



TOPANGA TOWN COUNCIL

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May 1, 2024

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Dear Governor Newsom, Director Ward, and Administrator Casillas Guzman,
The Topanga Town Council and its community partners are spearheading the following attempt to try to qualify Topanga-area businesses impacted by the major landslide that occurred in our community on March 9, 2024, for the SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program. This landslide occurred following months of record-breaking rainfall from December 2023 through March 2024.

This massive landslide immediately provoked a full highway closure along the southern portion of Topanga Canyon Boulevard ("TCB," State Highway 27)-the main artery that connects our community to the Pacific Coast Highway ("PCH," Highway 1), Santa Monica and the West Side. That closure remains in effect to this day-nearly two months after the incident occurred.

TCB is our rural mountain community's main street and the road along which the majority of our small businesses with storefronts operate. As a result of the highway closure, our small business community has been decimated, with many small businesses reporting net losses and revenue declines of 50% or more. Please refer to this recent story by Laurie Perez of KCAL News: "[Topanga Canyon businesses struggling with extended road closure due to landslide](#)," April 20, 2024. All of the businesses located in our community are truly small, "mom & pop" operations; none is part of a regional or (multi)national chain. As such, there is no "parent company" that can bail them out during hard times. If our small businesses do not receive SBA Disaster Loan support through the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, many will have to shutter and close permanently.

To that end, we believe that our community readily qualifies for the SBA EIDL program under Criteria 4. (please see enclosed file: "Criteria for SBA Declarations" downloaded from the CalOES website on Saturday, April 27, 2024). We would like to see that designation accorded to our area immediately so that small businesses can begin the process of applying for the relevant small business loans. We have enclosed a representative sample of local Topanga businesses who have documented their struggles for your review in Exhibit B.

It should be noted that another recent disaster in Los Angeles, the Bridge Fire that occurred along the I-10 in November 2023, was also reviewed by the SBA and approved for EIDL funding. None of the businesses eligible for funding under that designation had any physical damage. They were approved for funding on the basis of the economic injury that they sustained as a result of the two-week highway closure itself. Our highway closure has already persisted for roughly two months (four times longer than the partial I-10 closure), with no end in sight- until perhaps the Fall. That timeframe means that our already struggling small businesses will have to forgo critical summer tourist income that typically carries them through much of the year.

There is one business, in particular, that must be saved at any cost, and that is the Theatricum Botanicum-a renowned local treasure of national repute. It has been reviewed and discussed in both *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* on multiple occasions over the past 50 years. This outdoor amphitheater not only boasts an impressive roster of professional plays and performances, it also provides an unparalleled arts education and theatrical opportunities for many of our County's underprivileged youth. As a direct result of the TCB/Highway 27 closure, the Theatricum will have to forgo much of its summer arts program revenue (representing an estimated loss of \$150,000). Its ticket sales for matinee and nighttime performances are expected to crater as well, as its peak season begins June 1.

Most of our other businesses have been similarly impacted. Our restaurants and retail shops still have to pay monthly rent and staff salaries, with almost no revenue to absorb these costs. We are attaching statements from five of our local small businesses outlining just how devastating this road closure has been to their bottom line. But it goes even deeper than that. In a community like Topanga, where everyone knows everyone else, the pain and the plight experienced by our local small businesses are felt by us all. We have been traumatized by this closure and feel completely powerless to get the road re-opened or to find any meaningful support for all the unique small businesses who have helped imbue Topanga with its special brand of charm. We are truly one-of-a-kind. Please help protect and preserve this special idyll in the woods, Governor Newsom. In a world of sameness and AI, Topanga has retained its bohemian humanity and commitment to what is natural and real against all odds.

Governor Newsom, we really need Topanga Canyon Boulevard/Highway 27 re-opened as soon as possible. Even with SBA EIDL funding, our small business community may never recover. In addition to helping expedite the approval for SBA EIDL eligibility, we are asking that you use your office and stature to ensure that Caltrans fast-tracks the mitigation of TCB such that the road can be re-opened for school and business commuters, beachgoers, and visitors to our area. Safety is another pressing concern. This closed southern half of TCB is also our community's main evacuation route in the event of a large wildfire or other disaster. Because of that stark reality, our small businesses are having to devise special shelter-in-place and evacuation plans for their employees should anything happen.

Finally, in addition to being the heart of our community, TCB is also a major transit corridor that serves as the main connection between the Valley and 101 Freeway to the North and the PCH/Highway 1 to the South. TCB/Highway 27 is one of the only major roadways to cut through the Santa Monica Mountains. Per one Traffic Study conducted by Caltrans, roughly 30,000 cars per day rely on this highway. As such, allowing TCB to remain closed for much longer will not only snuff out our reeling small business community, it will also severely impinge upon the economic activities pursued by commuters and tourists. Please help

us, Governor Newsom. Very little has been done to date to resolve this bracing crisis for our entire community of 10,000+ Topangans.

Sincerely,

Carrie L. Carrier

Carrie L. Carrier
Topanga Town Council, President

Cc:
Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin, California Assembly District 42
Senator Ben Allen, California Senate District 24
Supervisor Lindsey Horvath, Los Angeles County, Third District
Congressman Brad Sherman, 32nd District