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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Councilmember Huizar Wins Council Support to Acquire Elephant Hill
Site for Open Space**

Decades-long battle ends after Huizar urges City to settle lawsuit over Elephant Hill, a win-win scenario that avoids costly damages and acquires 19 acres of hillside property in El Sereno for preservation as open space

LOS ANGELES (Nov. 3, 2009) – Councilmember José Huizar led the Los Angeles City Council to vote today for a settlement that allows the city to acquire 19 acres of prime hillside property in El Sereno, which will save millions of dollars in litigation costs, preserve the hillside property for open space and finally put to rest a decades-long controversy in Northeast Los Angeles.

“This is a victory for everyone,” said Councilmember José Huizar following the Council’s vote. “For the residents of El Sereno, they can breathe easier knowing that their beautiful Elephant Hill will be protected against quite possibly dangerous development. It was a tough fight and a long time coming, but in the end Elephant Hill will be safe from development and will remain a treasured open space that will bring joy to many future generations.”

In the 1980s, a developer first proposed to subdivide the El Sereno hillside property commonly known as “Elephant Hill.” Controversial from the outset, the proposed development triggered community concerns when a similar large-scale development project in nearby Monterey Hills caused widespread subsidence and property damage in the late 1980s. That case, the Eaton Crest project, was the longest land subsidence jury trial in L.A. County history – lasting 10 months and ultimately costing the City \$65 million to settle with approximately 700 property owners whose properties were damaged as a result of an ill-located hillside development.

(more)

Elephant Hill Victory

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Councilmember Huizar took issue with the Elephant Hill proposal because there were substantial changes to the project since it was originally approved back in 1993, and he thought that the impacts of those changes could not be known without further environmental review. The grading area had expanded, additional parcels were added, roads were realigned and subsequent evidence had come to light about significant subsurface water and potential sinkholes.

Although the proposed project was approved in 1993, the developer did not actually move to build until 2006, when Councilmember Huizar heard the community opposition to a nearly 15-year old Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and led the City Council to withhold a B permit for the project until the developer completed a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR).

The developer, Monterey Hills LLC, ignored the Council's direction and sued the City. In January of this year, the Court ruled that the City erred in its decision but did not grant the developer's request to compel the City to issue the B permit.

The developer's attorney sought \$25 million to \$35 million in damages. Council today voted to acquire the litigated 14-acre property, plus an additional 5 contiguous acres for approximately \$9 million.

"We are pleased that this matter has settled and that the City will be saved from costly litigation," said Assistant City Attorney Susan Pfann. "We are happy to have helped the City Council accomplish this settlement."

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