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August 14, 2008

Regional Planning Commission
Los Angeles County
320 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**re: Green and Clean Baldwin Hills for All for Generations to Come:
Improve DEIR and CSD**

Honorable Commission Members:

The City Project is proud to work with the Greater Baldwin Hills Alliance, the National Latino Congreso, Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles, and a diverse and growing coalition to engage, educate, and empower the community to better ensure that the Baldwin Hills are clean and green for all for generations to come. We seek to protect human health, homes, and the environment and restore the area to parkland by regulating the existing oil field. This is the next best thing to prohibiting oil drilling in this diverse and densely-populated urban community. We put people and parks before oil profits.

Plains Exploration and Production Company (PXP) plans to drill up to 1,000 new wells in the next 20 years, adding to its nearly 500 existing wells.

The Alliance is working with elected officials and PXP to improve the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and draft Community Standards District (CSD). The Alliance is working to establish health and environmental standards; public accountability; monitoring; a health and environmental baseline; oversight of the oil operations; a built-in process to improve the regulations as new information and better technology becomes available to protect health and the environment; transition to parkland; improved aesthetics; respect for all neighbors; and equal justice for all.

See generally www.greaterbaldwinhillsalliance.org and www.baldwinhillsoil.org.

The Baldwin Hills Park and Community

The City Project is committed to making the dream come true for the Baldwin Hills Park. The two-square mile Park would be the nation's largest urban park in over 100 years. The Park will provide the remarkably diverse and park-poor region with much needed green space for recreation, conservation, education, and economic vitality. The Baldwin Hills Park is the greatest public works project in the history of a community that has long suffered from environmental degradation and discrimination.

Easily accessible to millions of people, with stunning views of the Los Angeles basin, the Pacific Ocean and surrounding mountains, the Baldwin Hills offer a unique opportunity within a dense and diverse urban community that is park poor to create a world-class park and natural space for all the people of California to enjoy.

The Baldwin Hills are one of the most park-poor areas in California, with barely one acre of parkland per 1,000 people. The Baldwin Hills Park provides badly needed park and recreation opportunities. Childhood obesity rates are among the highest in the Los Angeles region. Children crave the simple joys of playing in the park and need places for physical activity to help reduce the epidemic of obesity and diabetes.

Within a five mile radius of the Baldwin Hills there is only one picnic table for every 10,000 people, one playground for 23,000 children, one soccer field for 30,000 people and one basketball court for 36,000 people. On weekends and especially on holidays, the gates to Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, the only regional park serving 2.5 million people within ten miles, are often closed before noon because the heavily used park has simply run out of space.

Despite degradation due to urbanization, roads, and oil development dating back to the early 1900s, many native plants and wildlife remain in the Baldwin Hills.¹ Within minutes of urban Los Angeles, “the delicate balance of plants and wildlife is maintained, where a tranquil recreational experience is easily accessible, and where people can go to enjoy the natural world that is an important part of protecting the health and quality of life in urban communities.”²

The Baldwin Hills rest at the environmentally and demographically diverse center of Los Angeles. The Park lies at the intersection of the African-American, Latino and non-Hispanic white communities. Within a three mile radius of the Baldwin Hills, the population is 40% African American, 23% Latino, 8% Asian-Pacific Islander and 11% non-Hispanic white. 18% of the households have incomes that fall below the poverty line.³

The community just east of the Baldwin Hills is over 90% African-American, compared to about 11% in Los Angeles generally. The African-American community surrounding the Baldwin Hills is the historic heart of African-American Los Angeles. When the United States Supreme Court declared racially restrictive housing covenants unconstitutional and unenforceable in the 1950s, African Americans were free to move west from South Central Los Angeles in search of a better life in the Baldwin Hills. With Sugar Hill in Harlem, the Baldwin Hills traditionally has been an epicenter of excellence for African-American life and culture across the United States.⁴

The Struggle for the Park Never Ends

The community has struggled long and hard for a park in the Baldwin Hills. The City Project is proud to have worked with the community to stop a power plant and save the Park in 2001, to stop a garbage dump in 2003, to save the Baldwin Hills Conservancy and its budget when a

¹ Baldwin Hills Park Master Plan (May 2002) at 2-3.

² *Id.* at 8.

³ United States Census, GreenInfo Network, The City Project.

⁴ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* 21, 72, 101, 108 (2003).

Governor's commission threatened to abolish both in 2005, and to stop 24 new oil wells without adequate environmental review in 2007.

Strengthened by years of struggle, the community remains even more determined than ever to make the vision for a park in the Baldwin Hills into a reality for all the people of California to enjoy.

Media accounts extensively document the determination of the people to fight for the Park in the Baldwin Hills. "Baldwin Hills is not the place to solve the state's energy crisis." Editorial, *Powerful Reasons to Say No*, L.A. Times, June 21, 2001.

