

NEWS

FROM THE OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER
PAUL KORETZ
FIFTH DISTRICT



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LA City Council Directs City to Offer Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy First Right of Refusal Before Future Sales of Hillside City-Owned Surplus Property

March 2, 2022 – LOS ANGELES, CA –Today the Los Angeles City Council voted in favor of a motion that directs the Department of General Services to identify City-owned surplus property in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone and codify that the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) shall have the first right of refusal to acquire such lands for conservation at the City of Los Angeles’s purchase price plus any administrative and management costs incurred by the City.

In 2008-9, LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa initiated the “Own A Piece of LA” program to itemize, account for, and offer undevelopable slivers of City surplus land and/or remnant parcels to adjoining neighbors since they are deemed incapable of independent development and can only be of use to adjoining property owners. However, with advanced engineering innovations in recent decades, development in sensitive ecological areas has increased, resulting in the fragmentation and degradation of essential remaining wildlife habitat connectivity and corridors, particularly in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone, home to the Southern California subpopulation of the Mountain Lion. Local mountain lions are now a “candidate” species under consideration for listing as “threatened” under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) by the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

“While I have been working with the City Planning Department for the better part of a decade to protect wildlife habitat connectivity in the Santa Monica Mountains, it is imperative that we be certain we are not at the same time inadvertently selling off parcels for development that could obstruct the very linkages we are working so hard to protect,” said **Councilmember Paul Koretz**. “Thank you to Councilmembers Raman and Blumenfield for continuing to partner with me in our shared commitment to protect our precious wildlife and habitats in our Santa Monica Mountains.”

“Wildlife habitat connectivity is so essential to the survival of the cornerstone species we share our Santa Monica mountains with, and many areas are in serious danger of being blocked if we do not act urgently and consciously,” said **Paul Edelman, Deputy Director of Natural Resources and Planning, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and its chief biologist** “Today’s action by the City Council is so important and affirms the State legislature’s 1979 Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Act, but more steps need to be taken sooner rather than later.”

"Our park land is precious and acknowledging the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy’s right of first refusal at the original purchase price for surplus City land underscores our commitment and prevents any confusion,” said **Councilmember Bob Blumenfield**. “When critical open space is lost, it’s usually lost forever and the SMMC is the biggest protector of our wildlife corridors, open space, and indigenous plant species in the region.”

"This motion allows the Santa Monica Conservancy to have the right of first refusal when the city disposes of public land in the Santa Monica Mountains. My district contains so much of the beautiful and unique Santa Monica Mountain range, and I am so proud to partner with Councilmember Koretz to ensure that we preserve as much of this land as possible and prevent it from being developed," said **Councilmember Nithya Raman**.

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“It is essential for our collective long-term health that caution preempts short-term profit when addressing City-owned open space in the Santa Monica Mountains,” said **Tony Tucci, co-founder of Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife (CLAW)** who brought this issue to the City Council’s attention. “Today’s City Council vote recognizes that undeveloped City-owned lands of any size in our hillsides let us all “breathe” and that this land has an inherent and immediate value to our environment and a long-term benefit for the wellbeing of both our wildlife and human populations of Los Angeles.”

“Thanks to Councilmembers Koretz, Raman and Blumenfield for ensuring the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy has an opportunity to preserve our precious natural resources one surplus lot and sliver of land at a time,” said **Wendy-Sue Rosen, Brentwood Alliance of Canyons & Hillsides**.

Los Angeles is located in a global biodiversity hotspot called the California Floristic Province, which means that it includes more than 1,500 endemic plant species, that at least 70 percent of the area’s original habitat has been lost, and that the rest is endangered by human activities. Much of the remaining biodiversity within Los Angeles is located in the mountains and hillsides including the Santa Monica Mountains Zone. Plants and animals need these interconnected ecosystems to continue to exist and flourish within this urban context and this biodiversity hotspot is jeopardized by increased development and habitat fragmentation,

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