

**APPROVED**  
AUG 07 2019

**BOARD OF RECREATION  
AND PARK COMMISSIONERS**

**BOARD REPORT**

NO. 19-161

DATE August 7, 2019

C.D. 4

**BOARD OF RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSIONERS**

SUBJECT: GRIFFITH PARK – FINAL CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF MEMORIAL INSTALLATION TO COMMEMORATE 1933 CANYON FIRE VICTIMS; CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION FROM THE PROVISIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA) PURSUANT TO ARTICLE III, SECTION 1, CLASS 11(1) [ON PREMISE SIGNS] OF CITY CEQA GUIDELINES AND ARTICLE 19, SECTION 15311(a) OF CALIFORNIA CEQA GUIDELINES

AP Diaz \_\_\_\_\_  
H. Fujita \_\_\_\_\_  
V. Israel \_\_\_\_\_

*SP* S. Piña-Cortez \_\_\_\_\_  
\* C. Santo Domingo *DF* \_\_\_\_\_  
N. Williams \_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
General Manager

Approved X \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_ Withdrawn \_\_\_\_\_  
*With Corrections*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Grant final approval for the installation of a memorial plaque at Griffith Park, as described in the Summary of this Report and as depicted in Exhibit A of this Report (Project);
2. Determine that the Project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Article III, Section 1, Class 11(1), of City CEQA Guidelines as well as to Article 19, Section 15311(a) of California CEQA Guidelines;
3. Authorize the Department of Recreation and Parks' (RAP) Chief Accounting Employee to prepare a check to the Los Angeles County Clerk in the amount of \$75.00 for the purpose of filing a Notice of Exemption; and,
4. Authorize RAP to issue the appropriate Right of Entry Permit for the installation of the Project.

SUMMARY

Griffith Park is a regional park located within the Hollywood community. Griffith Park contains unique amenities such as the Griffith Park Observatory, Pony Rides, Shane's Inspiration Playground, Ferraro Fields, Greek Theatre, multiple golf courses, numerous hiking trails and much more. RAP has received a request from the Griffith J Griffith Charitable Trust (Trust) to install a memorial plaque commemorating the people who lost their lives in the 1933 Canyon

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Brush Fire. The Trust will provide funding, via the Los Angeles Parks Foundation, for the manufacture and installation of the proposed plaque.

During the Great Depression a number of Angelinos were employed using relief funds paid by a local bond measure. Some of those employed were men working in Griffith Park doing such work as trail maintenance, brush clearance and road construction. On October 3, 1933, a fire was spotted near today's Boy's Camp and a number of workers, carrying shovels and wet sacks, hiked down to combat what appeared to be a small blaze. A hot and dry wind blew up and the fire grew rapidly, trapping and killing twenty-nine people. This fire, known as the Griffith Park Canyon Fire, is one of the deadliest wildfires in California history.

The Trust has proposed the installation of a marker commemorating this tragic event. This marker is intended to both act as a memorial to those who lost their lives battling the fire as well as inform and educate park visitors regarding the unique fire ecology and danger in Griffith Park. The plaque will be placed along the **North Trail near Amir's Gardens** under the supervision of Griffith Park staff. The plaque will be 24" x 36" black powder coated aluminum with a matte finish and installed on a double cantilever pedestal with a 10" image as depicted in Exhibit A. A dedication event recognizing the plaque installation is anticipated for October 2019.

This proposal has been presented to, and received support from, the Griffith Park Advisory Board and the Friends of Griffith Park. Letters of support from these organizations as well as from the Trust are attached hereto as Exhibit B.

This proposal was presented to the Facilities Repair and Maintenance Task Force (Task Force) on July 17, 2019, at which time the Task Force recommended the proposal be forwarded to the Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners (Board) for consideration.

RAP management and staff support this proposal.

### TREES AND SHADE

No trees, nor shade, will be impacted by the installation of the proposed plaque.