"The conversion of unused sections of the oilfield into a park was proposed by then-county supervisor Kenneth Hahn in 1968. A 50 acre state recreation area was dedicated 15 years later and eventually expanded to 320 acres. As Baldwin Hills' oil peters out (only about 400 of its 1,130 wells are still active), there are plans to expand the recreation area to about 1,200 acres – or about two square miles." Bob Pool, *Surroundings / Baldwin Hills; Where L.A. Looks Pretty as a Picture Postcard; After a cleansing rain, the city shines from the panoramic vantage point of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area*, L.A. Times, Feb. 27, 2003.

The community stopped PXP (through its predecessor corporate form Stocker Oil Company) from putting a power plant in the site of the planned park.

In poor black neighborhoods in Los Angeles, the economic ladder is often perched against the Baldwin Hills.

There, on that lonely hump in the urban plain, lies hope. There, doctors and lawyers and politicians make up one of the wealthiest black communities in the nation. And there, in the heart of the hills, conservationists are hoping to create the crown jewel: a 1,200-acre state park.

That partly explains the outrage aroused when [PXP] proposed building a 53-megawatt power plant in the middle of that envisioned green space, on what is now a working oil field. Neighbors managed to come together with environmentalists and civil rights activists in such a strong coalition that they may have rung the project's death knell.

...

To many, the power plant proposal was another slight in a long history of discrimination, from the days of racist real estate covenants to white flight to zoning decisions that seem to put the unwanted--the power plants and chrome plating facilities--in minority neighborhoods.

Joe Mozingo, *A Fight for Their Goal, Their Gains; Baldwin Hills: Residents of the upscale black neighborhood rejoice over a victory in battle to block power plant. Many feel choice of site reflected racial bias*. L.A. Times, June 23, 2001.

"‘We listened to the community,’ La Jolla [energy company] President Steve Wilburn said in an interview Thursday. ‘We need to find another place for this [power plant].’" Joe Mozingo, *Energy Company Abandons Plans for Baldwin Hills Plant; Power: Homeowners and environmentalists rejoice at decision. The site is proposed as a 1,200-acre state park.* L.A. Times, June 21, 2001. *See also Stocker [PXP] Officially Drops Plans for a Power Plant,* L.A. Times, July 6, 2001.

“In Baldwin Hills, residents eager to see oil fields transformed into a 1,200-acre park turned out en masse . . . to protest plans to build a power plant on the property. The near- unanimous opposition prompted [PXP and] La Jolla Energy Development Inc. to withdraw from this ill-advised project, allowing work on the imaginative park plans to go forward.” Editorial, *No Big Boxes in This Yard,* L.A. Times, June 30, 2001.

“The community's outcry against the power plant . . . is an outpouring of support for a grand dream of a park in one of the most park-deprived areas of park- poor Los Angeles. The million people who live within a five-mile radius need this oasis.” Editorial, *The Power of a Park,* L.A. Times, June 11, 2001.

“This effort goes to show that if you show up in numbers and participate and have the facts behind you, you can win,’ said state Sen. Kevin Murray (D-Culver City).” Joe Mozingo, *A Fight for Their Goal, Their Gains; Baldwin Hills: Residents of the upscale black neighborhood rejoice over a victory in battle to block power plant. Many feel choice of site reflected racial bias.* L.A. Times, June 23, 2001.

“It's up to the Southern California delegations in the Legislature to let the governor know that . . . new parks and clean beaches affect a lot of city-dwelling voters.” Editorial, *Keep Veto Ax Off the Parks,* L.A. Times, July 25, 2001.

“First they fought off a power plant. Then they defeated a garbage dump. Now people who have struggled for decades to transform a forlorn patch of hills and swamps into a park stretching from the Baldwin Hills to Culver City are preparing to take on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.” Lisa Richardson, *Fighting This Conservancy Won't Be a Walk in the Park,* L.A. Times, Oct. 22, 2004.

See also John McKinney, Hiking; Bring your imagination to see the future of Baldwin Hills, L.A. Times, Nov. 24, 2002; Linda Blandford, *Private Lives, Public Places: A Park That Preserves Gentle Days,* L.A. Times, May 22, 1990.

Conclusion

The City Project is a multicultural policy and legal advocacy organization that is working to broaden access to parks and open space, especially in underserved communities, and to fight childhood obesity by guaranteeing that students get enough physical education. *New York Times, Nov. 12, 2008.*

Regional Planning Commission
Green and Clean Baldwin Hills for Generations to Come
August 14, 2008
Page 5 of 5

The City Project is proud to work with the Greater Baldwin Hills Alliance and a diverse and growing coalition to protect human health, homes, and the environment, and to ease the transition of the oil fields to parkland, through the regulatory process. We will submit additional comments on the draft Environmental Impact Report and Community Standards District to ensure both serve the needs of the community as defined by the community.

We incorporate by reference the comments of our allies in the Greater Baldwin Hills Alliance, to the extent those comments are not inconsistent with the views expressed here.

Very truly yours,

Robert García
Executive Director and Counsel

Angela Mooney D'Arcy
Policy Consultant

cc:

The Honorable Yvonne Burke
The Honorable Mark Ridley-Thomas
The Honorable Karen Bass
The Honorable Bernard Parks