



Laguna Greenbelt, Inc.

a non-profit corporation

June 2, 2018

Andrew Do, Chairman  
 Orange County Board of Supervisors  
 333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.  
 Santa Ana, California

**RE: West Alton Project**

Dear Chairman Do,

Why is the Orange County Board of Supervisors making land use decisions in the City of Irvine? Because they are following the same playbook they used in approving the massive “100 Acre” Project near the Irvine Train Station in November 2017. The County claims it does not have to comply with the City’s zoning or other laws.

The problem is that last November’s 4-1 vote approving the 100 Acre project immediately triggered four lawsuits against Orange County from the City of Irvine and others. For good measure, the County sued the City of Irvine. The lawsuits have been consolidated and are awaiting resolution in the Sacramento County Superior Court.

Why is the County rushing for a repeat performance? By using the same approach that it did for the 100 Acre Project and acting before the courts have resolved those issues, the County is forcing everyone to file more lawsuits. More lawsuits mean more taxpayer money fighting those lawsuits. Money that could instead be spent on real projects on the ground.

We propose a low-cost alternative to this rush to judgment. An alternative that will save the public money while promising significant benefits to our region’s environment.

The West Alton parcel contains a public resource of great value – a wildlife corridor. The corridor connects wildlife in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains to the Great Park wildlife corridor, under construction since March, and itself part of a long-planned corridor to reconnect the Santa Ana Mountains with 22,000 acres of coastal wilderness parks and preserves.

Wildlife in virtually all Orange County wilderness parks now exist in small populations, increasingly isolated from one another by roads and development. For their offspring to thrive, animals need to find mates that are genetically different. Wildlife corridors help make this possible.

Ever since the West Alton project was announced in 2015, we have been concerned that the population density and placement of buildings near the wildlife corridor will interrupt the movement of foothill animals coastward. The County claims the impacts would be minor but offers no evidence for its claim. It is too important to get this one wrong.

We propose to convene wildlife movement experts to settle the issue on-site. We have used this focused site-specific dialog approach to resolve seemingly intractable land use problems in the past.

By pausing the West Alton Project until the court has sorted out the legal issues in the 100 Acres Project lawsuits, the Board would save taxpayer dollars. The Board would also allow time for independent wildlife movement experts to study the interface of project and wildlife corridor and made recommendations. Why the rush?

*The Coast to Cleveland coalition partners, indicated with logos below, urge you to not certify the West Alton EIR until these issues are resolved.*

Sincerely yours,



Elisabeth Brown, Ph.D

President

Laguna Greenbelt, Inc.