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This proposed Project consists of the installation of on premise signs in an existing park. As such, staff recommends that the Board determines that it is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Article III, Section 1, Class 11(1), of City CEQA Guidelines as well as to Article 19, Section 15311(a) of California CEQA Guidelines. A Notice of Exemption will be filed with the Los Angeles County Clerk upon Board's approval.

### FISCAL IMPACT

The cost of the plaque manufacture and installation will be paid by the Griffith J Griffith Charitable Trust. There will be minimal impact for ongoing maintenance of the plaque.

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### STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES AND GOALS

**Goal No. 5:** Ensure an Environmentally Sustainable Park System

**Outcome No. 4:** Increased opportunities for environmental education.

**Result:** An installation which honors those Angelinos who perished fighting the fire in Griffith Park, and provides an educational tool regarding the fire ecology of Griffith Park, supports the goal of providing opportunities for environmental education.

This Report was prepared by Melinda Gejer, City Planning Associate, Planning, Maintenance and Construction Branch.

### LIST OF ATTACHMENTS/EXHIBITS

- A) Plaque Rendering
- B) Letters of Support

# TRAGEDY IN GRIFFITH PARK

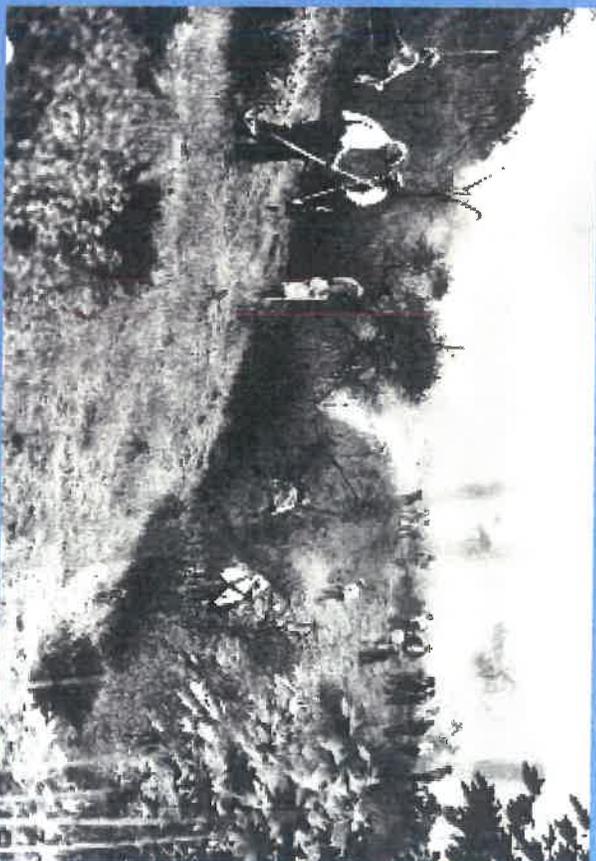
OCTOBER 3, 1933

In the early years of the Great Depression, Los Angeles battled joblessness by borrowing money through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. A local bond measure was passed to fund relief programs. Griffith Park-large and rustic-was made to order for putting large numbers of unemployed men to work. On October 3, 1933, records showed 3,784 relief workers in the park, maintaining trails, clearing brush and building a new road (Vista Del Valle Drive).

The day was hot - 100 degrees at noon. Around 2pm a fire was spotted near today's Boy's Camp in the canyon below. A large number of workers carrying shovels and wet sacks hiked down a narrow trail to fight what looked like a small fire. Suddenly, a hot, dry wind came up, causing the fire to flare up. The Los Angeles Fire Department arrived on scene and found a large number of poorly equipped men who were helpless to stop the rapidly growing blaze. Workers who were able to run downhill were safe. Those who attempted up the trail were vulnerable to the advancing flames.

By nightfall, the winds had subsided and the fire was brought under control. The official death toll counted 29 lives lost in one of the deadliest wildfires in California history.

The cause of the fire was never determined.



