



Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation, Inc.

Post Office Box 353, Agoura Hills, California 91301

April, 2007, MEETING (www.lvhf.org)

Thursday, April 19th 2007, 7:30 P.M.

The Place – Diamond X – Take Las Virgenes to Mulholland; turn left on Mulholland. For the next 3/4 mile, the King Gillette Ranch will be on your right. After you've passed Stokes Canyon Road, in about 3/4 mile, you will see a sign on your right with "Diamond X" and the National Park Service logo on it. A short distance past the sign a narrow road goes south at a right angle. This is Wickland Road, and, at this point you are entering the recently acquired King Gillette Ranch (Soka) property. Follow Wickland about 300 yards until the road forks; take the left-hand fork; keep bearing left to lighted house. Park; get out of your car; go into the lighted part of the house.

Call to Order

Officers' Reports

Roll Call

Correspondence/Announcements

Agenda Changes/ Approval

Approval of Meeting Minutes

**Informal presentation of Liberty Canyon Ranch development
By Samson Investment Company**

Old Business/ Reports

Delegates Reports

Banquet Planning Report

Report on Triangle Ranch hearing before BOS

Modification of By-laws Action

New Business

INSTALLATION BANQUET IS THIS FRIDAY

The Federation's 40th Annual Installation Banquet is this Friday, the 20th, at the Malibou Lake Mountain Club, 29033 West Lake Vista Drive. (Take Cornell to Mulholland, then keep going south until you cross Medea Creek where it enters Malibou Lake. The Mountain Club is on your right just after you cross the bridge.)

Special guest will be our new Assemblywoman, Julia Brownley. Come and meet her, and see what her plans are for representing us in Sacramento. There will be a no host bar beginning at 6:30, and a buffet dinner at 7:30.

If you haven't made reservations yet, time is running short! Contact or email our Treasurer, Joan Yacovone, ASAP at (818) 889-1286 or yacovotj@pacbell.net. Don't miss our big social event of the year!

LIBERTY CANYON RANCH PLAN TO BE PRESENTED

The Federation's guest at this month's meeting will be Mike Minder representing Samson Investments, who are developing Liberty Canyon Ranch on the north side of the 101 between Liberty Canyon and Saratoga Hills.

You may be aware that this project has gone through a number of iterations and that Samson acquired it with an entitlement for over 130 units. After looking at a number of alternate densities and the possibility of becoming a part of the City of Calabasas, Samson decided to stay in the County and develop the property in compliance with the North Area Plan.

This is an opportunity for delegates to have a look at a NAP compliant proposal, hear from the developer, learn about their process with the County and resource agencies and provide some feedback as the project moves through the County planning process.

OPERATION SAFE CANYONS FOR 2007

The principal players coordinating Operation Safe Canyons for this year came to the March Federation meeting to give a progress report and outline plans for this year's enforcement efforts. You might remember that Operation Safe Canyons is an enforcement program that targets speeding and unsafe driving on the local mountain roads. It is an effort coordinated by Supervisor Yaroslavsky's office that combines the efforts of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works and the California Highway Patrol to combat the racing, noise and unsafe driving that have resulted in fatalities, at least one small brush fire (quickly put out) and numerous rescue and recovery efforts.

Here's a quick capsule history. Residents from Cold Creek and Monte Nido who happen to live along the "Mulholland Raceway" loop of Piuma, Stunt and Mulholland along with the Federation have been concerned about this problem for a number of years. They brought this problem to Susan Nissman at Zev's Calabasas office and she helped to bring the key people together to address the issue and the result was Operation Safe Canyons. Last year Supervisor Yaroslavsky was able to direct funding to the Sheriff's department for traffic enforcement in support of CHP who in turn found funding to increase patrols under the leadership of Capt. Craig Klien.

