potential walls, preliminary design alternatives have been investigated as a part of this Plan, focusing on options for stepping back the walls. Refer to the Master Plan for possible design solutions to construct these retaining walls. Wall heights may be reduced a few feet if a super-elevated section is used in the final design of the Highway, which has not been factored into the design alternatives considered thus far. The Master Plan includes two alternative designs for this slope area are distinctly different; one is a more conventional retaining wall treatment, the other assume the entire slope is recontoured, thereby eliminating the need for a retaining wall. The retaining wall alternative is more costly, but can be constructed within the existing right-of-way. The "recontouring" alternative requires property owner cooperation. Should the adjacent property be willing to participate in the improvement program, slope recontouring could be accomplished so that a retaining wall is unnecessary. **A mitigation measure has been required to coordinate final design of this feature.**

(4) The third area constrained by slopes is just east of Freedom Drive and west of Mulholland Drive, as shown in the figure below. Previous residential tract development resulted in a widened Highway section up to this point. A significant portion of the hillside would need to be removed to continue the course of this widening. A significant retaining wall would be necessary to accommodate this road widening which could possibly range from 8' to 27' in height. A slope easement was required from the landowner as a condition on the property's parcel map, which would allow for the contouring of the slope and revegetation consistent with the landscape palette developed for this Plan. Based upon the preliminary soils engineering analysis, a stepped retaining wall could potentially save one foot of wall height for every two feet of slope easement. **A mitigation measure setting forth procedures for detailed design of this feature has been required.**

Discussion

With these significant slope issues in mind, a number of retaining wall and grading designs were explored for this site to mitigate potential environmental impacts. Specifically four alternative retaining wall designs were explored assessing issues of cut and fill quantities, wall height, block material requirements, slope ratios and cost. The various designs addressed options for single wall (10' to 15' height), two-stepped wall (5' to 12' height), triple-stepped wall (4' to 10' height) and hillside

recontouring whereby an additional 50' wide slope easement would be required for implementation. Earthwork quantities and block material requirements for each alternative vary significantly. General landscaping solutions for revegetation of the cut slopes and screening of the block crib walls also varies between the different options, as shown in Figures 8 through 11. Cost parameters range from approximately $210,000 to $275,000. Alternative 3, the triple-stepped, terraced retaining wall design is the preferred cross section. Estimated at about $260,000, this design gently terraces the hillside and will allow for ample landscaping to dominate the Highway, versus large expanses of block walls. The design can be accommodated within the existing easement, and is consistent with the overall image of the Master Plan.