Harold Corporation Los Angeles Examiner photograph, negative and copy, subject photographs, Collection no. 7700.2 Regional History Collection, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California

## THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE BRAVE MEN WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THIS TRAGEDY

George Alvin Anderson  
 Clarence William Berning  
 Franklin LeRoy Brown  
 John Raymond Dargo  
 Israel Isaac Hanan, Jr.  
 Irwin Alonzo Hunt

Harold John Mahn  
 Jesus Rivera  
 James P. Sweeney  
 Austin E. Williams  
 Alberto Amendariz  
 Walter Lee Bernor

Herron Orr Burnette  
 Isaac Grayson  
 William Lee Henderson, Jr.  
 Louis S. Kronhelmer  
 Robert R. Miles  
 Elmer Ira Robinson

Henry Taylor  
 John A. Benson  
 Wright Benjamin Brewington  
 John Clark  
 William Bethel Guy  
 Charles W. Hughey

William Lorenz  
 Charles Howard Porter  
 Perry Benedict Smith  
 James Cortez Viorato  
 Frank Zambrano

*This memorial plaque has been donated by the Griffith Jenkins Griffith Charitable Trust. Dedicated October 2019.*





**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:**

Chair: Ron Deutsch  
Vice Chair: Laura Howe  
Treasurer: Bryan Mercke

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

Chip Clements  
Lucinda Phillips  
Sheila Irani  
Michelle Crammes  
Mike Hain

**Griffith Park Advisory Board**  
*"Citizen Stewards of L.A.'s Premiere Urban Wilderness and Park"*  
Department of Recreation and Parks, Los Angeles

May 24, 2019

To: The Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners

**Re: Griffith Park Advisory Board's Support for Proposed Plaque Commemorating the Victims of 1933 Fire**

Dear Board of Commissioners:

This letter is to apprise you of our Board's unanimous support for the placement of a plaque commemorating the victims of the Griffith Park fire of 1933, as proposed and to be funded by the Griffith J. Griffith Trust.

This memorial to the 29 volunteers who fell victim to the fire, representing the largest loss of life to fire in Los Angeles history, is to be placed at the site of the fire -- atop a small canyon south-west of the current Griffith Park Camp area.

Though the memorial remains a work in progress, our Board has reviewed a draft of the text and has seen an example of its proposed design, and we're very confident the memorial's final version will be both appropriate and elegant. And that the presence of this memorial will well contribute to the cultural and historical aspects of our park, and to the enhanced enjoyment of our visitors.

Sincerely,

Ron Deutsch  
Chair – Griffith Park Advisory Board



**Friends of Griffith Park**  
P.O. Box 27573  
Los Angeles, CA 90027-0573  
friendsofgriffithpark.org

Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners

June 24, 2019

**Re: Griffith Park 1933 Fire Memorial - Support**

Dear President Patsouras and Commissioners:

Friends of Griffith Park supports the installation of a memorial marker for the victims of the 1933 Griffith Park fire that is proposed by the Griffith J. Griffith Trust.

The 1933 fire is the deadliest fire in the history of the City of Los Angeles. Depression-era relief crews were working on trail maintenance when the fire broke out and attempted to fight the fire with their shovels. The relentless Santa Ana winds drove the fire uphill killing 29 hard working men.

It is fitting and proper that the victims of the fire should be recognized. The Trust has designed a marker that will give the history of the fire and list the names of those who died that fateful October day. The memorial will not only recognize their sacrifice, but will also serve as a reminder to all who pass by of the ever-present danger of fire in Griffith Park.

Friends of Griffith Park greatly appreciates the effort of the Griffith J. Griffith Trust to honor the men who died trying to protect the Park.

Sincerely,

Marian Dodge  
President

Board of Commissioners  
Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks

Dear Commissioners,

We, the members of the Griffith J. Griffith Trust, urge the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks Commissioners to approve interpretive signage commemorating the Griffith Park fire of Oct. 3, 1933 and the county relief workers who died fighting it. The fire was the deadliest in the city's history. It serves as a cautionary tale about the danger posed by even relatively small brush fires and the need for well-trained and well-equipped personnel to fight them. The interpretive signage will also stand as a memorial to the 29 men who died protecting Griffith Park.

Respectfully,

Dr. Mike Eberts  
Claire Darden  
Van Griffith