Susan Nissman began by giving an overview of the program from the County perspective. Supervisor Yaroslavsky has dedicated \$95,000 to fund additional patrols and coordination by the Sheriff's department. She indicated that in addition to increased enforcement support the Department of Public works is active doing traffic surveys to evaluate speed limits and traffic calming measures. Amy Cheema from the DPW told us that they just completed the data collection for a traffic survey on Cold Canyon Road that was done at the request of a Monte Nido resident. This will result in the establishment of an enforceable speed limit on that important stretch of the "Mulholland Raceway". She also took questions from some Monte Nido residents about other traffic calming strategies such as declaring a portion of the road a residential zone (which would permit a speed limit of 25 mph) and speed humps. She indicated that there wasn't sufficient density to declare a residential zone and that traffic controls like stop signs could be installed only if shown to be warranted by the survey.

West Valley Capt. Steve Padilla and officers Ray Abramian and Leland Tang represented the CHP. Capt. Padilla announced that the CHP has received a grant that will fund 1,800 hours of patrol and enforcement activities this season. They are already concentrating on the mountain roads with patrols on weekends and at night. This has resulted in 600 citations and 15 arrests for DUI since January of this year. Sgt. Philip Brooks for the LA county Sheriff's Department indicated that they are planning to step up enforcement of noise violations particularly aimed at motorcycles as part of their effort. They passed a sheaf of emails around from racers and motorcyclists that suggested the enforcement was having some effect (yes, there are tech savvy officers that are tapping into the internet world of the racers).

The CHP encourages residents to help by being their eyes and ears. Knowing where and when racing is taking place can help them deploy patrols more effectively. If you witness racing, speeding or other reckless driving to report it to them at the following numbers; 1-800-TELL-CHP (835 5347), during the week you can call the West Valley office at 818 888 0980 and on the weekend or at night you can call the local dispatch office at 323 906 3434. If the situation is serious or life threatening, call 911. The more information you can give the better. Ideally the report should include the time, location, nature of the violation, a description of the vehicle(s) involved and their license information but even a partial report is helpful. If they have enough information to identify the owner of the vehicle, Officer Tang will write a pointed letter reminding them of the CHP's interest in safe driving.

The Federation would like to thank the people behind Operation Safe Canyons for their efforts and to let them know once again that we wholeheartedly support the program.

RESULTS OF CALABASAS RESIDENTS SURVEY

As part of its General Plan Update, Calabasas retained Research Network, Ltd. to do a telephone survey based on a "random digital sample" to obtain "statistically valid, community-wide input on a variety of issues".

301 ten-minute interviews with adult household members were conducted by "professional interviewers" during March. Here are some of the results.

JOB LOCATION: 25% work in Calabasas, 16% in the Conejo Valley, 16% in the San Fernando Valley, and 13% in Hollywood/Downtown Los Angeles.

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT: 69% felt it was "very important" to "maintain a high level of communication between City government and citizens".

OPEN SPACE/COMMUNITY CHARACTER: Five of six open space and community character goals were rated “very important” by over half of those called in the survey. Top rated “very important” goals were,

- “Preserve the scenic beauty of Calabasas through guidelines and standards” (81%).
- “Preserve open space for community view and recreation” (80%).
- “Protect rural lifestyle and provide environmental and open space protection” (79%).

DEVELOPMENT GOALS: Six of seven development goals were rated “very important” by over half of those polled. Top rated “very important” development goals were,

- “Place a higher priority on protecting the environment and open space than on expanding development” (75%).
- “Provide clear rules for review of development proposals” (72%).
- “Limit population and economic growth to balance improved environmental quality and available natural resources” (66%).
- “Acknowledge limits on natural resources and live within those limits” (66%).
- “Protect neighborhood character through limits on house size or lot size” (over 50%).
- “Tie the rate, location, and timing of new development to the availability of service and facilities” (over 50%).

