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May 17, 2010

COUNCIL PRESIDENT ERIC GARCETTI

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Re: Paid parking at Griffith Park parking lot at the Greater Los Angeles Zoo

Honorable City Councilmembers,

Although there has been little public outreach about the proposal for paid parking at the Zoo parking lot in Griffith Park (as was recommended by CLA to the Budget and Finance Committee), our association has become aware of it. We want to voice our strong opposition to the proposal on several grounds:

1) The intention of Col. Griffith's bequest is clearly that Griffith Park be an experience available to all economic classes without the burden of expense. Besides being used by Zoo attendees, the Zoo parking lot is utilized by many cyclists, hikers, picnickers, and runners. The precedent of allowing paid parking at the Zoo lot could lead to implementation of parking fees at other Griffith Park lots, including Fern Dell and Vermont Canyon, as well as in other parks, museums and facilities administered by the Department of Recreation and Parks for the city. If this were to happen, the "park experience" could become out of reach for lower income families and seniors.

2) We recognize that the City is experiencing financial challenges. Based upon the meager potential profits that would be generated by paid parking (perhaps around a half million dollars per year according to Mr. John Lewis), and taking into consideration the costs expended dealing with legal challenges by park advocates, proceeding with paid parking may only worsen the City's fiscal woes in the long run.

3) The City is legally obligated by the Autry National Center's lease agreement to

provide free overflow parking for Autry visitors. This fact, along with other details, was glossed over by the City Attorney's office in its opinion on the legality of charging for parking at the Zoo lot.

History tells the story of our City's misguided forays into charging for usage of Griffith Park and is summarized in Mike Ebert's book entitled "Griffith Park." The first attempt occurred in 1931 and was staunchly opposed by Van Griffith, son of the Col Griffith. The next occurred in the 1970's and was opposed by Recs and Parks General Manager, William Fredricksen, saying "No matter what the benefits, the idea of a parking fee is totally foreign to our idea of what Griffith Park should be." A last attempt was made in the early 1980's, and was overruled by the City Council after attendance dropped dramatically and the income generated at toll gates was about half of what was expected.

Surely by now we have learned that usage of Griffith Park ought to remain free. We urge you to oppose this proposal.

Very truly yours,

Gerry Hans
Parks Committee

Robert Young
President

Cc: Mayor Villaraigosa, John Kirk Mukri, Barry Sanders, John Lewis, Karen Winnick