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June 23, 2017

Mr. Frank Bush
General Manager
Department of Building and Safety
City of Los Angeles
201 N. Figueroa Street, Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: 901 Strada Vecchia, Bel-Air

Dear Mr. Bush:

I am writing about the now infamous 901 Strada Vecchia project in Bel Air. As you know, we find ourselves continuing to deal with this matter because of countless misrepresentations and misconduct by the developer who currently faces criminal charges for his actions at the property.

The project now looms over the surrounding residential community and presents ongoing risks to neighboring properties. Landslides are an ongoing problem, and of greatest concern is that just before LADBS issued a stop work order on all construction, the developer sought to build a retaining wall at the site which would measure 17 feet in height and extend 385 feet in length “to repair an unsafe or substandard condition.” That this massive wall was requested should be of great concern as it points to major slope stability issues that need to be addressed. The developer further pushed thousands of cubic yards of dirt across property lines illegally and did not build according to plans and approved geotechnical reports. No doubt this further destabilized a slope that could not support major development in the first place.

I understand that the developer has submitted plans for a project that would be very similar to what stands there now even though he has already taken actions that would have required discretionary entitlements and CEQA review. In other words, he is attempting to reap reward from his illegal actions. This should not be allowed – issuing any ministerial permit now would just encourage other developers to simply push dirt across property lines illegally rather than apply for a haul route and submit for CEQA review. Allowing the developer to continue playing games by pretending to the judge in his criminal proceeding that he is close to getting permits for his home does a disservice to the community and it should cease. There is no way that this project could ever move forward through the mere issuance of ministerial permits and LADBS should stop indulging that fantasy.

There is one path forward here and that is to designate 901 Strada Vecchia a nuisance and compel the owner to abate the hazardous conditions currently existing at the site through demolition of the project. There is

no question that the project constitutes a hazardous building. Pursuant to LAMC Section 91.8901.8, LADBS is authorized to abate a hazardous building by ordering its wholesale demolition. If the owner fails to follow through, the Code further authorizes LADBS to have the work done and recover all costs of the correction and/or demolition work from the property owner, plus an additional surcharge to cover the City's costs in soliciting and supervising the work.

I urge you to take an active hand to ensure the correction of the project's existing deficiencies as this developer cannot be trusted to comply with the law in doing so. The project presents a real and immediate risk to neighboring properties and there are available steps to remedy this situation before significant property damage – or worse, significant physical harm – is caused by the site's dangerous conditions.

Continuing to allow the developer to pretend that his project might be able to proceed without CEQA review and discretionary entitlements sends disconcerting messages about the enforcement of the Code. We cannot teach developers that it is better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission, or the issues at 901 Strada Vecchia will be repeated citywide.

I urge you to declare this property a nuisance, recognize that the structure at 901 Strada Vecchia constitutes a hazardous building, and immediately move to resolve the issues at the site through demolition of the structure. This is essential to safeguard the rule of law in the City of Los Angeles, to ensure compliance with the Code in future projects, and to protect the community of Bel Air.

Sincerely,



PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, 5th District