OTHER SURVEY RESULTS

- 79% of those interviewed shop for groceries in Calabasas.
- 42% were “somewhat” or “very” supportive of the City establishing additional affordable housing. 35% were “somewhat” or “very” supportive of the City permitting higher densities to create affordable housing.
- 58% felt it was “very important” for the City to “define and maintain a balanced transportation system that emphasizes environmental concerns and quality of life”. The same percentage felt it was “very important” to “slow or reduce traffic in residential neighborhoods”.
- 84% had not used the City Shuttle in the past year. The children in 65% of the households with children are either driven to school by parents or drive themselves. 12% participate in car pools, and 15% ride the school bus.

It is interesting to note that the results of the phone survey show that the long-standing ideals and goals of the Federation and its member associations accurately reflect the ideals and goals of the residents of the City and the larger community it represents.

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Calabasas residents should note a slight change in the schedule for the next public workshop on the revised general plan. It will be held the evening of Thursday, May 17th and all day Friday, May 18th.

PARK AGENCIES TO TAKE OVER SOKA AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Soka University has notified the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, State Parks, and the National Park Service that they will be exercising their right to vacate their lease on the campus portion of the 588-acre valley along Mulholland east of Las Virgenes ahead of schedule. You may remember that Soka sold the property, which was appraised at \$37 million, to a consortium of the three park agencies in April, 2005, and knocked \$2 million off the purchase price if they could lease and occupy the campus buildings and vicinity until December, 2007.

Soka will now be vacating the property ahead of schedule on June 27th. Unfortunately, the National Park Service, which was going to provide a substantial part of the cost of administering the campus portion, will not have funds available to manage the property until sometime in 2008, so the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy will have to “step up to the plate” and provide management funds until then. Cost of management will be considerable, considering not only the buildings, but also the expensive landscaping put in by Soka.

Meanwhile, the park agencies have already taken possession of most of the old Soka property outside of the “campus” area. The National Park Service developed Diamond X as their maintenance facility years ago and now owns an additional 80 acres to the south and east, including the area around the scenic overlook. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy has been using the old Spensley property, a few hundred yards west of Diamond X, for vehicle storage and operations for several months. STATE PARKS has taken possession of 102 acres between Diamond X and Las Virgenes Road, but has done nothing with it so far.

With the park agencies scheduled to take over Soka in less than three months, we can expect public workshops and planning for ultimate use of the property to begin soon after that takeover. Since future uses of the former Soka property will have effects on the surrounding communities, the Federation should be a significant player in the planning for future use of the entire 588 acre property.

It might not be a bad idea to invite representatives of the three park agencies to a Federation meeting in the near future to get more information about their near term and long term plans for use of the property and to get a chance to have some of our questions answered.

LAS VIRGENES CREEK MAY BE “DE-CHANNELIZED” SOON

In 1965, with real estate interests predicting 480,000 people would be living in the Santa Monica Mountains by 1980, Los Angeles County adopted a Master Plan Of Storm Drains that would require straightening and lining with concrete walls every creek, stream, and watercourse in the Las Virgenes Area. Since the benefits of this boondoggle would accrue to all landowners, much of the cost of constructing and maintaining these storm drains would come from our property taxes.

Upper Las Virgenes Creek was channelized north of the Freeway over the next 15 years, and, in 1977, channelization began south of the Freeway with construction of 400' of concrete channel between Agoura Road and the Freeway. Then a strange thing happened.

In 1978 the voters of California passed Proposition 13, which set strict limits on property taxes, making it much more difficult to finance growth-inducing infrastructure improvements such as concrete stream channels.

Two years later the Currey Riach Company proposed a Master Plan for development of the Las Virgenes Valley south of Agoura Road that proposed leaving Las Virgenes Creek unchannelized.

There were some alterations to the creek to make room for Lost Hills Road, but the legacy of the 1982 decision not to continue the concrete channel southward from Agoura Road can easily be seen from that road today – a 15-20' deep, 50' to 150' wide, heavily forested arroyo and greenbelt with a flowing stream at the bottom. The southern part of the arroyo is owned by the City Of Calabasas as part of De Anza Park, while the northern half is owned by adjoining landowners, notably Steeplechase.

