

cc: Michael Brown

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#8

March 16, 2009

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara

Re: Santa Barbara Botanic Garden



Dear Members of the Board:

The attached letter with respect to the Botanic Garden Draft Environmental Impact Report may be of interest and shed light on the issue before you tomorrow.

From my personal perspective, which is not the same as everyone interested in preserving the historical Botanic Garden, I do not see the temporary placement of a structure at the garden—even though I think it a bad idea—nearly as important as the Botanic Garden's larger development plan that will come to you in the next several weeks to months.

The essential issue with respect to long-term development at the Botanic Garden is the proposal to increase the amount of net floor area on the western side of the Garden, as well as issues with respect to paving trails and development of the meadow.

This issue of the proposed 11,000 new square feet of net floor area west of Mission Canyon Road will be the crucial issue which the Board of Supervisors will have to determine when you consider this issue later.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lanny Ebenstein".

Lanny Ebenstein

Good to see you recently.

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February 17, 2009

Planning and Development Department
County of Santa Barbara

Re: Comments on Santa Barbara Botanic Garden
Draft Environmental Impact Report Recirculation Document

Dear Planning and Development Department:

This letter is to provide input on the Draft Environmental Impact Report regarding the “vital mission plan” of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.

My family owns the only other county historic landmark in Mission Canyon, Glendessary, which is county historic landmark #15. I have lived in Mission Canyon almost my entire life and my family has been, and I am currently, a member of the Botanic Garden for decades.

On the basis of this background and experience, I believe it is a tragedy what has occurred and is occurring at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. It will be up to the larger community, preeminently the Board of Supervisors—since the county historic landmarks commission is, at this point, likely to give a green light to most of the proposed building construction at the Botanic Garden, *including the building construction on the most historical western side of the Botanic Garden, incorporating some of the earliest development there*—it will be up to the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors to determine whether the historical intent of the original Botanic Garden will be preserved, and whether the proposed development is consistent with the surrounding area.

Far too much development is intended in the Botanic Garden development plan. This includes the paving throughout the Garden of which even members of the board of directors of the Botanic Garden are unaware (at the conclusion of a recent hearing, I was surprised to learn from one of the members of the board of directors that there is no intention to pave more trails at the Garden). In part as a result of this discrepancy between what appears to be in the draft EIR and what some individuals in the community believe to be the case, would it be possible to clarify in the responses to these comments that will be prepared for the final EIR:

- 1. To what extent is the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden proposing to place pavers in trails throughout the Garden, including in the westernmost canyon region of the Garden, including the redwood grove and Pritchett Trail?**

That the Garden’s current management is contemplating the paving of almost all trails in the Garden is an example of how removed current perspectives are from the

historical development of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, and why it will be essential for the Board of Supervisors to preserve this vital county, state, and national site.

2. To what extent would the “cumulative impact” of the many changes proposed by the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden be inconsistent with the already landmarked portions of the garden and the historical preservation the Garden merits?

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden is a unique historical resource. The Botanic Garden, along with the Mission Dam and Aqueduct, is an officially designated county historic landmark. Much of the aqueduct runs near or adjacent to trails proposed for paving in the western canyon section.

The Botanic Garden was designed to be one with nature. The “design intent” of understated trails around natural communities of native California plants, particularly native to the Santa Barbara County coastal islands, designed by two nationally acclaimed landscape architects, Lockwood de Forest Jr. and Beatrix Ferrand, is a historical resource that goes beyond what is the case in most other botanic gardens. The understated design concept allows the blending of a unique combination of geology, archaeology, natural history, Mission history, and the spirit of Native Americans to emerge in the most natural setting possible, on the interface of development and the back country.

When Santa Barbara’s public-private park structure was planned some 70 to 80 years ago, it was planned with the idea of a greenbelt adjacent to the City of Santa Barbara. Each of Parma Park, Skofield Park and Rattlesnake Canyon, the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, Stephens Park, and Laurel Canyon play a vital greenbelt role. To what extent would the very extensive development proposed at the Botanic Garden be consistent with this historical greenbelt?

3. To what extent is further development of the main Meadow inconsistent with the historical design intent of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden?

Many do not recognize the fundamental change the historical design intent of the Botanic Garden represented at the time. Before the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, the prevailing approach in botanic gardens was the display of plant species imported from around the world in artificial groupings. By way of contrast, the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden was consciously designed to showcase native California plants and to present them in the most natural settings possible, with the natural meadow with its magnificent vistas in the center. Why should the Meadow be changed? Why should the current proposed development be allowed when it would change some of the Garden’s most unique, desirable, and historically significant and renowned features? What makes the Garden unique should be preserved.

In the revised EIR, the amount of net floor area has been revised to show an increase of 25,884 square feet, from 39,558 square feet of net floor area existing to 65,442 square feet proposed (p. 2-1), an increase in square feet of net floor area of approximately two-thirds from what exists at present. Moreover, since much of the existing net floor area is a separate residential area on the southeastern side of Garden property, which in the revised EIR will not be expanded much, this means the net floor area would double to triple or more on the historical, western side of the Garden.

4. It would be helpful if in the final, certified EIR, existing net floor area on the western side of the Garden were clarified, and the percent increase that is proposed compared to existing net floor area on the western side of the Garden were presented. How could a 65 percent increase in the net floor area of the total Garden in a single development plan not be considered significant and unmitigatable, apart from how could the increase of 200 to 300 percent in development on the historical, western side of the Garden not be considered of significant and unmitigatable historical impact?

To be clear: This project is too big, too poorly placed on Garden property, and too historically insensitive to meet standards of EIR review, or Board of Supervisors' approval.

Thank you for your consideration. With many others, I look forward to the day when the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden will return to the path its founders and benefactors intended. I anticipate the day when the whole community will be able to work together again in support of the Botanic Garden.

The Historic Resources Assessment incorporated with the Draft EIR Recirculation Document notes that the Botanic Garden would be appropriately included in the National and California Registers of Historic Places. These designations should be required to be sought by the Garden in any development. The historical intent of the Botanic Garden will become increasingly valuable over time.

Sincerely,

Lanny Ebenstein

cc: Board of Supervisors, County of Santa Barbara
Board of Directors, Santa Barbara Botanic Garden
Friends of the SBBG Landmark
Friends of Mission Canyon
Mission Canyon Association