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**EDITORIAL**

## **Gates Make Bad Neighbors**

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Here's an easy civics lesson: A private homeowners association wants to gate off a public street used by many to get to a public park. It needs city permission to do so. What should city leaders say?

The obvious answer is: No way. So what on Earth was the Los Angeles City Council thinking when it voted 13 to 0 last year to let the Crown Homeowners Assn., representing owners of 71 townhouses, go ahead with plans to close off Canyonback Road in upper Brentwood? About votes and campaign contributions from well-heeled constituents, apparently. Certainly not about the hundreds of joggers, hikers and dog walkers who don't live on the ridge top and use the street to get from one dirt fire road to another and to the 20,000-acre Santa Monica Mountains paradise known as the Big Wild.

In neighborhood disputes, council members typically defer to the colleague who represents the area. In this case that would be usually rational Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski. Last week, Miscikowski called for a halt in construction of the gate while she tried to broker a compromise that would give pedestrians and bicyclists access from sunrise to sunset. They would ring at the gate, stand in front of a video camera and get buzzed in by a guard in a booth half a mile up the road.

Sorry, that's not good enough. The public simply should not have to jump through such hoops — or drive all the way to the San Fernando Valley entrance — to get to a public park, which is what makes this more than merely a neighborhood matter. Besides, any first-time visitor would see the gate and assume the road to be off-limits.

Southern California is where that oxymoron "the gated community" got its start, if you don't count medieval villages. Today we rank behind Houston but ahead of other U.S. metropolitan areas in the percentage of walled and controlled-access developments. The Crown townhomes are the only section without gates in a 275-home private development called Mountaingate. A consultant says owners want the gate to enhance security. But few studies back up the belief that gates deter crime, especially because neighborhoods like the one in upper Brentwood weren't exactly hotbeds of criminal activity to begin with. They do, however, practically guarantee higher property values.

Sociologists debate how this proliferation of neighborhood-states affects a wider sense of community. In this case, the trade-off is clear: The townhome owners' gain would come at the public's expense.

The council should reverse its earlier decision and reimburse the townhome association for the half-constructed gate. Sometimes no fences make the best neighbors.

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