CALABASAS MASTER TRAILS PLAN

Calabasas is now in the process of adopting a Master Plan of Trails, one of which, the proposed "Las Virgenes Trail", would start at the north end of Las Virgenes Road and, following Las Virgenes Creek past A.E. Wright and De Anza Park, connect Ahmanson Ranch to Malibu Creek State Park, providing, along the way, a path for Las Virgenes Valley residents to walk, jog, bicycle, and ride along a heavily wooded arroyo well away from street traffic.

Recorded offers to dedicate already exist for much of the right-of-way for the Las Virgenes Trail. Don Wallace, who helped arrange some of those Offers to Dedicate when he was former Supervisor Ed Edelman's Field Deputy,, has announced that he plans to see the trail up and running in his lifetime.

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Meanwhile, here are some other things are happening along Las Virgenes Creek.

When Calabasas approved the Albertson's shopping center, it was able to arrange for the City to take title to the 400' of channelized creek. Since then the City has been quietly planning to remove the concrete banks and bottom and restore this highly visible section of the concrete channel.

The restored channel and banks would be planted in the same native vegetation now found along unchannelized portions of the Creek (willows, native walnuts, sycamores, etc.). A gazebo would be built just behind the Starbucks to overlook the Creek. There would an overlook of the restored channel and educational storyboards to inform visitors and schoolchildren about water resources, watershed protection, and water conservation.

So far the City has obtained funds for project planning along with a grant of \$187,000 from the California Department of Water Resources.

Last week two members of the State Water Board toured the site and had lunch with City officials and a couple of citizens. They seemed impressed and ready to support a grant of an additional \$515,000.

A final grant of \$326,000 will be heard by the State Coastal Conservancy at their May meeting. If all goes well, work on the restored, re-naturalized channel should start this summer.

CITY ADOPTS WEST CALABASAS ROAD MASTER PLAN

A few weeks ago, without much fanfare, the Calabasas City Council adopted the “West Calabasas Road Planning Guidelines”, a master plan for future development of the road corridor from Parkway Calabasas to the Anza trailhead at the end of the road.

No member association of the Federation has taken much interest in planning for West Calabasas Road (although Vista Pointe has expressed concerns about light pollution in the past), possibly because it isn't really in anyone's “backyard”. However, because of its high visibility from the Freeway, Calabasas Road is the “front parlor”, not only for CPHA, but for the entire WEST END of the City, as well as for Agoura Hills and the rural communities to the west.

If you get on the 101 at the Orange County line in San Clemente, and drive north through the heart of one of the world's largest metropolitan areas you will see nothing but wall-to-wall urban development and its lights, signs, and billboards for the next 50-miles. This is what developers, real estate investors, and potential residents see on their way out to our community.

It is only logical they would expect Las Virgenes to develop in much the same way. However, as the Freeway climbs west out of the Valley, urban development begins to thin out, and undeveloped, oak-dotted hills begin to dominate the view. By the time the motorist reaches the crest of the Grade, the view encompasses the stunning natural landscapes of “Firehouse Hill” to the west and the “James Baldwin Oak and Wildlife Preserve” to the south.

These natural vistas on the Calabasas Grade tell passing motorists, developers, businesses seeking to locate here, as well as potential residents, that Las Virgenes “ain't L.A.”, and, as the recent Calabasas survey once again demonstrated, doesn't want to be. It is important that future planning for West Calabasas Road helps convey that message.

So, how good a job did a City Council and planning staff do when it came to a Master Plan For West Calabasas Road? Here are a few excerpts from the adopted planning guidelines.

The Introduction addresses future applicants by pointing out that, when the Guidelines use words like “shall” and “will”, they mean it, and that the Guidelines are “minimum design expectations.” Future applicants are informed that,

“The architect is cautioned that substantial deviation from the guidelines may result in a protracted review period.”

The Introduction continues,

“Adherence to these guidelines will ensure that the area develops in a sensitive manner that is ... harmonious with the unique hillsides, and mirrors the vision, desires, and intentions of the City and community. Ultimately, the goal of the Master Plan design guidelines is to ensure that businesses and properties along West Calabasas Road are sources of tremendous pride for City residents, honors the history of the road, balances the desire for upscale amenities and aesthetics with a more rural tone, and creates a unique corridor that compels people to shop and spend time there.”

The Master Plan does not appear to make any changes in zoning for West Calabasas Road, but there are changes in permitted uses in the existing Commercial Retail (CR) and Commercial Limited (CL) zones, most notably the elimination of Multi-Family housing as a conditional use in the CL zone. (In recent years two multi-family developments were proposed on hillside properties along West Calabasas Road. One property was purchased by the City and the Conservancy; the other has apparently been abandoned.)

The Master Plan divides West Calabasas Road into two use areas,

- East of Mureau Road the area on both sides of the road is “Country Corporate” with auto sales, restaurants, retail stores, and parking facilities allowed.
- West of Mureau is designated “Upscale Country”, with the emphasis on medical and convalescent facilities, offices, studios, and bed and breakfasts.

(The above designations affect only lands from the Silverado Alzheimer’s Hospital eastward. All land west of the Hospital is owned by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.)

The Master Plan includes an incentive program to encourage businesses with non-conforming signs to replace them as soon as possible. All non-conforming signs must be removed in ten years, but, if owners will remove them sooner, the City will provide varying degrees of financial and technical help to the owners. If they remove them in the first three years. After that the owner will have to pay the cost of removal at his expense.

Otherwise, signage will be limited to monument signs, wall signs, and two tastefully designed multi-tenant signs for auto-related uses. Other guidelines include,

- “Large paved area for vehicle display and storage will not be allowed.”
- The guidelines encourage exterior auto sales display parking areas to have “permeable surfaces (e.g. grass swales, turf block, etc.) ... to reduce water surface runoff”.
- The City will work with individual businesses to “consider corporate design standards and image branding.” However, the City is not required to, nor will it automatically accept all of the specific requirements and requests.”
- “At all times, the hillsides will dictate appropriate design and height of buildings. Design of businesses will take into consideration and incorporate hillsides into site layout.”
- “Medical facilities will be sensitively designed to ensure they are representative of an “Upscale Country” aesthetic. Specifically a “country cottage style ... Sterile glass, metal, and concrete materials are not appropriate” ... earth tones ... are required. The overall aim is to have the business blend into the hillsides and be as unobtrusive and discreet as possible. Medical facilities should resemble residential rather than commercial uses ... flat roofs are not recommended. Signage will be subtle, and internal illumination is not allowed. Parking shall be low-key and tucked away behind the structure.”
- “Businesses will ensure that light does not spillover or project to residential uses above Calabasas Road.

For more information about the recently adopted West Calabasas Road Master Plan and Design Guidelines, contact Ysidro Figueroa at the Department of Community Development on the first floor of City Hall.

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED AT AGOURA AND LOST HILLS

A developer named Dolinger has purchased the property at the northeast corner of Agoura and Lost Hills Roads and, after discussions with Saratoga Hills has drawn up plans for a 70,000 square foot retail center, although he has not yet attracted a commitment from a major tenant as yet.

Preliminary plans show an interesting design that seeks to blend with the hillsides flanking the Las Virgenes Valley. Roofs of the buildings will be at various angles to mimic the hills, and a two-story version of the hawk from the Calabasas logo will be constructed near the entrance.

The Federation may want to invite the developer to make a presentation on this project at a future meeting.

WHAT “RAINY SEASON”?

Los Angeles has received only 2.47 inches this rainy season (normal rainfall is about 15”) and with this year’s “rainy season” almost at an end and no sign of rain on the horizon, residents and member associations have grounds for serious concern. This year will almost certainly be the driest year since records began to be kept in the late 1870’s.

This means several things for residents and member associations, even those who don’t normally pay much attention to how much moisture falls from the sky. The hills that are normally a lush green in April never greened up much, and are now rapidly fading. Soil moisture is already badly depleted, in spite of the green leaves coming out on the trees. The Santa Ana winds that normally threaten us with wind-driven brush fires in the fall months have been continuous all winter, and, as vegetation dries out rapidly, could bring catastrophic brush fires well ahead of schedule. Basically, **THE FIRE SEASON IS ALREADY HERE**, and residents exposed to fire need to take steps to protect their homes well ahead of the normal schedule.

According to LVMWD Director and former Federation President Glen Peterson, there is enough water in storage to last us through this year. It is not clear what will happen if we have several more dry years in succession.

Triangle Ranch March 27 Board Of Supervisors Hearing – update

The Triangle Ranch application, about 66 homes on 320 Acres near Kanan and Cornell roads, went before the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors on March 27, 2007. Long disputed due to it’s non-compliance with the North Area Plan, there were many people on hand and the majority was speaking against the project. While there were many speakers, presentations from CPO and testimony from the firm of Attorney Frank Angel appeared to influence the Supervisors.

In summary, the BOS continued the hearing and asked the applicant to address several design issues with the planning staff. In particular, Supervisor Yaroslavsky made a motion that itemized 10 items that the applicant needs to address prior to the June 26th hearing.

The motion is included here:

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS CONTINUE THE PUBLIC HEARING TO JUNE 26TH, 2007, AND INSTRUCT THE APPLICANT TO WORK WITH COUNTY STAFF TO REDESIGN THE PROJECT TO BE CONSISTENT WITH THE NORTH AREA PLAN. THE APPLICANT SHALL, AT A MINIMUM, INCORPORATE THE FOLLOWING CHANGES, AS DEEMED FEASIBLE BY COUNTY STAFF :

- (1) ELIMINATE ALL RETAINING WALLS, AND I HAVE ADDED IN HERE: AND REDUCE THE NUMBER OF UNITS ALONG KANAN ROAD ON THE SOUTHERLY PORTION OF THE PROJECT AND ALONG OTHER SCENIC CORRIDORS.
- (2) PROTECT ALL MAPPED LYON'S PENTACHAETA AND SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS DUDLEYA HABITAT AREAS, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THOSE IN THE SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AREAS OFF OF CORNELL ROAD AND ON OR NEAR LOTS 12, 13, 14, 24, 47, AND BETWEEN LOTS 25 AND 45.
- (3) INCORPORATE CHANGES IN PROJECT DESIGN TO MINIMIZE WATER QUALITY IMPACTS, PARTICULARLY TO MEDEA CREEK.
- (4) PROTECT THE RIPARIAN HABITAT WITHIN MEDEA CREEK BY MINIMIZING OR ELIMINATING BRUSH CLEARANCE IN THAT REGION.
- (5) RELOCATE STREET "D" FURTHER SOUTH IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE THE URBAN STYLE APPEARANCE OF THE FOUR-WAY INTERSECTION AND REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF GRADING IN THAT AREA.
- (6) REMOVE, WHEREVER FEASIBLE, ACCESS ROADS FOR FLOOD CONTROL FACILITIES NEAR MEDEA CREEK.
- (7) PREPARE BINDING DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE CONDITIONS TO ENSURE THAT THE PROJECT WILL MINIMIZE AN URBAN APPEARANCE AND BE COMPATIBLE TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE WITH THE EXISTING COMMUNITY CHARACTER.
- (8) DESIGN THE DEVELOPMENT TO BETTER MAINTAIN SIGNIFICANT LAND FORMS, FURTHER PROTECT THE NATURAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE AREA AND REDUCE THE OFFSITE EXPORT OF GRADED MATERIAL.
- (9) UTILIZE A RURAL ROAD STANDARD THAT ELIMINATES CURBS, GUTTERS AND SIDEWALKS.
- (10) AVOID THE CREATION OF ANY NEW OR INCREASED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS IN THE PROPOSED REVISED MAP.